



Subject:	Options for cultural event on 20 th September
Date:	24 th May 2024
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Lesley-Ann O'Donnell, Senior Manager Culture, Tourism & Events Chris McCreery, Culture Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision After Council Decision Sometime in the future Never	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide further information to enable consideration of an issue raised by the Deputy Lord Mayor, Cllr Aine Grogan at the City Growth and Regeneration

1.2	<p>Committee on 10th April 2024 under the procedures available to Members for raising an issue in advance that they wish to have included on the agenda.</p> <p>At the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 19th April, members requested an updated paper for consideration so that further detail of how this could be facilitated, resourced and managed could be provided.</p>
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>In considering the options, timelines and resource requirements outlined in this paper, it is recommended not to develop an event on 20th September as part of the Belfast 2024 programme. This is based on a number of factors including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The wide range of cultural activity already taking place as part of Belfast 2024. • The limited officer capacity to deliver this programme. • The limited time available for a robust public procurement process or a small grants programme.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Background</p> <p>At the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 10th April 2024, Deputy Lord Mayor Cllr Aine Grogan, outlined a suggestion to support cultural venues in the city to open on the evening of ‘Culture Night’ in September, within the Belfast 2024 Programme of events. The Committee agreed to refer the decision to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 19th April for consideration so that further detail of how this could be facilitated, resourced and managed could be provided. At this Committee, members agreed to defer consideration of the matter to enable a further report to be submitted on the cost to fund each of the three options.</p> <p>Belfast 2024</p> <p>Belfast 2024 is a year-long celebration of home-grown culture featuring new and exciting events, theatre, music, and art developed through new co-design and partnership models with the city stakeholders, the creative sector and the citizens of Belfast.</p> <p>The year delivers on the aims of the City Council’s Cultural and Tourism strategies, Belfast Agenda, Bolder Vision and City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy. As part of the Belfast 2024 programme, there is a significant number of cultural events happening in the last two weeks of September including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - World Peace Day Block Party in Townsend St with Ulster Orchestra – 21st Sept - Launch of the digital playroom Wiggle Room
3.2	
3.3	

- BBC Concert – Century of Stories at Waterfront – 24th Sept
- Belfast Half Marathon – 22nd Sept
- Shadow Dock at Thompson Dry Dock – 26 – 29th Sept
- An Droichead Irish Language Dance Showcase
- Drift River Installation - throughout
- Late Night Art – 5th Sept and 3rd October

Culture Night in Belfast

3.4 The report presented to members at the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 19th April outlined the history of Culture Night in Belfast. In summary:

- 3.5
- Culture Night in Belfast began in 2009 when a number of arts organisations came together to organise the first Belfast Culture Night in September 2010.
 - In 2012/13, the Cathedral Quarter Trust became the custodians of the event, delivering Culture Night in the city until the final event in 2019.
 - As the largest free shared cultural event in the city-centre, audiences grew to an attendance of over 100,000 for the 2019 event held across two days in September 2019.
 - The budget for Culture Night ranged from £240k in 2016 to over £328k in 2019.
 - Culture Night received £12,000 annually from the councils Core Multi Annual Funding programme from 2016 to 2020, with additional resource in 2019 as part of the Bank Buildings recovery campaign through City Centre Revitalisation Funding.
 - The event received the majority of its support from other statutory bodies including the Arts Council NI, The Executive Office, Department for Communities and Tourism NI alongside support from trusts and foundations and the private sector.
 - On 6th April 2023, because of the withdrawal of core funding the Cathedral Quarter Trust announced that it is “has been forced to cease day to day operational activity, including planning any cultural events”. In the absence of the Cathedral Quarter Trust, no organisation has taken on the lead organising and delivery role necessary to revive Culture Night in Belfast.

Options for a late night event in September 2024

3.6 Following the discussion at City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 10th April 2024, council officers examined options on how an event on the night of Culture Night could be facilitated, resourced and managed. In order to develop any event, it is important to consider a range of factors including:

- Geographic – Is the event in one defined location (e.g. city centre, or a section of the city centre such as Cathedral Quarter) or open to the whole city
- Support mechanisms – Is financial support available for groups to apply to or are organisations asked to contribute their own resources as an audience development tool
- Thematically – Is the event focused on a particular artform or audience.
- Delivery mechanism – Is this delivered via an external facilitator or internally in council
- Marketing – Who leads on collation and promotion of the event
- Budget – What are the requirements to make the event successful

3.7

At the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 19th April, members were presented with a number of options, including requirements for engagement with the sector. It was also noted that the pressures on staff resource during Belfast 2024 are a consideration in all options. A breakdown of pre-existing commitments for June to September 2024 is detailed in Appendix One.

