

The Creatively Birmingham Statement of Intent

The Creatively Birmingham Statement of Intent sets out our shared ambition, as partners, invested in the creative future of our city, to grow and develop Birmingham's diverse creative, cultural and arts sector over the next decade.

The Birmingham Coat of Arms demonstrates through the figure of the blacksmith and the painter the entwined nature of creativity and industry in our city. Creativity, arts, and culture are positive forces that add meaning to our lives, provide jobs and opportunities, open conversations and connections across communities and draws people to places. The creativity of Birmingham's people, our communities, businesses, and organisations, is part of our past, our present and our bold future as a city.

Our ambition is that Birmingham's diverse and vibrant creative and cultural scene is inclusive, accessible, sustainable and benefits everyone – a growing and evolving cultural offer that is thriving and recognised nationally and internationally as a unique beacon of good practice, inclusion, and quality.

To do this we aim to

- Work with all stakeholders to facilitate new relationships and develop a new cultural approach for our city - The Birmingham Model; A beacon of talent and inclusion within a relevant, localised and flourishing cultural sector.
- Create local creative communities across Birmingham, in which people can meet, collaborate, thrive and be innovative within their own communities of place and culture, becoming a city of interconnected cultural centres.
- Help facilitate safe cultural spaces which allow for inclusive, accessible, affordable, and representational arts and culture.
- Nurture our artist and creatives' aspirations and talents to allow them to reach their full creative potential as part of a vibrant and successful creativity economy in the city

We will achieve these aims by working together to create a new Creatively Birmingham Strategy that delivers clear career pathways and business opportunities for creativity, arts, and culture in Birmingham, builds collaboration and partnership, enables representation and reconciliation, demonstrates and realises the benefits of the creative, arts and culture sector to health, wellbeing, community cohesion and economic growth.

This strategy will form a framework to guide our partnership and collaboration over the next ten years and will interconnect with the regional arts and cultural strategy and the local delivery strategies such as the heritage, tourism and future city strategies as well as the Future City Plan.

As we work together to develop this strategy we will engage more, be deeper in our listening and learning and work intentionally to enable voices and participation from those who are seldom heard.

Working with Arts Council England and other funders and partners we will be ambitious and realistic in our approach. Looking for opportunities in our journey to highlight and demonstrate the potential benefits of our creative city to health and wellbeing, education and economic growth.

We will work with each other to develop targets and deliverables that allow us to hold each other to account and to see progress is made in meaningful and measurable ways, overseen by the Birmingham Cultural Compact partnership.

The Creatively Birmingham Strategy will deliver our joint commitment to an inclusive, accessible, sustainable and economically vibrant arts, culture and creative sector that is part of our vision for a Bolder Prosperous Birmingham and lives and breathes in every community across Birmingham.

Big Creative Birmingham Conversation Summary

This summary provides a short overview of the Big Creative Birmingham Conversation process and outputs.

Introduction

The Big Creative Birmingham Conversation aimed to inform the creation of the cultural statement of intent, with which to guide the creation of the next cultural strategy within the arts and culture sector for Birmingham.

Over a short period of six weeks over 900 individuals and organisations were engaged in discussions to shape the statement drawing on lived experience of citizens as well as people working in the cultural, creative and artistic sectors of Birmingham.

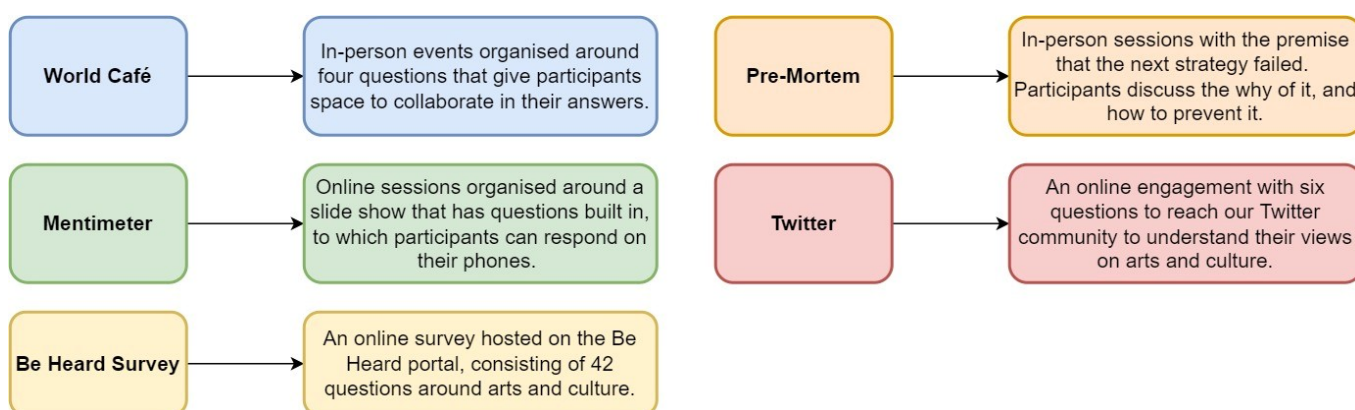
The feedback from this engagement was synthesised into core themes that have shaped the statement of intent and provide assurance that the commitments being made in the statement reflect the opinions of a reasonable cross-section of citizens and stakeholders.

