

Committee	Dated:
Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee	25 January 2021
Subject: City Outdoor Arts Programme: 2020 Performance Evaluation Report	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	3, 4, 7, 10
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Peter Lisley, Director of Major Projects	For Information
Report author: Nick Bodger, Cultural and Visitor Development Director	

Summary

Over the last year, in what has been described as “unprecedented times”, your Outdoor Arts Programme has delivered a record-breaking level of engagement across the audiences it serves, supporting the mental wellbeing of communities, while enabling the local creative and cultural sector through opportunities of work and exposure. Furthermore, it has demonstrated its ability to adapt and respond to national crises, delivering reputational gains for the City Corporation as a dynamic and agile provider of culture while positively addressing issues of national concern, namely those raised by the Black Lives Matter Movement.

This report provides an overview of the achievements of the 2020 Programme against its four “golden thread” principles, highlights the challenges faced due to the Covid-19 pandemic and provides an overview of the programme planned for 2021.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the contents of this report.

Main Report

Background

1. Throughout the spring, summer and autumn months of 2020, your Outdoor Arts Programme had planned to deliver a large programme of major and smaller events, building on the significant success of *Fantastic Feats* the previous year

which had seen record-breaking achievements across its “golden thread” principles. These included the securing of more than double the value of the Programme’s core budget through partnership; a record number of events delivered in more outdoor City spaces than ever before; a rise of 71% in attendances year-on-year; and quadruple the number of new commissions, with audiences rating these works as ‘very good’ being the highest in the Programme’s history.

2. The planned Programme (April to September 2020) – entitled “*Believe! – Faith, Freedom and Football*” – drew inspiration from a number of major anniversaries and events during the year, including Mayflower 400, Becket 900 and the Euro 2020 championships. With a focus on religious diversity, tolerance, worship and freedom of speech, artists were contracted, and funding and delivery partners secured. These included the Diocese of London, Aldgate Connect BID, Greenwich + Docklands International Festival, the Whitechapel Art Gallery, the GLA and London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT) amongst others.
3. In response to the pandemic, the Government announced a nationwide lockdown on 23 March (lasting until the 4 July); thereafter, restrictions in play from 5 November to 2 December and again from 16 December to the present day have precluded outdoor arts activity of any kind. In the periods in-between, only non-congregational activity (such as on-street exhibitions) or performance-based activity under heavy social-distancing and policing rules (which has largely been cost prohibitive) have been allowed. Extremely low footfall within the City (across the worker and visitor communities particularly) has also called into question the viability and value of outdoor events activity during this time.
4. In consideration of the above and balancing the appropriate use of funding with continued support for creator makers (many of them freelancers – a group hard-hit by the pandemic) against a rapidly-changing London and national picture, your Outdoor Arts Programme took the difficult decision to incrementally cancel planned activity as restrictions developed, being careful to ensure minimal contractual cancellation penalties were incurred by the City Corporation at the same time as negotiating fair and favourable settlement fees in support of artists and partners. Where possible, this has sometimes resulted in activity being postponed until 2021 so providing future engagement for said contractors.
5. It should be noted that all elements of the Outdoor Arts remit were eventually cancelled as part of this decision including its Aldgate Square and Guildhall Yard Programmes and planned or continuing activity such as the Aldgate Mela and Yard Lunch Markets which, although permissible, were not considered viable by stallholders given the level of footfall in the City. Subsequently, the new test centre in the Yard has precluded the Yard’s use for cultural activities.

Current Position

6. Instead, working with the wider Cultural and Visitor Development Team (CVDT), your Outdoor Arts Programme has sought to establish an online platform that enables streaming of cultural activities, ensuring the ongoing engagement of audiences. At the same time, the platform has provided a mechanism for the City Corporation to promote access to its collections and assets across its full

portfolio, respond to pertinent and new initiatives (such as the work of the Tackling Racism Workforce and the advancement of its *Celebrating City Women* programme) and support local creator makers across the cultural spectrum through the commissioning of online workshops, lectures, creative challenges and other content.