3.8

Option 1 – Extended Late Night Art

One option presented to members was to explore the option of supporting a special Late Night Art on 20th September. In this option, members were informed that:

- Late Night Art is a pre-existing event in the city with a defined list of galleries and participants.
- Late Night Art is an audience development initiative created and managed by the visual arts sector, with Belfast City Council playing a supporting role in helping to amplify the event.
- The event is organised independently by visual arts galleries in the city and officers would need time to consult with the organisers of the event to explore the appetite and feasibility of an additional event on 20th September.

3.9

Officers met with the Visual Arts Steering Group on 9th May to discuss the potential initiative. This steering group consists of 11 organisations and sets the direction for the wider Visual Arts Forum which consists of approximately 50 people representing individual artists, directors of arts orgs and venues, curators, Gallery Directors and studio groups. The majority of steering group members participate in Late Night Art. Feedback from this meeting includes:

3.10

- Galleries would continue to host their planned events on Thursday 5th September and Thursday 3rd October. The “First Thursday” principle is a key element in the success

of Late Night Art so any event on 20th September would be additional to these pre-existing events.

- There was a general agreement that galleries would respond to financial support to deliver a special Late Night Art on 20th September.
- Support for a special one-off event could prove an opportunity to also draw attention to the Late-Night Art concept to new audiences.
- It is imperative that any extra event maintains its identity as Late Night Art, is hosted in visual arts spaces and venues and is primarily a visual arts and craft event. To veer from this principle risks diluting and impacting the brand of Late Night Art. The event would have to be carefully described to ensure that audiences were not expecting a 'culture night', rather a specific approach building on Late Night Art. There would be no other art forms included e.g. music, comedy, theatre, but there may be a participatory element where possible with craft & art demonstrations and artists talks, as well as exhibitions and shows.

3.11 This option would require the administration of financial support to organisations who are part of the current Late-Night Art ecosystem. There are currently circa 30 organisations/venues who participate in Late Night Art. Within these parameters, a £75,000 allocation could be broken down as:

- 3.12
- £60,000 allocated to programming costs – Groups to apply for up to £2000 for the cost of programming, producing and marketing their own events as part of the evening. Financial support may also need to include costs such as security. As a non-ticketed event, galleries may need to manage audience flow.
 - £15,000 allocated to marketing of the event. As a pre-existing event with an established brand, this allocation would go towards physical and digital advertising of the event.

3.13 This approach would require the establishment and administration of a new small grants programme led by the Culture Development team and under delegated authority with the Director of Economic Development. Given that any resource is linked to the reporting of the year end position in June, the earliest opportunity for members to approve this approach would be at the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 21st June. Therefore, the administration of this programme would necessitate a very quick turnaround to develop, administer, score, award and market the potential event. A potential timeline is suggested as:

- 3.14
- 21st June – SP&R approval
 - 1st July – Council Ratification

- 10th July – Call in Period Ends. Small grants launched and advertised
- 31st July – Application deadline closes.
- 1st to 9th August – Assessment of application
- Week beginning 12th August – Notification of awards
- Week beginning 19th August – Marketing of event begins to include the range of events in receipt of support
- Friday 20th September – Late Night Art Extra event

3.15

As a pre-existing event, there is no requirement to develop a new brand or scope as event would build upon the current Late Night Art concept. Staying within the parameters of Late Night Art will also limit the number of potential applications. However, the administration of any small grant will require significant resource including a minimum of three officers from the Culture Development team to score and monitor the awards. As outlined in appendix one, officers are currently committed to delivery against a wide-range of initiatives during this period and delivery of a new grants programme will have a significant impact on delivery of these commitments.

Option 2 – Procure an external organisation

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Similar to how the delivery of Culture Night is managed in Dublin, one potential model is the procurement of an external organisation to manage an open call for a series of free events in venues across the city. This contractor would act as a receiving house, collating various events from willing participants under one banner and presenting them to the public as a cohesive programme. This external organisation would be expected to lead on programming, production and marketing of the event, with support from council officers.

