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| Committee(s): Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee | Dated: 03 November /2025 |
| Subject: Developing the Cultural Strategy – progress update September to October 2025 | Public report: For Decision |
| This proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse Engaged Communities • Vibrant Thriving Destination • Flourishing Public Spaces • Providing Excellent Services. |
| Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending? | No |
| If so, how much? | £ |
| What is the source of Funding? | N/A |
| Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department? | No |
| Report of: Greg Moore, Deputy Town Clerk | |
| Report author: Emma Markiewicz, Head of Profession for Culture Omkar Chana, Interim Culture Director | |

Summary

This report provides an update on the development of the Cultural Strategy. It presents the founding commitments and priorities that have emerged from the extensive stakeholder consultation that has been undertaken to date. The proposal for the next phase of development is to further share these priorities in engagement sessions with corporates, SMEs and other relevant stakeholders, particularly the cultural institutions and the BIDS, in the Square Mile. This is to further test these commitments and priorities in order to support their planning and implement their delivery.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

1. Approve the foundational commitments and priorities one to eleven (detailed in paragraph 10 of this report).
2. Approve the hierarchy of priorities as: foundational commitments and priorities (paragraph 10); opportunities (paragraph 12); and additional considerations (paragraph 14).
3. Approve the next stage of development of the Cultural Strategy which is the implementation plan based on the foundational commitments and priorities.

Main Report

Background

1. In December 2024, the Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee (CHL) approved the Terms of Reference for developing the Cultural Strategy.
2. In September 2025, the Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee received a report on the progress of the Cultural Strategy from July to August 2025 including a second iteration of the draft definition, commitment & priorities, and The Audience Agency's Population Survey report.
3. This period continued to involve significant internal and external co-creation and consultation with stakeholder groups including: the Culture Strategy Development Group; the Officer Group and CHL Members; as well as the City Corporation's Executive Leadership Board and the Strategy Forum.

Current Position

4. Strategy development work has continued, including a Cultural Strategy Development Group (made up of CHL Members, City Corporation Officers and a representative group of external stakeholders) designed to bring together and share perspectives and inform the next stage from ambition to creation of an achievable action plan. The version of the definition, commitments and priority created through this process is included in Appendix 1 for reference.
5. Our final 'Go and See' visit engaged stakeholders took place, with a tour of the Guildhall Art Gallery and London's Roman Amphitheatre. It shared progress on the strategy development and gathered stakeholder views.
6. The significant co-creation and consultation process has resulted in a coherent and clear set of foundational commitments and priorities which are put forward for Member approval.

Proposal

Cultural Strategy: foundational commitments and priorities, opportunities and considerations

7. The foundational commitments and priorities presented in this report are the outcome of the co-creation and stakeholder engagement process. They seek to provide a coherent and clear set of commitments and priorities that are intelligible to all and implementable by stakeholders.
8. Eleven foundational commitments and priorities are set out below. They represent the essential building blocks for delivering a cultural offer for the whole of the City of London hence, the use of the word "foundational". This includes our City workers and residents, our cultural, religious and educational establishments, our corporates and SMEs (including financial, property and legal institutions), our Liveries, BIDS and the City of London Corporation itself.

9. The foundational commitments and priorities can only be achieved through the whole City of London community working together to deliver them through partnerships, collaboration and engagement.
10. The foundational commitments and priorities focus on the most critical areas for implementation and are not intended to postpone or downplay any work that is already happening within the City Corporation and externally on other areas. The foundational commitments and priorities set out the building blocks for the Cultural Strategy.

FOUNDATIONAL COMMITMENTS AND PRIORITIES

Access Culture with Ease – make culture simple to find and effortless to enjoy, unlocking what’s hidden in plain sight and unleashing it onto our streets as part of daily life.

