

The Future of Edinburgh's Cultural Sector

Update

Background

Scotland's Futures Forum and the City of Edinburgh Council's (CEC) Culture and Sport Division have been engaged in a short-term project, exploring the future of the city's arts and culture sector.

The purpose of the project is:

- for those in the arts and culture sector to share their aspirations for the future, and;
- to consider how they might collaborate better together, and with the Council, to meet shared aspirations.

On 21 June 2010, Scotland's Futures Forum held an initial seminar with members of the city's arts and culture sector to consider their shared aspirations against the backdrop of constrained public finance.



Summary

This initial session was designed to assess what people believed the impact of less money being available in the sector would mean from 2011. There appeared to be a mixed understanding and appreciation of the likely impact. Many delegates did not fully appreciate the level to which the spending cuts would affect the city and their organisations.

Most people saw an absolute need to encourage more partnership in the arts and at community level but differing views emerged on what the role of the Council was, and should be, in enabling the sector to develop more effective partnerships, to ensure the continuing top quality art and cultural offering and to facilitate development of cooperative financial models and potential cost saving measures.

There also appeared to be a lack of awareness of the work currently being undertaken by CEC in relation to many of the concerns and points raised.

7 Questions to consider

Over the summer months the Council has reflected on the learning points to emerge from the initial meeting. CEC recognize the need to work and communicate more effectively with the arts and culture sector and are very keen to consider new intelligent collaborations and new thinking to help inform its strategic approach.

However, given there was a general lack of understanding of the current work and role of the council we have decided to run another café discussion to consider the Council's perceived role in more detail and for the council to communicate more fully its current approaches.

Invitation. This café will be held at The Scottish Parliament on the afternoon of Monday 31 January 2011. If you wish to attend, please contact Donald.jarvie@scottish.parliament.uk

Full programme details will be issued nearer the time. In advance of this event, listed below are 7 of the key ideas, themes and issues raised at the initial meeting along with a short description of the current actions being undertaken by CEC.

Key Question 1

There was a general feeling, true, accurate or otherwise, that reductions in CEC funding could be offset through more public participation in events and ticket sales. How can the Council and other agencies help promote wider participation in arts and culture events in the city?

Current CEC actions: The Edinburgh Portal Pilot Project has been funded by the CEC and Creative Scotland and is planned to launch within this financial year. The idea behind the portal is to provide an electronic one-stop-shop providing everything from an overview of cultural events in the city to offers and deals, from real-time ticketing to venue information. It will also provide feedback and recommendations from customers, venue, transport and accommodation information. **More information on the portal can be accessed through The Audience Business clicket@tab.org.uk.**

Key Question 2

How can politicians be further encouraged to support grass root / community interest in arts and culture.

Current CEC actions: CEC recognise that political support for community arts is important alongside the need to continue supporting the big ticket festivals and large venues.

The Pledge: To that end, and as a way to encourage access to sport and culture from the wider community, CEC coordinates 'The Pledge' initiative. This has led to over 40 organisations setting out ways to improve access and participation in arts, sport and physical activity. More details of the Pledge can be found at http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/486/arts_development/424/access_to_sport_and_culture_asc_edinburgh

Annual Networking Event: CEC run an annual networking event to encourage arts groups to come together to promote and celebrate community arts and culture projects and initiatives. The next Arts Expo will be on 18 March 2011, offering the opportunity to link up to this Scottish Futures Forum work and providing further evidence on how community arts positively impacts locally, nationally and internationally.

Corporate support: CEC also plays an important brokering role by working with corporate organisations to encourage financial backing of arts and culture initiatives and projects.

Key Question 3

How can the Council and other agencies enable new business models in the sector?

CEC actions: The Council has been active in a number of areas including the redevelopment of the Assembly Rooms, the Museums Hub proposal and Arts Hub proposal. The Museum Hub, in the Canongate, will include the extended and renewed Museum of Edinburgh alongside the re-located and revitalized Museum of Childhood. The City Art Hub feasibility study is currently being carried out involving a number of publically supported independent contemporary art galleries. The Assembly Rooms plans include a capital redevelopment and new business plan. In addition there are many examples of how the Division are supporting individual organisations to follow new models, for example Theatre Workshop have been supported to realize their new business plan objectives, moving out of the existing building to a new more flexible operation based at out of the blue. Committee reports on these projects can be shared by contacting rebecca.peppiette@edinburgh.gov.uk. These initiatives are good examples of how CEC is strategically brokering and developing new business models in their own services to ensure sustainability and financial savings in the sector.

Key question 4

Should the Council, together with other agencies, undertake an audit of all operational and non operational assets in the city to help inform their strategic approach to investment (to maximize the capital resources available).

CEC actions: In 2009, CEC commissioned a large study to consider the City's operational and non-operational assets, along with nationally and privately owned cultural venues and to strategically make recommendations on the future provision required and investment priorities. This comprehensive evaluation, the Edinburgh City Cultural Venues Study, can be shared by contacting rebecca.peppiette@edinburgh.gov.uk.

Key Question 5

Is now the right time for the Council and other Agencies to develop an aggressive marketing strategy, to enable the sector to promote a new coordinated narrative for the future?

CEC actions: While recognizing more can be done on this, the Council supported 'The Audience Business' (TAB) to drive audience development in ways that no single organisation could do for itself. TAB's core activities include, delivering centralised marketing resources and services, undertaking organisation-specific or issue-based research and, consultancy projects around marketing, market research and audience development. More details on TAB can be found at www.tab.org.uk.

Key Question 6

Are the Council and other public agencies engaging with the Olympics and Commonwealth Games organisers to ensure, on the back of these events, maximum benefits accrue for the arts and culture sector in Edinburgh?

Current CEC actions: Festivals Edinburgh's document 'Edinburgh's Festivals 2012 – 2014: a permanent legacy for Scotland' can be found at www.festivalsedinburgh.com. This document clearly sets out how it believes a significant legacy can be achieved. Through programming, marketing and cultural diplomacy, and through coordinated approach by many different public organisations, CEC believes FE is on the right track to maximize the benefits from both the Commonwealth and Olympic games between 2012 and 2014. There is also a programme of sporting and cultural events being planned during the 2012 to 2014 period by the culture and Sport Division.

Key Question 7

In developing a vibrant and sustainable future for the arts and culture sector in the city, during the current and predicted future time of austerity does the Council have i) a strategic role, ii) no role, iii) a brokering role iv) a management role v) no role in developing collaboration between arts and cultural bodies?

CEC role: Excellence in Culture and Sports – maintaining the crucial cultural and sports profile for the capital city, as well as contributing to health improvement. Actions include delivering and supporting high quality cultural and sporting events. Key city objectives include being the most physically active European city by 2020 and sustaining Edinburgh's pre-eminence as the world's leading festival destination by increasing customer engagement with both direct and arm's length services.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the coming years will be difficult. However, it is clear that the Council have been working hard to address a number of areas identified by delegates as crucial on 21 June 2010 at the Scottish Parliament, if we are to realize our shared aspirations for the sector in 5 years time.

It is clear that better communication on roles and responsibilities are needed; and, it is clear too that the Council are keen to engage with representatives in the sector to find innovation and intelligent collaboration. The next event at Holyrood will help to take us along this road.

Next Steps

Following the second cafe at the Scottish Parliament, The Futures Forum, CEC and other public agencies will reflect on the learning to emerge from this piece of work, so far, and consider how the ideas of delegates might be developed within the strategic planning processes of the Council.

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