



Subject:	<i>A City Imagining</i> Investment Programme: Cultural multi-annual grants
Date:	11 August 2021
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<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: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Update Members on the investment programme that supports the cultural strategy, <i>A City Imagining 2020-2030</i>.– Seek approval for the opening of the cultural multi-annual two-year scheme in September 2021 for funding from 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2024.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Members of the Committee are asked to recommend that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4 th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Note the contents of this report and agree to open cultural multi-annual grants in September 2021 for Arts and Heritage organisations and Events and Festivals for funding from 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2024 subject to final recommendations being agreed by Committee in February 2022.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>Members will be aware that at a meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 28 August 2019 a new ten-year cultural strategy for Belfast, <i>A City Imagining</i>, was agreed. As part of this strategy a new investment approach was approved including phased implementation of new funding programmes. Similar to the Belfast Agenda, the recommended investment model for culture proposed a new partnership approach to supporting the cultural sector, with the aim of sustaining and developing accessible cultural activity and infrastructure across Belfast. This investment is central to creating positive cultural, social and economic impacts for the city, delivering on our overall targets for the period, positioning Belfast as a regional driver, and creating the conditions for long-term transformation.</p>
3.2	<p>As included in the strategy, the aims of the cultural investment model are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - support the cultural life of the city by enabling citizens to be active, dynamic and creative agents of change - invest in the cultural and creative sectors skills development and capacity for production and innovation - position Belfast as an international testing ground for new approaches to cultural engagement, development and placemaking - establish Belfast as a cultural destination.
3.3	<p>The first phased implementation of the cultural investment model commenced with the opening of a competitive funding programme for cultural multi-annual grants for the period April 2020 to March 2024. It was agreed that these multi-annual grants would cover two main areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arts and heritage organisations, which have a year-round programme of cultural activity (<i>Anchor</i> four-year grants and <i>Enable</i> two-year grants) - Festivals and events organisations, which have a festival or event with an audience of 65,000 or more (<i>Imagine</i> four-year grants), or an audience of 10,000 or more (<i>Activate</i> two-year grants) by end of grant period.

3.4	<p>These two strands of funding, Arts and Heritage and Festivals and Events, each with two tiers of investment available (two-year and four-year) replaced previous core multi-annual funding for arts and heritage and previous one-off funding agreements to events and festivals awarded on an annual basis via the Committee process.</p>
3.5	<p>The Arts and Heritage strand of funding is similar to and replaced the established core multi annual funding first implemented in 2013. It was designed to sustain our existing cultural offer covering both programmes and infrastructure. The Festivals and Events strand of funding was a new element and was designed to develop large events and festivals that will help Belfast become a year-round events destination. Furthermore it created a transparent and open process in line with the arts and heritage funding process.</p>
	<p>Cultural multi-annual funding April 2020 Process</p>
3.6	<p><u>Applications received</u> In 2019 the process was completed to award funding for the period commencing 1st April 2020. A summary of this process is included below.</p>
3.7	<p>Cultural multi-annual grants opened for applications on 7 October 2019 and closed on 22 November 2019. The grants were advertised via websites, existing networks and on social media. Nine information sessions were held across the city, with 204 attendees in total. In addition, 137 one to one advice sessions took place. In total, officers engaged directly with 406 potential applicants in advance of the deadline.</p>
3.8	<p>84 applications were received in total, and 54 grants were recommended to be awarded across the two strands as follows:</p>
3.9	<p><i>Festivals & Events cultural multi-annual funding</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Four-year <i>Imagine</i> grants: 11 applications were assessed, of which four were recommended and received a grant. Seven applications were unsuccessful, of which six were considered for a two-year grant. - Two-year <i>Activate</i> grants: 26 applications were assessed, of which 12 were recommended and received a grant. Eleven applications were unsuccessful, two were ineligible, and one was withdrawn.

