

Aberdeen City Council

Aberdeen Culture Funding Framework – Stakeholder Engagement

Cultural Policy and Partnerships Team, City Growth

Charlotte Wilson, Mark Dobson, Dr Caroline Murphy

Report

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the Cultural Investment Framework

Aberdeen City Council (ACC) recognises the fundamental role that culture plays in the city's economic and social well-being. Culture is not just an enhancer of quality of life; it is a crucial component of the city's recovery and revitalisation efforts. Aberdeen has a rich cultural landscape that includes museums, galleries, libraries, music services, and a variety of festivals and events. The Council's investment in cultural activities, approximately £12 million in 2022, underscores this commitment. This investment supports not only internal city services but also extends to external cultural organisations through grants and funding from both the Council revenue budget and the Common Good Fund.

The impetus for developing a new Cultural Investment Framework arose from the need to evaluate and optimise this investment. The Culture Funding and Delivery Review, conducted in 2023 and 2024, aimed to assess the effectiveness of current funding mechanisms and recommend improvements. The Review highlighted several objectives: ensuring a transparent and accountable investment process, maximising the impact of limited resources, leveraging the Council's investment for sector growth, and continuing to provide residents and visitors with rich cultural experiences.

The Council's directive on 7th February 2024, instructed the Chief Officer of City Growth to create a new investment framework based on the Review's recommendations. This directive also marked 2024/25 as a transition year, with cultural investment maintained at standstill levels to allow for the development of new criteria and application processes. The ultimate goal is to launch the new funding framework for the 2025/26 financial year.

In order to progress this work, Aberdeen City Council contracted Charlotte Wilson Research Services to plan, design and implement a series of stakeholder engagement workshops and consultation exercises to seek views and to inform its new Cultural Investment Framework. The Stakeholder Engagement process took place during June 2024.

This report presents our approach and methodology; stakeholder engagement participation data; findings and feedback on priorities and principles; challenges and proposed mitigations; and practical considerations for the framework.

1.2 Stakeholder engagement: purpose and potential benefits

As part of the development of the new Cultural Investment Framework, the engagement process with stakeholders was identified as a critical step. Following on from the Culture Funding and Delivery Review, stakeholder engagement enables the Council to address a number of priorities, and to pursue potential benefits which we outline below.

Firstly, it aims to ensure that the framework is grounded in the realities and needs of the cultural sector in Aberdeen. By actively involving those who are directly affected by cultural policies the framework can be designed to address their specific challenges and opportunities effectively.

Moreover, stakeholder engagement fosters a sense of ownership and buy-in among participants. When stakeholders feel that their voices are heard and their input is valued, they are more likely to support and advocate for the framework. This collective endorsement is essential for the successful implementation and sustainability of the cultural investment framework.

Engaging stakeholders also enhances the transparency and accountability of the process. By opening up discussions and consultations, the Council demonstrates a commitment to openness and responsiveness, which helps build trust and credibility with the community. This transparency ensures that the decision-making process is seen as fair and equitable, reducing potential conflicts and resistance.

Furthermore, the diverse perspectives and insights gathered through stakeholder engagement can lead to more effective solutions. Stakeholders bring unique experiences and ideas that can challenge conventional thinking and inspire new approaches to cultural investment. This collaborative environment encourages creativity and shared problem-solving, which is vital for addressing complex cultural and economic issues.

In summary, stakeholder engagement enhances the potential of creating a Cultural Investment Framework that is inclusive, effective, and supported by the community. It aims to ensure that the framework is not only aligned with the strategic goals of the Council but also resonates with the needs and aspirations of Aberdeen's cultural sector.

2 Approach and Methodology

2.1 Key Concepts and Our Approach to Stakeholder Engagement Objectives

The brief set out 4 priorities for engagement: Define Cultural Investment Priorities, Build Trust and Understanding, Ensure Sector Wide Engagement, and Provide Clarity on the Council's priorities and innovative thinking on how culture can deliver the right outcomes.

Our interpretation of these priorities provided a foundation for how we approached a robust methodology for stakeholder engagement.

Define Cultural Investment Priorities

We have interpreted this as enabling stakeholders to contribute to identifying the areas of culture that will have the most significant impact on Aberdeen. This required a clear understanding of the cultural landscape, current gaps, and potential alignment with key strategic initiatives, in particular the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) themes of Economy, People, Place and Community Empowerment. Comprehensive research undertaken as part of the Culture Funding and Delivery Review provided a clear understanding of the existing cultural ecosystem in Aberdeen. This foundational knowledge enabled us to facilitate focused discussions with stakeholders to gather insights and consensus not only on Priorities but on the Principles that could inform the new framework. We ensured that the process was data-driven and aligned with both local needs and broader strategic goals.

Building Trust and Understanding

Building trust and understanding among stakeholders is essential for effective collaboration and successful implementation of any new framework. Trust is built through transparency, consistent communication, and inclusive practices that ensure all voices are heard and respected. Understanding, on the other hand, involves stakeholders comprehending the purpose, benefits, and processes of the new framework. We adopted a transparent and open communication strategy, sharing information about the Cultural Investment Framework and its development stages. We organised workshops that encouraged open dialogue, characterised as both 'safe spaces' and 'brave spaces'. This enabled stakeholders to voice their concerns and suggestions. Our knowledge of the cultural landscape in Aberdeen and the wider cultural sector, along with responsiveness to feedback, fostered an

environment of mutual respect and trust. We carried out workshops online and face to face, and we utilised surveys to reach a wider audience, ensuring that as many stakeholders as possible had an opportunity to voice their opinions and ideas.