7. The platform – [Our City Together](#) (#visitthecityfromhome) – is fed with content deriving from a consortium of internal and external partners and led by your CVDT. These partners include City Corporation and external City assets and services such as Barbican Centre, Museum of London, Guildhall Art Gallery, London Symphony Orchestra, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Culture Mile, Tower Bridge, Keats House, Sculpture in the City and the London Metropolitan Archives.
8. As a group, the partnership is uniquely placed to deliver a compelling City offer to inspire, entertain and support audiences during the pandemic at a time when the mental wellbeing of the communities we serve is paramount. Indeed, the involvement of partners such as Thrive LDN in the promotion and launch of the platform has helped ensure the engagement of those most vulnerable.
9. Supported and informed by the content delivered by the partner group and the strength it derives from such a collective endeavour, your Outdoor Arts Programme has been able to commission the activity referenced in item 6 above and in the paragraphs following, with sometimes extraordinary success. Not least in this was a photography masterclass with Nick Turpin broadcast on YouTube which – alone – received over 100,000 views.
10. The results presented in this report consider these commissions in terms of their effectiveness to engage with audiences and support local artists. They are reported against the Outdoor Arts Programme's golden thread principles of working in partnership, animating City spaces, commissioning new and innovative work and attracting new audiences to the City. While ordinarily, the annual report considers quantitative and qualitative data under these headings, (eg the ratings and demographics of its audience), this has not been possible this year as most engagement has taken place online without surveys.

Partnerships

11. Through creative digital co-commissions the Outdoor Arts Programme worked with 21 partners to produce collaborative content for *Our City Together*. This compares to 32 partners in 2019, 37 in 2018 and 22 in 2017, decreases of 34%, 43% and 4% respectively.
12. While this may seem cause for concern, the 2020 figure reflects the severe limitations on funding and activity brought about by pandemic with many regular partners cancelling all activity for the year, reserving resources to ensure they stay in business and furloughing staff accordingly. It is also worth noting that many *Believe!* partners who are not counted in this figure have agreed to a postponement to 2021, nuancing their ideas and products to align with next

year's theme, when it is hoped there will be greater scope for outdoor arts activity.

13. Ordinarily, this annual report attaches a value to the partnerships brokered. This has not been possible this year as partnership has been focussed on promotion and reach, using partners' digital platforms and other marketing tools to deliver greater levels of engagement with no real income or co-commissioning taking place. Rather, the focus of the Programme has been to support the City's cultural and creative sector SMEs, deploying funding through commissions to enable businesses at a time when this is most needed.
14. Partnerships of note in 2021 include continued support of Open City and their Open House London festival, the programme's longstanding alliance with the London Festival of Architecture (LFA) and a new partnership with Google Arts and Culture which saw the creation of a platform that explores the history of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the City, highlighting City sites connected with this theme and featuring a virtual guided walk by Blue Badge Guide Dominic Burris-North. This work particularly, has helped support Tackling Racism Workforce cultural ambitions and forms a major strand of a wider programme that will seek to celebrate diversity within the Square Mile.
15. Looking to 2021, despite challenging financial circumstances, your Outdoor Arts Programme has successfully secured funding from the Aldgate Connect BID to continue its role managing and coordinating the events programme in Aldgate Square. Similarly, a potential service level agreement (SLA) with a significant City provider is being explored to deliver activity within specific City areas, as is the potential for event provision by the programme team at a new City development with planned outdoor event space. Both initiatives would be funded by the external partners if negotiations prove successful.
16. Finally, it is worth noting that an underspend of £96,000 of the 2020/21 Outdoor Arts Programme budget (a result of the lower level of activity this year) has been identified as a potential resource for Culture Mile if carried forward. This proposal is part of a wider bid to your Policy and Resources Committee this month for continued funding of the Culture Mile initiative. Within it, the Outdoor Arts Programme is cited as the ongoing delivery agent for on-street events within the area (previously, presence was only achieved through ad hoc event partnerships), enabling closer working and greater alignment with programme themes and engagement objectives, and a more effective and efficient pooling of resources.

City spaces

17. Despite physical events in 2020 largely being cancelled, unique City spaces have continued to be animated throughout the year (albeit this has often been through virtual means). In 2020, a total of 35 City spaces (including City attractions) were visited by audiences either physically or from the comfort of their armchairs. This exceeds the Programme's previous record (2019) of 31 spaces (an increase of 13%) and is largely due to the significantly lower cost of exploring a space online than physically animating it.