However, some elements, such as the Seldom Heard Voices focus groups and the peer review analysis, were not completed, so these need to be undertaken alongside the work to develop the full strategy to ensure it is effective and reflects full engagement.

Methodology

Five engagement methods (fig 1) that were used to collect information and engage citizens and stakeholders, provided different approaches that would broaden the engagement and drew on learning and experience from Public Health's development of the Creating a Healthy Food City Strategy.

Figure 1 - Engagement Methods



Recruitment to sessions was through social media, stakeholder networks and direct recruitment to key stakeholders and sessions were facilitated jointly between the Culture team and Public Health division.

Target events were held for different dimensions of the creative sector such as Dance, Craft, Arts as well as virtual events focused on different communities of identity including parents, older adults, disability and LGBT+ communities. The World Cafés were held in each of the five localities of the city in community venues and the Pre-mortem event was focused on sector organisations and partners. Alongside this engagement there were also presentations given at existing events that signposted into the Be Heard survey.

Across these engagement methods over 320 people and organisations engaged with over half talking part in the interactive methods such as the mentimeter web-based events and the world-café and pre-mortem workshops which allows richer discussion and debate.

Results

The findings from the engagement were analysed using a thematic analysis approach by a multi-disciplinary team to avoid any inherent bias in the analysis based on individual skills or perspectives. This process identified a set of clear themes and sub-themes which reflected the feedback and engagement through the Conversation process.

Figure 2 – Themes and sub-themes.



Of the six themes, three had the strongest resonance across the engagement with citizens and stakeholders:

Inclusivity was mentioned in every session and was the common thread throughout the engagement process, there were strong views expressed about the lack of representation in the artistic offer from different communities of identity and the lack of support for inclusion in the city’s creative industries and outputs and the perceived lack of involvement of citizens in shaping the cultural identity of Birmingham.

Localisation was a clear strand through discussions; there was clear frustration at the perceived lack of offer outside of the city centre and that the new strategy must invest in creativity in neighbourhoods and creative ecosystems below the level of the city and outside of the central tourist landmarks. Transport and infrastructure were highlighted, and this created additional barriers to engagement, there was also concern about the affordability of spaces across the city for creatives to work and exhibit, and although some of the efforts to address this through Birmingham 2022 Festival were applauded, this was not seen as being the norm.

Communication was the final headline theme that was recurrent across conversations; participants recognise the huge volume of activity but highlighted the lack of communication and celebration of what was on offer. There was seen to be a lack of a core narrative for Birmingham, and although some of the organic evolution of arts was welcomed, the lack of communication and marketing of the cultural offer to citizens and the wider world was seen as a major shortcoming.

Other themes included in the discussions highlighted the importance of developing a clear localised cultural model that enabled people to participate in creativity as well as be audience members and there were clear asks for simplification and support to access funding, recognising also the need for more work to support commissioning,

especially from outside of traditional arts funders. Learning and development came through especially in relation to education but there were consistent themes on jobs and skills and the importance of culture to the prosperity of the city and the need for the Council and partners to help the creative sector articulate and demonstrate its benefit beyond its own sector to partners in health, criminal justice and education to secure funding as well as support.

Summary

The Big Creative Birmingham Conversation provides a strong steer for the content of the Statement of Intent and a strong foundation for the creation of the new strategy for Birmingham.

Further work is needed to broaden the depth of the engagement through the 'Seldom Heard Voices' methodology of commissioned targeted focus groups and the external peer review of the potential from senior external experts alongside the development of the Strategy to continue to demonstrate the commitment of the Council to co-creation.