



Coventry City Council

# Briefing Note

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**To: Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee**

**Date: 20 December 2023**

**Subject: Coventry Cultural Strategy – Next Steps and Learning from City of Culture**

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## **1 Purpose of the Note**

- 1.1 To provide an overview of next steps in the ongoing development and delivery of the Coventry Cultural Strategy 2017-2027, drawing on and considering learning insights from the UK City of Culture Impact Evaluation Final Report.

## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Scrutiny Co-Ordination Committee is recommended:

- 1) To note the learning insights from the UK City of Culture 2021 Impact Evaluation Final Report
- 2) To consider (i) the impact of community engagement and participation in culture and (ii) the economic impacts of culture and the creative economy, and how these might shape the Council's approach to delivering its One Coventry Plan priorities through the refresh of the Cultural Strategy and Action Plan.

## **3 Cultural Strategy 2017-2027**

- 3.1 In January 2017, Cabinet approved a new, partnership Coventry Cultural Strategy 2017-2027, in support of the long-term positioning of culture in the city.
- 3.2 The process of developing the new Strategy had begun with a period of structured primary and secondary research, which was followed by phases of consultation and engagement, including community workshops, stakeholder meetings, social media activity, mobile video feeds and blogs by local creatives. This process shaped the emerging Strategy and informed development of the Coventry UK City of Culture 2021 Bid.
- 3.3 The Cultural Strategy set out a ten year-vision for the cultural life of Coventry, building on the existing heritage and culture of the city. The Strategy was structured around Five Goals for cultural growth in the city, each of which was under-pinned by 'Seven Big Ideas' that support the transformation of the cultural life of the city.
- 3.4 The Five Goals outlined in the Strategy are: Partnership; Lifelong Learning; Diversity; Health and Well-Being; and Economic Growth. The Seven Big Ideas outlined in the Strategy are: Place Partnership; Creative Production Hubs; City is a Festival; Seven Years Younger; Nation in Coventry; Diverse City; and Getting Coventry Moving.

- 3.5 The Strategy was designed to span a timeline in which Coventry was bidding for and had the potential to be UK City of Culture 2021. It was therefore acknowledged from the outset that the Strategy approach would need to remain flexible, consultative, and responsive, continuing to evolve over the full ten-year period in order to achieve the vision.

#### **4 Impact and Learning from Coventry City of Culture 2021**

- 4.1 In December 2017, Coventry was designated as the UK City of Culture 2021.
- 4.2 The lead delivery body for the UK City of Culture 2021 (UKCoC 2021) was the Coventry City of Culture Trust (the Trust).
- 4.3 UK City of Culture 2021 events were initially planned and scheduled to commence in January 2021, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the start of Coventry's City of Culture title year was delayed until May 2021.
- 4.4 Following the conclusion of the UKCoC2021 year in May 2022, the Trust entered its post-year legacy phase, but experienced significant financial difficulties. These difficulties hampered the Trust's legacy delivery, and in February 2023, the Trust entered administration. This event resulted in the sudden cessation of legacy programmes and activities, including the closure of a key legacy facility (the Reel Store). Fifty employees of the Trust and others who would have supported longer-term impacts of UKCoC 2021 lost work, many going onto roles in new sectors and/or outside of the city. Many local organisations were also creditors of the Trust, and others lost access to expected commissions and legacy funds.
- 4.5 The Final UKCoC 2021 Impact Evaluation Report was published on 2 November 2023 and forms part of a platform which contains over forty evaluation reports, research outputs and analysis relating to Coventry's time as the UKCoC 2021. The platform is available at [www.coventry21evaluation.info](http://www.coventry21evaluation.info).
- 4.6 The Final Report is an impact evaluation and looks at the overall impact of the UK City of Culture 2021 year. It is not a process evaluation study, and therefore the evaluation of the operations and processes of the Coventry City of Culture Trust are not within the scope of the report.
- 4.7 The circumstances leading to the Trust entering administration are further understood to be subject to ongoing, independent investigations by the Administrator and the Charity Commission, and are therefore also not addressed in detail within the scope of the Impact Evaluation report.
- 4.8 The Impact Evaluation report details the impact of taking a hyperlocal, community co-production approach to supporting engagement with cultural activities. The report includes considerations regarding the success of the approach and the resource commitment required to achieve success.
- 4.9 The Learning Insights for note in this Report are as follows:
- Culture makes a significant contribution to community engagement through co-creation and hyper local projects and to wider non-cultural outcomes through working with voluntary and community organisations.
  - Investment in cultural and heritage assets and the public realm transform the city's landscape and internal and external perceptions of Coventry as a city to live in, work in and visit.