3.10	<p><i>Arts & Heritage cultural multi-annual funding</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Four-year <i>Anchor</i> awards: 13 applications were assessed, of which nine were recommended and received a grant. Four applications were unsuccessful, of which three were assessed for a two-year grant. - Two-year <i>Enable</i> awards: 43 applications were assessed, of which 29 were recommended and received a grant. Thirteen applications were unsuccessful, and one was deemed ineligible.
3.11	<p><u>Criteria for Decision making</u></p> <p>Assessments were made and scoring applied under three key areas of criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality of programme: this includes their vision, content, audience experience and marketing and audience development. - Impact of activity: this includes how the programme contributes to the four strategic themes (A City Belonging, A City Challenging, A City Creating and A City Exploring) and how they will monitor and evaluate that impact. A minimum score of 30 was required in this section to be eligible for a grant. - Readiness for investment: this includes planning, financial management, staff, governance and environmental impact.
3.12	<p>Assessments were made only on the basis of information supplied by the applicant within their submission. This included the application form and supporting documentation such as business plans and strategies.</p>
3.13	<p><u>Principles of the Assessment Process</u></p> <p>Applications are received and eligibility checked by the Central Grants Unit before being passed to officers for scoring. A five-day rule is implemented consistently by the Central Grants Unit at the eligibility check stage for missing key eligibility information such as annual accounts, bank statements and governing documents. Thereafter, officers do not return to applicants to request any additional details in relation to their applications.</p>
3.14	<p>Officers undertake a thorough assessment of all eligible applications. Applications and assessments are discussed and agreed at an internal moderation panel. Applications to Festivals and Events grants were assessed and moderated jointly between the Tourism Culture Arts & Heritage team and the City Events team. This was in order to combine the skills and knowledge of both teams. Given the substantial investment for the <i>Imagine</i> festivals and events grant strand, an independent external advisor was</p>

	appointed via competitive quotation to complement the team in assessing and moderating these applications.
3.15	An independent assessment panel co-ordinated by Central Grants Unit and chaired by a Senior Managers is then convened. The role of this assessment panel is 'to ensure that the scoring of applications has been undertaken in an appropriate fashion and to provide verification or validation of sampled applications and the overall process'.
3.16	<p><u>Rationale for funding allocations</u></p> <p>The threshold for awarding grants was determined by the quality of applications and the budget available within each strand. This was a competitive process and the standard of applications was overall very high, with thresholds ranging from over 73% to over 79%.</p>
3.17	Due to limits of budget available, volume of applications, and high scoring threshold, some parameters were set in place to help guide grant allocations. The following general rules were applied to help rationalise allocation of grants:
3.18	<p>Festivals and Events organisations (<i>Activate</i> two-year grants):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Those organisations recommended to receive an <i>Imagine</i> and an <i>Activate</i> grant, or two <i>Activate</i> grants for different festivals or events, received a maximum of £20,000 for their second festival or event.
3.19	<p>Arts and Heritage organisations (<i>Enable</i> two-year grants)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The following three steps were applied: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grant offer was 10% of turnover based on average of last two year's supplied audited accounts, or £30,000, or specific amount requested, whichever is the lowest (as published in the guidance notes). 2. Maximum of standstill funding, if applicant was an existing core multi-annual funding recipient, where the minimum score of 30 had been achieved under the 'Impact' criteria within the scoring matrix. 3. Where an uplift of funding was recommended following step one and the minimum impact score of 30 had been exceeded, then 90% of the amount calculated at step one was awarded. The exception is where this amounts to less than standstill funding for existing clients, at which point the amount recommended will revert to standstill, or maximum grant of £30,000, whichever is lower.

