

**Leeds Culture Strategy  
Draft Scrutiny Statement**



# Introduction

1. In accordance with the remit of the Inclusive Growth, Culture and Sport Scrutiny Board, we agreed at the beginning of the 2017/18 municipal year to consider and monitor progress with the city's European Capital of Culture 2023 Bid as well as monitoring the development of a delivery plan linked to the city's new Culture Strategy 2017-2030, which was formally adopted in July 2017.
2. In July 2017, we therefore received a detailed overview of the work undertaken to develop the Leeds 2023 European Capital of Culture Bid and expressed our support, recognising the cultural and economic value a successful bid could have to the city and the wider region.
3. However, in December 2017 we received a further briefing from the Chief Executive, Chief Officer for Culture and Sport and the Leader of the Council in light of developments surrounding the eligibility of the UK to host European Capital of Culture 2023.
4. In February 2018, the Director of City Development then provided an interim update on the development of the Culture Strategy Delivery Plan following the adoption of the new Culture Strategy for Leeds 2017-2030 and also the implications of events relating to the city's bid for European Capital of Culture. At that stage, we also welcomed contributions from external witnesses representing the business sector and musical arts.
5. In consideration of all this information presented to Scrutiny, we have set out within this Statement our key observations and conclusions regarding the situation with the 2023 European Capital of Culture Bid and in moving forward with the delivery of the city's Culture Strategy for 2017-2030.



# Observations and Conclusions

## Acknowledging the value of the Leeds Culture Strategy.

6. We appreciate that trying to define culture can be very difficult and so there are varying definitions adopted by cities the world over. Leeds has therefore created its own definition following a year of conversations with people from across the whole city, incorporating a vast range of perspectives. Our definition of culture, as cited within the new Culture Strategy for Leeds 2017-2030, is:  
  
*“Culture is what we do and who we are, encompassing a broad range of actions and activities which have the capacity to transform, challenge, reassure and inspire, giving a place and its people a unique and distinctive identity.”*
7. We acknowledge that this Strategy is the first of its kind in Leeds, having been co-produced with the residents, artists and businesses of the city, it sets out six guiding values and principles, five aims and seven objectives. Since its adoption, we are proud to learn that it has also received national and international recognition as a best practice example and model for co-producing the future cultural policies of a city.
8. In terms of its impact locally, we also recognise that the Culture Strategy is a key element of our ‘Best City’ ambition, as it has the potential to support all of the ‘Best City’ outcomes, giving further evidence of the way in which culture and cultural activity is a vital part of all our lives and that of future generations.
9. As such, we acknowledge that the Delivery Plan is vital to ensuring that the aims and objectives of the new Culture Strategy for Leeds 2017-2030 are delivered.
10. However, we also accept that the Delivery Plan must continue the co-produced approach pioneered by the development of the Strategy, seeking to share ideas, energy and resources and empower people to create and enjoy the cultures that are relevant to them, as opposed to creating a top-down, predictive and restrictive plan for our city’s future.

## Understanding the implications of the European Capital of Culture Bid.

11. A key action of the Culture Strategy was for Leeds to bid for the title of European Capital of Culture 2023. A small delivery team within Leeds City Council’s Culture and Sport service therefore had responsibility for creating the new Culture Strategy for Leeds 2017-2030, developing the bid for the title, and ensuring that the city’s many and diverse communities were fully involved, engaged and represented in both projects.
12. Autumn 2017 saw a series of key milestones for the bid including the creation and submission of an initial 80 page bid book, a celebration event hosted at Quarry Hill which was attended by more than 4,000 people from across the city, and extensive media and marketing campaigns and preparations for the initial panel interview. Whilst some early preparatory work was undertaken to start the broader development of the



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Culture Strategy Delivery Plan, the limited resources of the team were focused on ensuring that the first stage bid for the title was successful.

13. However, on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2017 the European Commission wrote to UK Government confirming its decision that, as a result of Brexit negotiations, the UK would no longer be eligible to participate in the European Capital of Culture competition, with immediate effect. The decision was announced despite the team being reassured by the previous actions of both Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the European Commission that the competition would go ahead.
14. We acknowledge that this announcement was a huge shock to the city and had far reaching consequences, not only for the developments, ideas and projects included as part of the bid, but also impacting the development of the Culture Strategy Delivery Plan, which was very closely aligned with the bid and would have provided the framework for its delivery. We noted that all five bidding cities continue to have proactive discussions with DCMS and we encourage Government to continue to support cities in their international cultural ambitions after the UK has left the EU.
15. We were advised at that stage that the Council had spent £155,000 on the bid, with approximately 4 times that amount spent by private and education sectors. However, in terms of the risk management strategy that was established as part of the bidding process, we acknowledge that the biggest risk identified was the possibility of not winning, particularly as 4 other UK cities had also submitted bids. Moving forward then, we are pleased to find that there is recognition from across community, business, artistic and political stakeholders that the hard work of the last four years must not be lost.
16. Linked to this, we welcome that Leeds will now move forward with plans to host a year-long celebration of its diverse cultures in 2023 following a White Paper approved by Full Council on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2018, which gained cross party support. Although not European Capital of Culture, the year will continue to have a strong international focus and will be rooted in the values, aims and objectives of the new Culture Strategy for Leeds 2017-2030.