- c) The title and year-long programme helped bring millions of pounds of investment to the city and stimulated a £150 million boost in tourism income above pre-Covid levels.
- d) Co-created programmes have a direct impact on local policy development and can influence change in practice through building a deeper connectivity with, and understanding of, community need, interests and/or key global and social agendas.
- e) Projects which engage the most vulnerable residents have the highest Social Return on Investment.
- f) Engagement and participation have a direct impact on the individual lives of many participants. These impacts include the formation of new social connections, a developing sense of agency and inclusion, and a growing sense of ability to influence change at a variety of levels.
- g) Significant communication problems within the Trust led to difficulties in maintaining partner relationships, lack of timely communication of the programme (both locally and regionally) and missed opportunities to market the UK CoC 2021 more effectively.
- h) The lack of clarity about agreed budgets and costs for both Trust staff and partners impeded project delivery.
- i) In some neighbourhoods, activity was limited. Activity took place in every ward, however at the more granular neighbourhood level, activity was limited in some neighbourhoods.
- j) Transparency around programme decisions made by the Trust was lacking. This led to the local cultural sector perceiving that projects coming from local artists were overlooked or not prioritised.

Broader Lessons learned include:

- k) A temporary organisation like the Trust cannot be expected to deliver longer-term, sustainable outcomes for the city without enduring place-based governance arrangements including key stakeholders.
- l) The strong civic partnership that developed the Cultural Strategy and the bid needs to be revitalised and invested in to ensure a sustainable and lasting legacy that focusses on how culture can contribute to communities, increase tourism and attract investment.

- 4.10 The detailed findings of the Impact Evaluation were considered by the City Council at a dedicated All-Member Seminar held on 1 December 2023, supported by representatives of the Core Monitoring and Evaluation Team.
- 4.11 Furthermore, an amended Motion received cross-party support at Full Council on 5 December 2023, stating “In light of Coventry’s recent experience hosting the City of Culture, this Council calls upon the Government to review the governance arrangements for future events and commit dedicated legacy funding to secure legacy work beyond the year itself”.

## **5 Cultural Strategy and Forward Legacy – Coventry Culture Works**

- 5.1 Further to the Trust entering administration, in June 2023, Coventry University, the University of Warwick and Coventry City Council announced their support, as Principal Partners, for ‘Coventry Culture Works’ – an inclusive partnership approach,

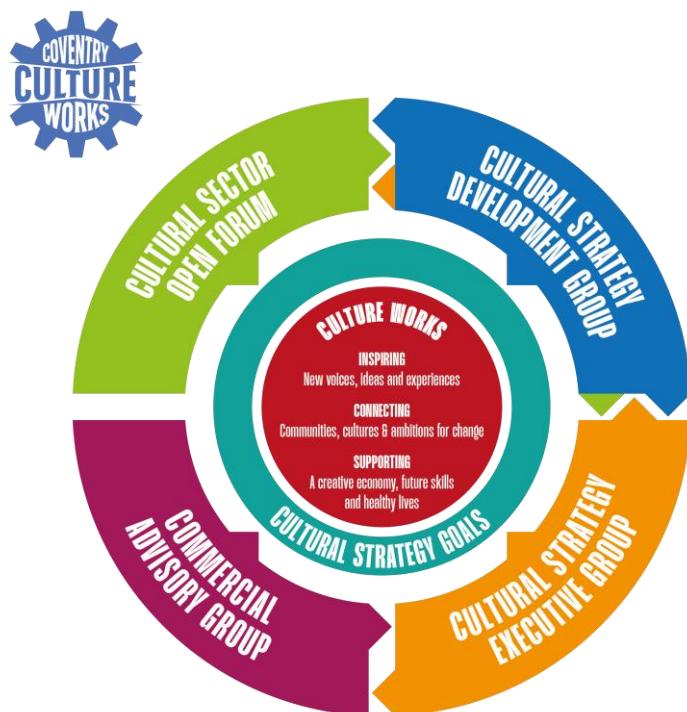
working alongside leaders from the cultural, creative and wider sectors in the city to take culture forward and deliver the city's ambitious 10-year Cultural Strategy.

5.2 The Culture Works model is focused around:

- Inspiring – New voices, ideas and experiences
- Connecting – Communities, cultures and ambitions for change
- Supporting – A creative economy, future skills and healthy lives

5.3 As Figure 1 shows, components of the proposed Culture Works governance model reflect commitment to a consultative nature for the partnership, with a Cultural Sector Open Forum; Cultural Strategy Development Group; Cultural Strategy Executive Group and Commercial Advisory Group all focused around delivery of the Cultural Strategy Goals.

