



To: Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

Date: 30th January 2025

Subject: Coventry Cultural Strategy - Progress Report

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To provide an update of progress on delivery of the Coventry Cultural Strategy 2017-2027, including progress on new governance arrangements and the development of a new Strategy Action Plan 2025-2027.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Scrutiny Co-Ordination Committee is recommended:
- 1) To note progress on delivery of the Coventry Cultural Strategy and the revised focus areas.
 - 2) To note progress on delivery of the Culture Works Collective governance arrangements.

3 Cultural Strategy 2017-2027

- 3.1 In January 2017, Cabinet approved a 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 Strategy had begun with a period of structured primary and secondary research, which was followed by phases of consultation and engagement. 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 then became) the 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, to achieve its vision.

- 3.6 Work to refresh implementation of the Strategy in 2022 identified the need for an enhanced focus on climate change and Coventry's Green Future, creating a greater alignment for the Strategy with Coventry's Climate Strategy objectives.
- 3.7 A further refresh (to the conclusion of the Strategy period in 2027) is now required to respond to subsequent and evolving changes in the operating environment for the sector. This includes the impact for the sector of the City of Culture Trust going into administration in 2023; the cost-of-living crisis and other societal changes; and the appointment in July 2024 of a new Head of Culture and Creative Economy at Coventry City Council (a post jointly funded by the City Council, Coventry University and the University of Warwick – to support delivery of the Strategy and sector development). The need for new governance aligned to this required refresh has also been a central consideration – specifically in relation to the forming of a Coventry Cultural Compact through close collaboration between the city's cultural sector and wider partners.

4 Coventry Culture Works Collective

- 4.1 Cultural Compacts are partnerships designed to support the local cultural sector and enhance its contribution to development and delivery of city outcomes, with a special emphasis on cross-sector engagement beyond the cultural sector itself and the local authority.
- 4.2 The Coventry Culture Works cultural compact was initiated in 2023, to create an entity that could take ownership of delivery of the Strategy, including shaping and driving legacies of Coventry City of Culture, following the City of Culture Trust going into administration.
- 4.3 It was widely advocated by the sector and recognised that an inclusive process of development was needed to take the Compact and the city forward, and this has been the subject of significant discussion and collaboration. An initial event – Future Works – was held in January 2024, led by local creatives, focussing on the future of culture in Coventry. The event was attended by around 80 people and provided valuable feedback on the direction of travel, as well as key opportunities and challenges for the cultural sector. At the time there was however limited capacity within key stakeholders to take some of these recommendations forward and to fully develop the new, inclusive governance model for Culture Works.
- 4.4 Further to the appointment of a new Head of Culture and Creative Economy in July 2024, Coventry City Council facilitated a Future Works II event in October 2024, with nearly 200 people attending. This event was aimed at securing a mandate from the cultural sector and key stakeholders for the next steps, including:
- Testing that the aims of the Cultural Strategy were still relevant, and seeking sector input to future delivery plans, with the Council playing a convening and enabling role.
 - Putting forward a refreshed governance model for the Culture Works cultural compact, with feedback being gathered and taken into consideration in terms of next steps.
 - Introducing a new piece of work to develop a culture-specific communications strategy for Culture Works and wider Strategy implementation.
- 4.5 Based on the feedback and testing of the Cultural Strategy themes at Future Works II, it is proposed that 'Cultural Engagement & Opportunity' is added as an overt Strategy Goal in the refresh. This will support an increased focus on cultural

participation and the infrastructure required to support this. To ensure both diversity and partnership are established as central to the delivery plan (particularly given the joint ownership of the partnership Strategy), it is further proposed that these areas of focus are both positioned as Foundations for the Strategy, cutting across the other focus areas, as illustrated below.



- 4.6 The Cultural Strategy will, therefore, continue to have a wider focus on making Coventry a better place through arts, culture and creativity, thus advocating for a wider role for arts and culture, beyond just the cultural sector itself. It is proposed this should include ongoing exploration and commitments around impact for health and wellbeing, tourism, skills development, tackling local inequalities, environmental factors and other linked sectors.
- 4.7 The Strategy Refresh will also help to articulate the different narratives and ambitions for the future, for example, using Coventry’s existing strengths in order that the city may become recognised as a centre for excellence in cultural co-creation. This ambition is linked to the city’s unique demographic (which is both young and diverse); inclusive models of delivery developed through local partners and communities; and the city’s strengths in data, research and evidence around cultural engagement.
- 4.8 These above Strategy aims and Goals directly correlate with the One Coventry Plan objectives of:
- Improving outcomes and tackling inequalities within our communities (Health and Wellbeing, Cultural Engagement and Opportunity)
 - Increasing the economic prosperity of the city and region (Economic Prosperity, Lifelong Learning and Skills)
 - Tackling the causes and consequences of climate change (Environment and Social Justice)

In addition, the Cultural Strategy and the new way of working through the Culture Works Collective will allow the Council to fully explore its role as a partner, enabler and leader – e.g. through policy and advocacy regarding sector development and where applicable, through supporting or acting to facilitate joint/consortium funding bids (such as the city’s recent collective bid for Creative People and Places funding, led by a consortium of local partners).