18. Of note under this principle is the Programme's focus on supporting the wider City visitor offer during the pandemic, delivering curated, guide-led and downloadable walks in, out and around the City to excite neighbouring borough communities to visit our attractions and spend in our shops (as restrictions have allowed). Complementing this, some few physical events within the City's streetscape have also been programmed to signal that the City is open to wider London (when it was) while serving local residential communities with safely viewable on-street content.
19. Highlights include partnerships with TfL and the City Guides to create, deliver and promote the walks – notably [*From the Suburbs to the City*](#) and [*Adventures Close to Home*](#); on-street exhibition [*Faith in the City*](#) (Paternoster and Aldgate Squares, September through December) which celebrated religious diversity using Niki Gorick's photos from her book of the same title and supported the City's Tackling Racism Agenda; and the Programme's support of *Aldgate in Winter* – a small local exhibition trail displaying large lanterns in the windows of the local area's buildings. Both exhibitions could be viewed by the public in a safe and socially distanced way.

Excellent and innovative work

20. The third principle outlined in item 10 (programming excellent and innovative work) is measured by the number of new commissions undertaken and the satisfaction ratings of the audiences engaged with them. Given the Programme's move to online and the rapidity with which this change has taken place, it has not been possible to ascertain ratings in any efficient and expeditious way (as per our usual audience surveys at events). However, the audience numbers (next section) speak for themselves, noting that these have been achieved in a marketplace that is noisier than ever before, with most cultural organisations across the UK and beyond seeking to engage through digital means.
21. In total, the Programme produced 71 commissions throughout the year – this is its highest figure yet and reflects the comparative cheapness of delivering online works noting that the scale of these is significantly reduced and that, rather than events that fill a route through Cheapside and over to St Paul's for example (*Thank You for Having Us*, 2019), commissions have been contained to workshops, lectures, videos and creative challenges (amongst other event types). This compares to 30 new commissions in 2019, seven in 2018 and five in 2017 and sees increases of 136%, 914% and 1,320% respectively.
22. Highlights include the street photography masterclass with Nick Turpin (item 9) which – due to demand – has even been translated into Arabic; the *Ultimate Londoner Quiz* hosted by comedian Dane Baptiste in partnership with the GLA, London and Partners and *The Londonist*, which supported local SMEs by offering a platform to promote their businesses and requested donations from participants to the Mayor of London's *Pay it Forward* campaign; and – as part of the Mayflower 400 commemoration – four composers from “nonclassical” - presenting four new multimedia pieces exploring themes of journeys, migration

and cultural identity on YouTube, the creation of which was stretched over 66 days - the duration of the Mayflower's journey to North America.

23. Overall, the programme supported 50 City and London artists, freelancers and cultural organisations through the commissioning process.

New audiences

25. As indicated previously, without demographic breakdowns, it is difficult to ascertain whether the audiences engaged with this year's Outdoor Arts Programme are new. Its move to online would suggest so but this not a particularly useful comparison, rather it demonstrates the Programme's agility in adapting to changing circumstances and to engage across platforms.
26. Similarly, comparing audience numbers from previous years pits physical visits to events against online engagements and ignores the impacts of the pandemic, noting particularly the difficult context in which audiences have been achieved, namely a crowded online marketplace with most UK cultural organisations and programmes bidding for the same audiences.
27. Considering the issues cited above and to provide useful comparisons, this year's audience figures are divided into those that actively engaged by attending a physical event, participating in an online masterclass or taking part in our quiz (for example); those that passively consumed cultural content by visiting our platforms and those of our external partners (presumably reading and digesting the articles they have accessed, noting the action to visit was of their choosing); and overall reach which calculates the number of people that could, potentially, have seen content through our own dedicated social media and external press coverage. The numbers for 2020 breakdown as follows:
- a. Active engagement: 118k
 - b. Passive engagement: 148k
 - c. Reach: 99.6m
28. In 2019, 96k engaged with a *Fantastic Feats* event or associated activity. This compares to 56k in 2018 and 61k in 2017. Taking the active engagement figure for 2020 only (118k), it has been another record-breaking year for the Programme with a rise in engagement of 23% year-on-year and of 111% and 93% respectively across 2018 and 2017. As above, while these may not be useful comparisons, they do suggest that new audiences, above and beyond those previously achieved, have been engaged.
29. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that if active and passive engagement are combined (266k), this compares favourably with the total number of physical visits to all City attractions (including HM Tower of London, Tower Bridge, St Paul's and Barbican) for the original period of the Programme's planned activities (April to September). The total attractions visitor number was 243k for the period 6 July to 4 October when assets were operational, around 8% lower than the total engagement figure for the Outdoor Arts Programme. If nothing else, this demonstrates the Programme's capacity to adapt its business model