3.20	<p>In calculating the level of award for organisations that met the scoring threshold and were not in receipt of a core multi-annual grant, the moderation panel took into consideration the level of turnover and discretionary factors such as nature of work and potential for alternative sources of income.</p>
3.21	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>The total requested for Festivals and Events funding was £2,431,150.00, and for Arts & Heritage it was £2,014,963.50. This was a total request of £4,446,113.50 which was substantially more than the budget available.</p>
3.22	<p>51 organisations representing 54 grants received funding amounting to a total level investment of £ 2,363,264. Of these 54 grants 41 were for a 2-year period made up of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 29 Arts and Heritage organisations - 12 Events and Festivals <p>These 2-year contracts are due to come to an end on 31st March 2021. In order to ensure new funding is in place it is recommended that a new 2-year scheme opens in September 2021 for grants for period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2024. This scheme would operate under the cultural strategy criteria as set out at 3.11.</p>
3.23	<p>Review of current scheme</p> <p>Whilst the 2-year scheme falls into an overall 4-year programme with a commitment for a full review at the end of this period (March 2024) there is an opportunity to make a number of amendments at this stage. Therefore, officers have conducted a review of the current scheme including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 10 group engagement sessions - 67 one to one meetings - Analysis of end of year monitoring data - Consideration of the application and assessment process for the 2020 scheme
3.24	<p>Key feedback includes;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overall satisfaction at the funding process and systems - Concern relating to certain eligibility thresholds, for example turnover and beneficiaries given the impact of COVID-19 - Greater parity between Arts and Heritage upper grant limit (£30,000) and Festival and Events (£50,000) upper grant limit

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concerns that 4-year and 2-year tiers create a hierarchy within the cultural sector in the city
3.25	<p>In response to this feedback and based on an analysis of available information a number of amendments are proposed. These have also been informed by a review of the quality of applications received as part of the 2020 funding scheme including information relating to unsuccessful or ineligible application in order to better understand barriers to accessing multi-annual grants.</p>
3.26	<p>The proposed changes are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lowering the turnover threshold from £100,000 to £60,000 to reflect how baselines have changed due to COVID-19. Consideration was given to requesting baselines relating to pre-COVID-19 period however this was felt to disadvantage new organisations or those that had continued to develop.
3.27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The requirement to have a full-time equivalent staff member for the delivery of an event or festival is adapted so that this resource can be within a partner organisation where there is a clear legal relationship and where a commitment to delivering the Festival or Event can be demonstrated and measured. - Inclusion of digital audiences as part of beneficiaries - both baselines and targets. - Strengthening of criteria relating to sustainability (in particular environmental practices) and accessibility. - Integration of criteria relating to proposals for Year of Culture to streamline process for applicants. This will be subject to a separate assessment and approvals process however is an efficient method for organisations to present information to Council.
3.28	<p>Proposed process</p> <p>It is therefore recommended that the amendments above are made to the scheme and that it opens in September 2021 and closes in November 2021. An extensive assessment process will be undertaken as outlined at 3.13. Final recommendations for funding will be presented to City Growth and Regeneration Committee in February 2022. Engagement with the sector will be sustained throughout the application process including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Group Advice Clinics facilitated by the Central Grants Unit and Culture and Tourism team offering information and guidance.

3.29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In addition, officers will offer one to one meetings to any organisation considering applying to the scheme. Organisations who have applied to previous schemes will be offered detailed feedback on their applications. <p><u>Other Forms of Investment</u></p> <p>It is important to note that Cultural multi-annual grants (CMAG) are only one form of funding provided by the Council to support cultural development in the city. As part of <i>A City Imagining</i> other schemes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community Festivals Fund – while this did not operate in 20/21 due to COVID-19, a letter of offer has now been received from Department for Communities and this scheme will launch in October 2021. - Pathfinder Awards – for organisations not in receipt of core funding from any public sector body. - Creative Bursaries – to support individuals who have clear career development paths aligned to the priorities of the cultural strategy. - Project Funding – during COVID-19 this has been replaced by transition funding for organisations who had lost core funding. This scheme will be re-introduced in due course.
3.30	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There are currently no financial implications to this report. Final recommendations will be subject to Committee approval and confirmation of departmental budgets for 2022-23.</p>
3.31	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>An Equality Impact Assessment and Rural Needs Assessment was carried out for the Cultural Strategy. An equality screening was completed on the Investment Model including multi-annual grants which has been screened out with mitigating actions. Mitigating actions include: monitoring key population indicators and programme performance measures, in particular participation and attendance by disabled people; consider additional support and for sector-wide audience development of under-engaged audiences, in particular disabled people and older people; people and groups where there is evidence of additional barriers, such as LGBTQ+ and carers, and people with multiple identities; promotion and implementation of the council’s Inclusive Events Guide for outdoor events and cultural festivals.</p>
4.0	<p><u>Appendices – Documents Attached</u></p>
	<p>None</p>