

Report of: Leeds City Council Culture & Sport

Report to: Inner North West Community Committee

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Leeds Culture Strategy (2017-2030)

Purpose of report

To provide Members of the Committee with an update on the approach taken to develop the new Culture Strategy for Leeds 2017-2030.

Background information

In order to bid for European Capital of Culture 2023, and ultimately we hope to win the title, the city is required to have a current Culture Strategy, from which the bid takes its steer. The report to Executive Board therefore stated that the city council team would:

Work with the people of Leeds, stakeholders and partners to create a culture strategy for the period 2017-2030.

Over the next six to nine months the Culture and Sport team will continue to work with the people to 'co-produce' a new Culture Strategy, setting the underpinning values, defining and shaping our cultures, articulating the value of culture across a range of policy areas and supporting the future creators of the city's vibrant cultural offer.

The new Culture Strategy for Leeds 2017-2030 will set the tone for the Leeds bid to become European Capital of Culture 2023, and provide the framework for its delivery should Leeds be successful in its bid.

Since the development of the previous Culture Strategy the landscape of cultural activities and local government has changed significantly.

Austerity measures have seen funding reductions to culture both from local government and from lottery distributors.

The way people create and consume culture has also changed; the expectations of audiences are different, and increasingly informed by digital technologies. Barriers between art forms continue to break down and artists move more seamlessly between a portfolio of subsidised, commercial and individual work.

Main Issues

Considering the above challenges and opportunities, this new approach will see the people of Leeds co-produce the strategy. This will be achieved initially via an online blog capturing views, comments and opinion.

Of course not everyone is able to take part in an online debate and so the work will be supported through a range of off-line events, focus groups, meetings, workshops and conversations to ensure the broadest range of views are taken into account.

Crucially, at this stage no decisions have been taken regarding the aims, objectives, values and core focus of the strategy. The team are not consulting on the city council's ideas and suggestions for a Culture Strategy. Instead, taking its leave from the commission and the approach to the 2023 consultation, the team are seeking a genuine co-authored approach to the development of ideas and ultimately the services and delivery mechanism that will be created as a result.

Following the initial conversations that have taken place since the launch of the blog the Culture Strategy may also seek to reposition the value of culture in the city. Often viewed as the 'nice to have' or added to conversations about the regeneration of areas towards the end of the project, culture can have transformational effects across a range of policy areas from housing, planning and urban regeneration to health and wellbeing, adult social care, children's services and education.

The new Culture Strategy for Leeds may not directly create a raft of new cultural policies, but instead will seek to work with policy makers from across these areas.

The initial conversations have sometimes revealed a lack of understanding between different aspects of life in the city which has sometimes led to division where there could be unity. One current example of the proposed values of the new strategy is therefore 'tolerance.'

Over the last five years there has been surge in new events, clubs, societies and gatherings. The people who create these happenings are makers of the city's culture, just as those who make the city's world class arts and performance offer are also makers of the cultures that define us.

Conclusion – Culture Strategy

Given the changes to the landscape of both the cultural sector and local government, and the city's decision to bid for European Capital of Culture, a new approach is needed to the development of a new Culture Strategy for Leeds, to cover the period 2017-2030.

There is significant appetite and support from both the culture sector and other stakeholders approached to date for a co-produced methodology, working with the people of Leeds to develop the new Culture Strategy, setting the underpinning values, creating a new definition of our cultures, articulating the value of culture across a range of policy areas and supporting the future makers of the city's vibrant cultural offer, as the city embarks on its bid to become European Capital of Culture 2023.

Recommendations

Inner North West Community Committee is requested to:

- consider and debate the contents of this report;
- comment on the approach to developing the new Culture Strategy for Leeds 2017-2030;
- suggest other groups, networks, organisations and individuals who could contribute to the new Culture Strategy