1. **Make the City’s culture easier to find and follow** – develop a communications campaign with partners to share the City’s cultural story, identifying ways to coordinate promotion, and connect workers, visitors and residents with its vibrant offer.
2. **Bring hidden gems into public view** – open up our extraordinary yet hidden spaces and buildings, filling them with activity, and inviting visitors to explore every corner of the Square Mile.
3. **Extend institutions beyond their walls** – encourage and support our world-class institutions to spill beyond their walls with open-air workshops, concerts and exhibitions that reflect the City’s diversity and international spirit, animating public space and opening culture to everyone.
4. **Sort the basics, signpost the rest** – improve seating, toilets and wayfinding by working with partners to enhance amenities, making cultural experiences more comfortable and welcoming so people stay longer and want to return.

Balance the Cultural Mix – create the conditions for a balanced and diverse cultural ecosystem; celebrating world-class excellence and making the space for independent culture.

5. **Embed culture across all Corporation departments** – build culture into processes across the City Corporation so that culture is not siloed or sidelined but integrated and outward looking. We will do this from planning to business support, ensuring cultural understanding informs decisions and services.

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| <p>6. Shape collective impact with major cultural partners – work with our world-class cultural institutions to set shared outcomes and collaborate on evaluation; making cultural value more tangible and ensuring the whole sector learns and evolves together.</p> |
| <p>7. Use empty spaces to seed new ideas – we will work with our corporates and BIDS to activate meanwhile space by identifying, supporting and encouraging free or low-cost, flexible places for independent culture to test ideas, build momentum and create lasting impact.</p> |
| <p>8. Celebrate the City’s many stories – work with artists, historians, residents and impacted communities to face the past with honesty and care, while making space for new stories to be seen, heard and celebrated in the heart of London.</p> |
| <p>9. Align cultural investment across the City – bring partners within the City of London together to pool resources and focus on shared goals, getting more value from investment and creating cultural activity that makes a bigger difference for everyone. This will include engagement with small cultural groups, workers and residents so they can help shape and deliver activity that feels relevant and connected to local life and reflects its diversity.</p> |
| <p>Create Pathways into Creative Futures – nurture the next generation of creative talent; opening doors and building routes so everyone can access the City’s creative future.</p> |
| <p>10. Open the City’s culture to London’s classrooms – build on the City’s strong school partnerships and educational institutions to create long-term cultural pathways so children and young people develop a lifelong attachment to City culture.</p> |
| <p>11. Create pathways into creative careers – develop new pathways into creative careers and leadership roles by blending hands-on experience in culture and heritage with business skills from City corporates and Livery organisations, creating an alternative to traditional degrees and placements.</p> |

11. Our cultural offer is not only for the City of London community to enjoy but for all, wherever they may work, visit or live. We have identified two opportunities to facilitate this; one local and one global.
12. The opportunities set out a longer-term ambition. The intent is for further work to follow when the foundational priorities are being progressed through implementation.

OPPORTUNITIES

12. **Connect the City's culture with its neighbours** – work with neighbouring boroughs and partners to open the City's culture to surrounding communities; taking activity out, inviting audiences in, and making everyone feel part of its cultural life.

13. **Build global cultural partnerships** – utilise the City's networks and reputation to spark cultural exchange, develop international programmes, and show how culture can celebrate difference and build unity.

13. The extensive consultation process has brought some additional areas to light. We want to acknowledge all the material that has surfaced through this process. Some of these areas are complex and beyond the scope of what we can commit to at this moment.

14. To ensure that this work is documented, these areas are presented below as additional considerations. We proposed to continue to support progress in these areas led by other teams as some of these overlap with ongoing work across the City Corporation.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

14. **Make funding more accessible** – review and adapt funding mechanisms designed for smaller organisations and independent creatives. By making funds more accessible and flexible, the City can nurture local talent and ensure cultural investment reaches those with the biggest potential impact.

15. **Put culture on the street** – bring culture into everyday life through a year-round programme of music, performance and art in public spaces, creating joyful, unexpected moments that are free and open to all.

16. **Use rates relief to nurture independent culture** – explore a discretionary business rates policy to make space affordable for independents; helping to unlock empty units for grassroots culture and supporting distinctive ideas to take root in the Square Mile.

15. In relation to the priorities, Members are asked to

- a) Approve the foundational commitments and priorities one to eleven.
- b) Approve the hierarchy of priorities as: foundational commitments and priorities, opportunities, and additional considerations.
- c) Approve the next stage of development of the Cultural Strategy which is the implementation plan based on these foundational commitments and priorities.