5 Cultural Compact Governance

- 5.1 Based on the feedback from the Future Works events and wider sector conversations, there is strong support for the Cultural Strategy to be held as a joint responsibility between stakeholders, organisations and residents, with the Culture Works Collective cultural compact providing a way to create a more democratically representative body. Work to develop this approach has been supported by Arts Council England Development Funding for Cultural Compacts.
- 5.2 It is proposed that the Culture Works Collective will have shared, delegated responsibility for overseeing the delivery of the partnership Coventry Cultural Strategy, informed by the wider Future Works Open Forum, an annual large event following on from Future Works I & II. It is proposed the Future Works Open Forum will be an annual event bringing together everyone who is interested in the future of arts and culture in Coventry. It will be an opportunity to take stock of progress and have a wider conversation about the needs, opportunities and successes of arts and culture in Coventry.
- 5.3 The Culture Works Collective will bring together people with the knowledge, passion and skills to fulfil the vision of Culture Works, as well as to act as the representatives of different sectors, which all have an impact on the arts and cultural ecology of the city.
- 5.4 To ensure a good level of representation from the cultural sector, community and voluntary sector and the key anchor institutions in the city on delivering impact across the Strategy’s focus areas (Economy, Health & Wellbeing, Skills, Environment), the structure proposed seeks to ensure the steering group for the Culture Works Collective will include members from all of these groups, with the members called ‘The Reps’.
- 5.5 The Reps will be the members of the Culture Works Collective. They will be people representing the interests of different stakeholder groups, ranging from residents to private businesses and the cultural sector. These are outlined below:

Cultural Sector Reps (8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reps from smaller cultural organisations, up to 4 members in total ● Freelancers from the cultural and creative sectors, up to 4 members in total ● Members will be selected through an open application process
Community Sector Reps (7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● These Reps will represent the residents of Coventry either directly or through the work they do ● Two residents will be selected through an open application process ● The other Reps will include, for example, faith and community organisation/network representatives. These Reps will be selected via a recommendation process. Voluntary Action Coventry are already linked to the Compact through their lead role in the Coventry Creative People & Places consortium application.
Other Sector Reps (6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● These Reps will be representing the key focus areas of the Cultural Strategy, including economic development, education and skills, health and wellbeing and environment and social justice. ● They are likely to be organisations or networks already working across these areas ● These members will be selected by an application or via specialist recommendation process

Wider Stakeholder Reps (7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These are Reps from wider partnering organisations including Coventry City Council, Coventry University, University of Warwick, Coventry Cathedral (as a key physical venue), and the three larger National Portfolio Cultural Organisations (Warwick Arts Centre, The Belgrade Theatre and Culture Coventry Trust) • These appointments will be direct appointments
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5.6 There will therefore be a maximum 28 representatives, with the recruitment process (initial recruitment currently underway) due to complete in February 2025.

5.7 Following recruitment of the Reps, the group will look to recruit the Chair from within the existing membership; develop its formal Terms of Reference and sub-group governance structures. The group may also establish time-limited additional working groups or invite specialist advisors to support specific areas of work.

6 Additional Development Work

6.1 Across the past nine months, a sector development and delivery programme has been supported through the City Council, funded by £307k of Commonwealth Games Legacy Enhancement Funding, via the West Midlands Combined Authority Cultural Pillars programme. This funding has supported the commissioning of specific co-created cultural programming, along with key elements of strategic research and planning, in support of future sector development. The work commissioned includes:

- Cultural Programming – five creative programmes were commissioned through direct appointment and open application processes to work in Coventry areas identified as having higher levels of disadvantage and historically lower levels of cultural participation. The ‘Made In Cov’ and ‘Greenways’ programmes involved local artists and creative practitioners working within communities to co-design activities, co-create artworks and performances and bolster local pride through end of programme exhibitions and celebration events. The commissions worked with residents in Foleshill, Hillfields, Bell Green, Henley Green and Willenhall. Nearly 1500 residents were engaged directly and regularly as participants with wider community engagement through end of programme events and online audiences.
- Cultural infrastructure mapping – commissioned to provide new data and evidence to inform the Strategy delivery plan. This work will support development of a future cultural capital pipeline, in support of the infrastructure ambitions of the refreshed Cultural Strategy.
- A Joint Cultural Needs Assessment – developed with the University of Warwick, to ensure that the refresh of the Cultural Strategy and accompanying delivery plan are strategically linked to the One Coventry Plan, and the key aims of the Council.
- Development of a Communications Strategy and Delivery Plan to provide a clear roadmap for the Culture Works Cultural Compact, as well as to inform the wider delivery plan for the Cultural Strategy.
- A Cultural Sector Skills Development Programme – with a focus on the financial resilience of organisations (delivered from November 2024 to January 2025). The feedback from this programme will inform the future Strategy Delivery Plan in relation to skills activities.

- Delivering a Community and Culture Mixer event in November 2024 – to bring together community and cultural organisations to stimulate new partnerships, as well as to explore the potential for Coventry submitting a Creative People and Places (CPP) application to Arts Council England. This event was attended by nearly 100 people and the CPP bid was submitted in January 2025.
- 6.2 The Council’s Culture and Creative Economy Team is also participating in initial conversations with stakeholders around a further potential Place Partnership application to Arts Council England (up to £1m). The focus of this application would be around skills development, and it would therefore form a key part of the delivery of the Lifelong Learning and Skills part of the Cultural Strategy.
- 6.3 Initial conversations have also commenced with the sector and with local, regional and national partners regarding the development of a visual arts strategy for the city, to maximise the opportunities presented through the City Centre Cultural Gateway project.
- 6.4 The finalisation of the Cultural Strategy Delivery Plan 2025-2027 through the Culture Works Collective is key to shaping, driving and capturing local delivery across the remainder of the Cultural Strategy period from 2025 to 2027.
- 6.5 The city’s proactive engagement with national and regional opportunities for Culture and the Creative Industries is also considered key to securing resilience and growth in these sectors and securing longer-term positive outcomes for the city.

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