## **Moving forward towards a year-long celebration of culture in 2023.**

17. We understand that the Leeds 2023 Independent Steering Group will be retained for an initial 12 month period to further develop the scope of the year-long celebration, and ensure robust governance and delivery mechanisms are in place for its successful delivery.
18. Linked to this, there will also be a period of ongoing dialogue, planning and development with a view to sharing more detailed plans for the year in late spring 2018.
19. However, it is vital that we also create a meaningful and sustainable legacy from the bid which goes beyond a year of celebration and creates a step-change in the quality of life experienced across communities in Leeds, by placing culture at the heart of policy and decision making.



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## Revised timescale for developing the Culture Strategy Delivery Plan.

20. Given the implications of the decision taken by the European Commission and the time needed to recast the plans for Leeds 2023, we appreciate the need to review the scope and timeframe of the Culture Strategy Delivery Plan.
21. We understand that the Culture Strategy Delivery Plan will therefore now have a six-year time frame as opposed to the three year timeframe initially proposed. Alongside community-driven projects, the Delivery Plan will comprise plans for a £35 million cultural programme, enabling the year-long celebration in 2023 to be bold, ambitious and inclusive.
22. It was also originally anticipated that the Delivery Plan be developed by March 2018. However, given the pressures on resources over the last six months, the need to review plans in light of changes to Leeds 2023, the continued appetite from residents, businesses and communities across Leeds to continue the values and ethos of co-production and the proposed extended timeframe for the Culture Strategy Delivery Plan, we are supportive of the decision to now develop the Delivery Plan over a longer period of time, with a view to completion by Autumn 2018.

## A co-produced approach to the Culture Strategy Delivery Plan

23. We very much support the continuation of the co-produced approach to the Culture Strategy Delivery Plan, including the creation of an open-source online platform that anyone can contribute to, crowd sourcing our cultural identity, placing culture at the heart of our daily lives, connecting all corners of the city, sharing experiences and creating the conditions for every person living in the city to have the capacity to create and play an active role in the cultural life of Leeds, should they choose it.
24. However, we also recognise that not everyone in the city has access to the internet and digital services. As such, we are pleased to note that officers will also continue to invest time and energy in qualitative conversations and building new relationships off line which are documented and shared by those who do have access to the internet, ensuring that those conversations and ideas do not become excluded from the Delivery Plan.
25. Although resources have been limited, we note that there are some actions and projects that are already in development, which will form part for the Culture Strategy Delivery Plan. A particular project shared with us by a Senior Lecturer within the School of Film, Music and Performing Arts at Leeds Beckett University, is a new sector-led strategy for the development and support of music in Leeds. Led by Music:Leeds, we learned that this project aims to build resilience across the music industry and grow its contribution to the Leeds economy. Music:Leeds and its partners have already undertaken an initial audit and hosted a symposium sharing ideas and best practice from across Europe to



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support both music production and performances in cities. The next stage of the project will be to undertake further engagement with the sector and build towards a new strategy for supporting the music eco system in Leeds, which we very much welcome and support.

26. We also learned that over the last six months, officers have continued conversations with communities across Leeds, starting the ground work to develop ideas and suggestions for the Culture Strategy Delivery Plan. Ideas and projects that are currently being explored (some at a very early stage) by communities across the city include the following:

- An economic impact study to measure the impact, value, size and scope of the cultural sector and its activities in Leeds
- Working in partnership with Art Forms Leeds to develop a new toolkit for culture to act as a bridge brokering relationships between services across Leeds City Council to engage with schools, children and young people and communities in consultations and local developments
- The creation of a 'Cultural Communities Fund' targeted to increase arts and cultural engagement in the top five most deprived wards in the city by 20%
- The continuation of the 'Leeds 2023 Explore Fund' supporting artists to develop meaningful international partnerships and promoting diversity and inclusivity
- The creation of a community-developed and maintained pocket park at Guiseley Wells
- The creation of a high-level Cultural Infrastructure Prospectus to promote the development of major cultural venues in the city and increase investment in cultural infrastructure
- A mural and art trail across Chapel Allerton utilising vacant wall space and junction boxes
- A new cultural development programme for artists with profound and multiple learning disabilities from Bramley to become part of a community-led revival of Bramley Festival creating a new artist-led Residents Association.
- The creation of a community-led 'Messy Maker Space' at Aire Place Workshops

