

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Urgent Business Committee
DATE	29 July 2009
CORPORATE DIRECTOR	John Tomlinson Lead for Education, Culture & Sport
TITLE OF REPORT	Aberdeen and SEAS – developmental opportunities in Europe and request for attendance at conference

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report provides information on the SEAS initiative which aims to build partnerships between harbour towns and cities throughout the Black and North Seas areas in order to encourage longer term networks, regeneration, and growth through the arts.

The report also asks elected members to consider a request for a member of staff from the Culture and Leisure team in the Education, Culture and Sport Service to attend the cityscape conference in Gothenburg, Sweden, organised as part of the Black Sea/North sea artists exchange programme by SEAS, along with the Lead Councillor for Culture and Sport, in August 2009 from 20 -22.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee:

- a) Note the content of the report, and instruct officers to further explore potential opportunities for Aberdeen in relation to this initiative and bring further reports to appropriate future committees.
- b) Approves the attendance of one officer and one Elected Member at the cityscape conference in August 2009, to be funded by the Scottish Arts Council.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no initial financial implications, as the Scottish Arts Council has agreed to pay the accommodation and transport costs to allow Aberdeen City Council to attend the conference.

If the initiative were to progress, it would be expected that EU funding and Scottish Arts Council funding would be available to help support the project, which would be tailored in scale to meet the funding available. At this stage, it is anticipated that resource input from the Council would be provided from existing

budgets and in kind support. Further to the conference, officers will bring a more comprehensive report to appropriate committees.

4. SERVICE & COMMUNITY IMPACT

The Cultural forum for Aberdeen City leads on SOA National Outcome 13 'We take pride in a strong and inclusive national identity' with local outcomes 'To maintain and develop arts and heritage activities and venues which have a positive impact on the social, economic and cultural development of the City'. And 'Raise the profile of national identity within the City by attracting an improved quality of significant sporting/cultural events'.

The emerging Cultural Strategy, 'Vibrant Aberdeen' aspires to make Aberdeen a leading cultural player in Europe with the following commitment: 'Aberdeen will be recognised internationally as a key cultural centre for Europe'

The recommendations within this report will contribute to the following Vibrant, Dynamic and Forward Looking commitments:

“Support arts venues to bring the best and most innovative performances to the city.”

“Continue to support the best city festivals.”

“Recognise the contribution of Sport, Culture and Arts to promoting the area as a tourist destination.”

“Continue to drive regeneration and take advantage of regeneration opportunities citywide, as they present themselves”

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

A committee decision is required before the 31st July in order that the appropriate travel and accommodation requirements can be made which provide best value to the Scottish Arts Council, and to allow adequate time for the preparation of a conference paper and presentation.

The approval of this report will result in improved delivery of national and local Cultural objectives. There are also potential regeneration implications and the team of officers involved in this initiative includes the International Strategist and City Strategist. There are no other legal, resource, personnel, property, equipment, environmental or health and safety implications.

6. REPORT

- 6.1 Black/North SEAS is an initiative facilitated by Intercult, a not for profit arts organisation, funded by the EU and based in Sweden. The aim of SEAS is to build partnerships between harbour towns and cities throughout the Black and North Sea areas in order to encourage longer term networks, regeneration and growth through the arts. SEAS focus on harbours as places of migration, mobility and histories, rethinking these harbour areas by adding a cultural dimension.
- 6.2 All SEAS projects connect their events to city planning and urban regeneration, and in cities where a SEAS initiative is present, the arts projects are complemented by major conferences on significant themes: environment, urban planning, cultural tourism, active citizenship and migration.
- 6.3 The arts events themselves are built round a process of artistic research termed 'dating'. Artists are commissioned to work collaboratively using the urban landscape as their inspiration. Two artists, usually from the coasts of two different European seas, and working in different disciplines, are paired together and sent for a short period to research a third coastal place which neither of them have visited before. When they return, they present a proposal they would like to realise based on their travel. This is an original artwork based on their experience. The completed artworks could be performance, sculptural, visual arts, digital media, dance or any other art form. The works are then performed or placed in important public spaces in the host City.
- 6.4 The host cities and towns face similar challenges: changing populations, de-industrialisation, migration and ecological issues. The projects recognise that the gap between privileged and marginalised grows bigger and seek to address this. Intercult works from the philosophy that artistic intervention can lift urban re-invention and environmental issues to the forefront, by directly using city public space to profile the work.
- 6.5 In 2008 SEAS presented conferences and new artworks in Odessa (Ukraine), Vama-Balchick (Bulgaria) and Mangalia (Romania). In 2009 it is presenting in Istanbul (Turkey), Helsingor (Denmark), Gothenburg (Sweden), Tromso (Norway), Rotterdam (Netherlands) and Skegness (England).
- 6.6 In Istanbul during March, over 6,000 visitors visited more than 50 artistic events as part of the SEAS programme, from theatre, dance, video, installations, workshops and seminars. A cityscape seminar held there looked at culture led urban regeneration projects, with presentations by Skegness and Gothenburg as future venues.
- 6.7 The Scottish Arts Council has commenced work with Intercult to bring SEAS to harbour towns and Cities in Scotland. Having been consulted on the development of 'Vibrant Aberdeen', the proposed Cultural strategy for Aberdeen 2010 – 15, the Scottish Arts Council recognised and praised

Aberdeen City's Cultural forum for their ambitious international aspirations as expressed in the draft strategy. The International Officer with the SAC as a result approached the City Council to ask it to consider whether it would wish to be a host City for a future SEAS project. A meeting was held with Cultural forum representatives, SEAS staff and the Scottish Arts Council to look at the possibilities for Aberdeen.

- 6.8 The Scottish Arts Council have offered to fund an Officer and an Elected Member to visit the event to be held in Gothenburg in August, to assess the suitability of a SEAS event for Aberdeen, to deliver a paper and presentation on the cultural challenges and the development of the Cultural strategy for Aberdeen, and to build up relationships with other harbour towns and cities who share many of the same need to revitalise their economies and public spaces. If this is successful, Aberdeen will work collaboratively with the SAC and SEAS to realise a project for Aberdeen over the next three years. There is no prescriptive format for such a programme, which would be tailored to our needs. Financial support is made available via Intercult for some areas of the work.
- 6.9 This is an important building block for our City in our aspiration not only to be UK City of Culture, but a City recognised as an international cultural player. Invitation to be the first City to be a SEAS host in Scotland is entirely due to the work done by the cultural forum for the City on the Cultural Strategy, and should the project be realised, will be an excellent platform for the launch of the strategy next year.
- 6.10 It is intended to present an initial paper on the Cultural Strategy to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee in August, with the full draft strategy coming to the committee in October 2009.

7. AUTHORISED SIGNATURE

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8. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None