Figure 1. – Coventry Culture Works



5.4 On 18 January 2024, 'The Future Works' gathering – an event led by local creatives, supported by the City Council and the city's two universities – will bring together a wide mix of people from across the city, from cultural and creative sectors, wider partners, businesses, and institutions. The event will seek to shape and create a vision for the next chapter for culture in the city; to explore the current challenges and barriers; to put down route markers; to revitalise the refresh of the Cultural Strategy; and to set in motion tangible city and region-wide action. The event will build on collaborative, sector and partners' discussions around 'next steps' for culture in the city, including those of the city's National Portfolio Organisations, CW9 Group and F13 Group (a network of independent and small-scale arts organisations, freelance artists and creative practitioners). Earlier in the year, the F13 Group held a workshop focused on a forward vision and action plan for culture in the city, leading to draft set of actions for 'Creating the Conditions for Creation'.

- 5.5 It is proposed that a refreshed, Coventry Cultural Strategy Action Plan 2024-2027 will clearly highlight the contribution culture is making to improving outcomes for our communities, including in delivering One Coventry Plan priorities, as follows:
- Increasing the economic prosperity of the city and region
  - Improving outcomes and tackling inequalities within our communities
  - Tackling the causes of climate change
  - Continued financial sustainability of the Council
  - Council's role as a partner, enabler and leader
- 5.6 Through Culture Works, the Council has further committed to supporting development of a new Creative Economy Strategy, Heritage Strategy and Public Art Strategy, across 2024.
- 5.7 Investment from the University of Warwick, Coventry University and the Council will support a new, joint-funded Head of Culture and Creative Economy role from 2024.
- 5.8 The City Council further continues to progress the city's cultural capital investment programme, though key legacy projects such as the Albany Theatre Phase 1 capital works and the City Centre Cultural Gateway project, which continues to build and develop long-term partnerships with national and local partners.
- 5.9 City partners, through initial Culture Works discussions, have additionally committed to working collaboratively to support sector access to new sources of cultural and non-cultural investment in the city. This includes working with the West Midlands Combined Authority, West Midlands Growth Company and regional partners around accessing Commonwealth Games legacy funding. As a recent example of such an approach, on 5 December 2023, the Council hosted an informal information session, supported by Heart of England Community Foundation and United by 22 (the legacy charity of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games) to promote the opportunities for local organisations to apply to the Inclusive Communities Fund – a £9 million legacy fund for the West Midlands. 'Arts, culture and creativity' is one of the themes of the Fund. Over 100 representatives of Coventry's cultural, community and sports organisations from across the city attended.

## **6 Applying Learning Insights**

- 6.1 For Culture Works to become a strong civic partnership reflective of the local collaborations that developed the Cultural Strategy 2017-2027 and the successful bid for UKCoC 2021, local partners will need to reflect, plan and invest in new, forward focussed collaborations.
- 6.2 The Learning Insights from the UKCoC 2021 Impact Evaluation detail the impact of taking a hyperlocal, community co-production approach to supporting local engagement with cultural activities. Consideration must now be given to the commitment and approach required to achieve future success – to ensure a sustainable and enduring legacy that focusses on how culture can contribute to communities, increase tourism, and attract further investment.
- 6.3 In developing the Cultural Strategy Action Plan, in the delivery of any funded programmes and in the distribution or award of key funds, Coventry Culture Works (through its respective partners) needs to demonstrate commitment to effective collaboration, communication and actions, building on and from the learning insights above.

## **7 Health Inequalities Impact**

- 7.1 The UKCOC 2021 Impact Evaluation report details the positive impact of taking a hyperlocal, community co-production approach to supporting engagement with cultural activities.
- 7.2 The report highlights that, where such focused approaches are planned and resourced, culture makes a significant contribution to community engagement and to wider non-cultural outcomes. Through UKCoC 2021, target areas of historically low cultural participation saw increases of an average 36% for regular engagement with publicly funded culture in the city and 41% of tickets issued went to citizens from Coventry's lower socio-economic groups.
- 7.3 It is noted that such co-created programmes have a direct impact on local policy development and can influence change in practice through building a deeper connectivity with, and understanding of, community need, interests and/or key global and social agendas. Projects which engage the most vulnerable residents can further be seen to have the highest Social Return on Investment.
- 7.4 Cultural engagement and participation have a direct impact on the individual lives of many participants. These impacts include the formation of new social connections, a developing sense of agency and inclusion, and a growing sense of ability to influence change at a variety of levels. Those who participated in the UK City of Culture 2021 programme reported a positive increase in wellbeing and a desire to remain active and engaged in community action or civic activity beyond the title year itself.
- 7.5 In progressing the next steps for Cultural Strategy delivery in Coventry, close consideration of the context and range of key learning insights from UKCOC 2021 is considered key to securing enduring partnerships, inclusive economic growth, greater social impact and positive outcomes for local communities.

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