16. The next step is to further refine the foundational commitments and priorities; produce a draft structure for the strategy, which may include examples of best practice drawing on the Corporate Plan, the Destination City programme and Local Plan to ensure consistency between these documents and to work up a short Cultural Strategy document.

Stakeholder engagement

17. The Cultural Strategy development process has been co-created in a highly consultative manner, which has already included our institutions, the major attractions (such as the Tower of London), places of worship, Livery companies, the BIDs and many areas of heritage and culture community in its broadest sense.
18. This has enabled the development of a robust and comprehensive set of commitments and priorities that reflects the outcome of a process which brought together the City Corporation, our institutions and many external stakeholders that have kindly given up time to assist with and support the development process. Appendix 2 provides a consultation list of those that have participated in the process up to this point.
19. The next step is to carry out stakeholder sessions via Breakfast Briefings on these foundational commitments and priorities in order to discuss further buy in and implementation. These sessions will focus on the City of London corporates, SMEs (e.g. financial and professional services, legal, banking, insurance and technology sectors), the BIDS and our cultural institutions in particular the GSMD, the Barbican and the emerging Museum of London. We intend to undertake this in-house utilising Members of CHL and Officers.
20. The process would enable the City Corporation to test the foundational priorities and develop a series of 'asks and offers' so that we can understand where we have common cultural objectives and goals with corporates, and what commitments each of us can bring to the implementation process. We hope to enter into agreements (possibly via Memorandum of Understandings) with as many of these organisations as possible outlining how we can collectively deliver on our commitments and priorities.
21. Crucially, and for the first time, as explained above, we intend to do this as a collective with representation from the City Corporation's cultural activities in its broadest sense, including representation from the Barbican, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Museum of London.
22. Additionally, as we continue to engage with stakeholders through the drafting process, we are mindful that the foundational commitments and priorities will continue to evolve and may be brought back to Committee at a future date.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

23. Strategic implications – the Cultural Strategy spans four areas of the Corporate Plan: Diverse, Engaged Communities; Flourishing Public Spaces; Providing Excellent Services and Vibrant Thriving Destination. It also supports the delivery of Destination City objectives.
24. Financial implications – in November 2024, a bid of £45,000 to the 2024/25 Policy Initiative Fund, categorised as ‘Supporting the development of a Culture Strategy’ and charged to City’s Estate was approved. We are hopeful that our consultants can finalise this work within the allocated budget and will continue to monitor budgets to mitigate any cost pressure that may arise.
25. Resource implications – the Cultural Strategy is being developed using existing Culture team resource, supported by two external specialist consultancies (Things Make Public and The Audience Agency).
26. Legal implications – none identified.
27. Risk implications - none identified.
28. Equalities implications – the Cultural Strategy will impact the public, cultural institutions, residents and partners in the Square Mile. There are several strands of the Cultural Strategy in development which seek to promote and create cultural opportunities and experiences to those with protected characteristics, who may currently experience barriers to access. Officers will be working with EEDI colleagues to assess whether this strategy warrants an Equalities Impact Assessment or whether this is more appropriate for individual projects that come out of the Cultural Strategy. In either case, an explanation of how the Cultural Strategy complies with our Public Sector Equality Duty 2010 will be considered.
29. Climate implications – none identified.
30. Security implications – none identified.

Conclusion

31. This report brings together the work on developing the Cultural Strategy to date. The proposed foundational commitments and priorities, and hierarchy will simplify what is taken forward into meetings with key corporates and SMEs, BIDs and our cultural institutions in the Square Mile – these organisations will play a key role as our Cultural Strategy delivery partners.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – draft definition, commitments and priorities (used at the 16 Oct stakeholder event)
- Appendix 2 – Cultural Strategy – Consultation List

Omkar Chana

Culture Director (Interim), Town Clerk’s Department

omkar.chana@cityoflondon.gov.uk

Emma Markiewicz

Head of Profession (Culture) and Director of The London Archives

emma.markiewicz@cityoflondon.gov.uk