3.17

Similar to the timeline above, any resource is linked to the reporting of the year end position in June and therefore the earliest opportunity for members to approve this approach would be at the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 21st June. This would result in:

- 21st June – SP&R approval
- 22nd to 10th July - Tender specification developed
- 1st July – Council Ratification
- 10th July – Contract advertised
- 31st July – Tender deadline closes.
- 1st to 15th August – Tender assessed including scoring, panel, clarifications and sign-off.
- 16th August – Contract Awarded

<p>3.18</p> <p>3.19</p> <p>3.20</p> <p>3.21</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friday 20th September – Event takes place <p>The proposal for circa £75k could be broken down as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £25,000 – Marketing of event – Including branding, web design, hosting, print and distribution. • £50,000 – Contracted organisation or individual. To cover core costs of managing the call out, event staff, insurance and general administration <p>Given the required approvals and time needed for a robust public procurement process, there are significant internal time and resource challenges to this approach. Any supplier would effectively have just over 4 weeks to establish the core team, issue the call for any venue that wishes to participate, curate the programme and launch the full list of events. This timeframe also provides a very limited window to market what is effectively a new event, thus limiting the potential reach of the event. The limited timeframe to deliver, coupled with the acute resource pressures within the cultural sector, is likely to limit the number of responses to the tender.</p> <p><u>Option 3 – Produce an event internally through funding mechanisms</u></p> <p>Another suggested approach to delivery of an event on 20th September would be to invite organisations to apply for small grants to develop and deliver events in venues throughout the city. This approach would result in Council effectively acting as curators for the night through selecting which projects receive financial support through funding. In addition,</p> <p>Similar to other funding schemes full eligibility criteria, themes and outcomes would be required to be developed. In addition this scheme would still required additional central marketing support to promote. Similar to the timeline referenced above, a potential timeline would likely be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21st June – SP&R approval • 1st July – Council Ratification • 10th July – Call in Period Ends. Call out launched • 31st July – Application deadline closes. • 1st to 14th August – Assessment of applications • 16th August – Notification of awards • Week beginning 19th August – Marketing of event begins to include the range of events in receipt of support • Friday 20th September – Event
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3.22	<p>It is likely that this approach will be the most resource intensive for Council to administer due to a range of factors, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The concept and theme for the event would need to be designed; • Parameters and eligibility criteria would need to be developed • Opening out the event to all forms of cultural venues will result in a significant increase in applications, adding additional pressure on assessment of applications. <p>Recommendations</p>
3.23	<p>In considering the options outlined above, it is recommended not to develop an event on 20th September as part of the Belfast 2024 programme. This is based on a number of factors including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The wide range of cultural activity already taking place as part of Belfast 2024. • The limited officer capacity to deliver this programme. • The limited time available for a robust public procurement process or a small grants programme. <p>2025 and a way forward</p>
3.24	<p>As an historically successful event in Belfast and a key part of the cultural calendar across multiple towns and cities globally, in recognition of benefits of having a sustainable and successful event in the city, Council officers have been exploring potential ways forward part of the legacy planning from Belfast 2024 for September 2025 and onwards. This work to date has included meeting with officials involved in developing and delivering Culture Night in other jurisdictions to understanding funding and delivery models.</p>
3.25	<p>The concept of Culture Night was initially developed as an audience development tool for the culture sector and this principal is the foundation of other successful Culture Nights such as Dublin. It is therefore vital that any development of a new iteration of Culture Night must begin with the Cultural and Creative Sector co design to ensure buy-in, ownership and the success of the event.</p>
3.26	<p>In order to build a sustainable Culture Night in future years, it will also be necessary to secure significant buy in and investment from previous statutory funders and supporters such as Arts Council NI, British Council, Museums NI, BBC NI, National Heritage Lottery and finally from the broader business, institutional and educational sectors.</p>
3.27	<p>Whilst Belfast City Council can act as a catalyst for the re-emergence of the event, there is significant merit in having an independent convenor of these conversations. The contracting</p>

	<p>of a convener who could broker and bring together conversations and assess interest and capacity across the cities cultural and creative sector to enable BCC to forward the objectives of its Cultural Strategy.</p> <p><u>Finance and Resource Implications</u></p>
3.28	<p>In the discussion held at CG&R a proposal for circa £75k was discussed. There is no current allocation for this initiative within unit budgets or the Belfast 2024 programme budget and either budgets would need to be reallocated or funding would be required from central budgets and/or underspends. An understanding of available funds would be linked to the reporting of the year end position in June.</p>
3.29	<p>If members were to approve the development of an event in September, there will be significant time and human resources required with this approach, particularly given the current workloads relating to delivery of Belfast 2024, the ambitions of the Cultural Workplan, delivery against the Music Strategy and the ongoing calendar of city and major events (as outlined in Appendix 1).</p>
3.30	<p>It is recommended to allocate up to £30,000 to the facilitation of an engagement programme with the wider cultural sector, key funders, partners and other interested parties in relation to culture night from September 2025 and onwards. There is no current allocation for this initiative within unit budgets or the Belfast 2024 programme budget An understanding of available funds would be linked to the reporting of the year end position in June.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>
3.31	<p>The cultural strategy, <i>A City Imagining</i> has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and a Rural Needs Assessment (RNA). Specific initiatives as required will be subject to a further equality screening.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 - Appendix one – Culture workplan commitments – June to September 2024