## **Maximising the use of public buildings and open spaces for cultural activities.**

27. We learned from the Chief Officer for Culture and Sport that, as part of the legacy of the bid for European Capital of Culture 2023, the city and its partners will build a £35m cultural programme supporting the Culture Strategy Delivery Plan and the year-long celebration of culture in 2023, making the council a minority funder and generating significant investment for culture in Leeds.
28. One of the key values of the Culture Strategy relates to 'Generosity'. However, we recognise that generosity means more than just monetary transactions. In order for culture to happen there must be places for it to be created and shared.
29. As already acknowledged within the Strategy, the city has a plethora of theatres, galleries, museums, churches, village halls, schools, libraries, studios, cinemas and



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community centres, spanning its geography. However, these are not always used to their maximum potential.

30. During our February 2018 meeting, we were particularly interested to hear from the Community Engagement Manager at Bruntwood Property Management about their own culture strategy. Linked to this, the company proactively supports cultural activities by offering free work spaces within their own city centre properties. This very much encapsulates the valuable act of generosity as well as demonstrating a commitment towards the city's cultural ambitions. We believe that such good practice therefore needs to be actively promoted to help inspire others within wider business sector to develop similar ideas and suggestions for the Culture Strategy Delivery Plan.
31. However, this led us to also query how we as a Council are leading the way in maximising the use of our own public buildings and open spaces for cultural activities.
32. Linked to this, reference was made to actions already in development surrounding the 'Our Spaces Strategy', which is working towards delivering the ambition for our public spaces to become our greatest cultural asset. With several public realm projects planned across the city, this new strategy will aim to provide a high-level framework which considers how the needs of cultural events can be incorporated in these plans from practical infrastructure requirements to audience experience and scalable and flexible spaces for culture.
33. In welcoming the development of this Our Spaces Strategy, we were also pleased to note other related key actions already cited within the Culture Strategy, including:
  - Balance the need for income and commercial return with the need to provide affordable work space, meetings venues and community spaces for vital cultural activities to take place.
  - Ensure that every new estate, every school, and every development, works towards creating distinctive places that build a greater quality of life for everyone in the city
  - Ensure that our cultural venues will be generous with the spaces at their disposal, opening them up for community groups, rehearsal space, business and civic life.
  - Connect from the city centre towards the communities that immediately surround the more affluent and thriving centre, placing greater emphasis on their identities and cultures.

## **Capturing the wider benefits of cultural activities for young people.**

34. Particular references were made to the positive work undertaken by Opera North across local primary schools and the wider benefits this has brought in raising confidence amongst young people and also helping to improve attainment levels. Linked to this, it was recognised that more work is needed to help capture the wider benefits of such cultural activities for young people.





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35. As such, we welcome the creation of a new Leeds Cultural Education Partnership which focuses initially on schools and ensuring that the cultural offer provided by the city is incorporated as part of the curriculum. We noted that the Leeds museums and Galleries services has already created a Leeds Curriculum pulling together content and material relating to cultural stories of Leeds such as Leeds West Indian Carnival which will be used to inform lesson plans, school visits and events.
36. We also acknowledge and welcome the commitment already set out within the new Culture Strategy to champion the importance of arts and culture throughout the education curriculum through proactive dialogue with head teachers.

## **Helping arts organisations to build resilience.**

37. In Leeds there are two specific arts grant funds; arts@leeds and Leeds Inspired. Leeds Inspired is a modest scheme to fund one off projects, whilst the arts@leeds grant programme, which has been operating for 6 years, provides core revenue support to organisations who then benefit from multi-year funding agreements which allow them to plan their businesses effectively.
38. However, following on from the development and consultation of the new Culture Strategy, we are pleased to note that the arts@leeds scheme has now been updated and revised, introducing three tiers to reflect the needs of organisations of different scales and at different stages in their development. It therefore now supports the development of arts organisations to build resilience and grow their contribution to the Leeds economy.

## **Maintaining a watching brief of progress**

39. We very much recognise and welcome the hard work that has gone into establishing the new Leeds Culture Strategy as well as the progress made to-date in terms of informing its Delivery Plan. However, we also acknowledge that there is still a significant amount of work yet to be undertaken over the coming months and years in terms of achieving the ambitions of the Culture Strategy and therefore we strongly advise on-going Scrutiny involvement in this area of work by successor Scrutiny Boards.



**Scrutiny Board (Inclusive Growth, Culture and Sport)**

**Statement - Leeds Culture Strategy**

**March 2018**