and to engage with audiences in a time of national crisis, delivering consumable content to benefit mental wellbeing without compromise to safety.

Plans for 2021

30. This year, the Outdoor Arts Programme will present *A Thing of Beauty*, commemorating the bicentenary of the death of John Keats and celebrating beauty, which was a recurring motif in his work. This season will focus on beauty, love and truth and examine these concepts in the context of art, nature and relationships addressing themes of diversity, the environment and sustainability. As such, the programme supports, complements and strengthens the City's Climate Action and Tackling Racism Agendas.
31. While government restrictions remain in place, the focus of the programme will be on non-congregational activity which includes an outdoor exhibition programme with partnerships already secured with Keats House, Games London, London Metropolitan Archives, Sculpture in the City, and Greenwich + Docklands International Festival (GDIF). Additional activities planned include the postponed *Mela in the City*, City Beerfest and additional new co-commissions in partnership with GDIF, London International Festival of Theatre, Sculpture in the City, London Landmarks Half Marathon and the GLA. Some of these will be dependent on Covid restrictions being lifted.
32. Because of this, the focus on digital content will continue with the commissions being translatable and streamed alongside small new commissions to the *Our City Together* platform.
33. In addition, the Programme team will deliver key elements emanating from the Lord Mayor's Culture and Commerce Recovery Taskforce, the City's Recovery Taskforce and the Lord Mayor's *Re-opening the City Week* initiative, noting the key role culture has to play in delivering a robust recovery for London across business and tourism markets.

Key Data

34. All relevant data is included in the report above. Detailed breakdowns are available on request from the Director of Major Projects.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

- **Strategic implications:** the work described in this report aligns with (and delivers on) outcomes 3, 4, 7 and 10 in the Corporate Plan with the Programme being a core delivery agent for the City's Cultural and Visitor Strategies. It advances (and continues to advance) the City's Diversity and Climate Action Agendas, and – going forward – will be a key component in recovery plans, notably through its continued support of local artists and creatives and in its ability to drive the City's attractiveness as a place to be.
- **Financial implications:** the Programme returns a £96k underspend this year which has been identified as a potential source of funding to support Culture Mile next year.

- **Risk implications:** a continuing lockdown and/or ongoing restrictions on outdoor event activity could jeopardise plans for 2021 but the Programme has demonstrated significant agility and success in this regard and will ensure these risks are reflected in contracts with artists and technicians, and that cultural content continues to be streamed online.
- **Equalities implications:** the Programme delivers against the City's Diversity Agenda with next year's programme set to celebrate a significant number of protected characteristics.
- **Climate implications:** as above, the 2021 Programme will consider Climate Action as one of its major themes. Concurrently, it has contracted Julie's Bicycle to examine its carbon footprint and recommend ways that this may be reduced and/or offset.

Conclusion

35. Despite the pandemic, the City's Outdoor Arts Programme has successfully pivoted its focus to deliver on its four "golden thread" principles, breaking all previous records across three of them, while supporting local artists and creators through paid cultural commission, and attractions and providers by driving footfall (walks), during this unprecedented and challenging time for the sector.
36. In 2021 the programme will play a significant role in supporting the recovery and reopening of the City and continue to be a key delivery vehicle for the City Corporation's Climate Action Strategy and its Tackling Racism Taskforce as well as core strategies cited above.
37. Furthermore, the agility of the Programme in switching to an online focus has helped support the mental wellbeing of the communities served by the City Corporation, demonstrating its significant value as an engagement tool for all City-based attractions and cultural services.

Appendices

- None

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