During the period in which stakeholder workshops were taking place, it was brought to our attention that an Expression of Interest process (application form and guidance) had already been circulated by the Council to organisations currently in receipt of grant funding prior to going live within a few days to the wider sector. This was a concern for the stakeholder engagement process, as the EOI outlined the priorities and principles for future funding – which was of course at the heart of the consultation and engagement process. We addressed this issue by including the EOI principles and priorities in the survey that went to stakeholders on completion of the workshops.

We acknowledge that the EOI was developed to meet internal deadlines and recognise that such pressures are sometimes unavoidable. However, we believe that the process of building trust and respect with stakeholders can be compromised if it appears that decisions about funding priorities and principles have been made before the consultation is complete.

Sector Wide Engagement

Inclusive engagement ensures that the stakeholder consultation process is accessible to all relevant parties, regardless of their status or organisational size. It emphasises diversity, equity, and inclusivity, aiming to gather a broad range of perspectives and experiences to inform the new framework. We designed the engagement process to be as inclusive as possible. This involved reaching out to a diverse array of cultural organisations, including those that had not previously received funding. We scheduled workshops at various times and locations to accommodate different stakeholders' schedules and used both in-person and digital formats to increase accessibility. A list of participants is included in Appendix 1.

Clarity and Innovation

Our approach to the engagement process invited stakeholders to share their perspectives on opportunity and challenge within the sector, whilst also providing clarity on the scale of the financial challenge that lies ahead for the Council. We encouraged stakeholders to think creatively about alignment of sector objectives with those of the Council and used workshops as an opportunity to clearly articulate the objectives, processes, and expected outcomes (stretch outcomes) of the LOIP. This aimed to encourage participants to consider how new approaches to cultural investment could align with their own cultural objectives and maximise and amplify the impact of investment.

In summary, our approach to the stakeholder engagement methodology was underpinned by principles of inclusivity, transparency, collaboration, and innovation. By focusing on these key concepts, we aimed to develop a Cultural Investment Framework that is responsive to the needs of Aberdeen's cultural sector and capable of driving sustainable growth and positive change.

2.2 Engagement Methods

The following methods were applied to gather the required information and undertake the engagement process as outlined above. This included both qualitative and quantitative information gathering and engagement in the form of:

- Stakeholder engagement workshops – 4 in person workshops and 1 online workshop
- Stakeholder engagement survey – 42 responses

2.3 Stakeholder Participation

A stakeholder list was provided by the Council. Those identified as key stakeholders were invited by email to participate in the workshops. This list consisted of those who are currently funded by the Council and those who have been funded in the last 2 years as well as wider sector representatives e.g. universities and tourism.

A total of 6 workshops were planned during the second week in June (June 11th, 12th and 13th) however response to the workshops was initially poor and as such one of the workshops did not go ahead. The tight deadlines to turnaround the project was partly responsible for this as many stakeholders were not available to participate on the planned dates. In addition, some stakeholders did not respond to the invitations sent and others simply did not turn up to the workshops. In total 71 stakeholders were invited to attend the workshops, 16 stakeholders attended the workshops, and a further 4 accepted the invitation but did not turn up.

A further stakeholder list was provided which included the wider sector including community groups. This was used to circulate survey invites following the workshops. This list was updated to include all those who were invited to attend the workshops but could not attend or had not responded to the workshop invitation.

The survey which followed the workshops was sent to a total of 216 stakeholders. 42 responses were achieved, representing a response rate of 19%. The average response to an e-survey is generally between 15% and 20%.

Just under a third of those surveyed (29%) were currently funded by the Council. A further 45% had received funding in the past but no longer did. The remaining respondents had never applied for funding to the Council.

Just over a quarter of respondents were funded by Creative Scotland at present (26%). A third (33%) were currently in receipt of funding from Trusts and Foundations.

2.4 Workshop Design

The workshops were designed in order to get a free flow of information and unprompted response in terms of cultural Principles and Priorities for the city. To achieve this effectively, we introduced the context for the workshops, providing background relating to the Cultural Funding Review outputs as well as the basis for aligning with the LOIP priorities of place, adults, children and young people, economy and community empowerment. We asked specifically how stakeholders believed they currently aligned with these priorities in terms of their activities. In addition, we discussed how well they addressed the priorities and how they currently evidenced their impact against them.

In addition to this we discussed the practical aspects of a funding programme. What should a good funding programme look like? At this point, we introduced IVAR principles¹ and asked stakeholders to rank these in terms of their importance to them.

¹ IVAR is a foundation which works with a number of trusts, foundations and organisations to develop best practise in the delivery and administration of grant funding through its self-funding research centre at Aston Business School (previously known as the Centre for Voluntary Action Research, CVAR).

Lastly, we focussed on the specifics of a funding programme in terms of types of funding, addressing the LOIP, multi-year funding, the likelihood of reduced investment, and other support from the Council.

During the workshops a number of techniques were used to elicit the best discussion and response from stakeholders. This included paired work and discussion, individual exercises and group discussions. Throughout all of this, consensus and agreement was gained at all stages and discussion summarised to ensure that those participating felt happy with the feedback provided and that it was representative of their points of view.

A copy of the workshop discussion template is provided in Appendix 2.

2.5 Survey Design

As outlined in section 2.1 above, we adapted our survey approach to take account of the circulation of the EOI for the new framework during the engagement process. To achieve this, we replaced the unprompted approach to gathering cultural priorities with testing respondents' agreement to those priorities that had been circulated in the EOI.

The survey gathered evidence about respondents' current relationship with the Council and other national funders as well as their preferences relative to a new funding programme and additional support that would be useful. Like the workshops, the survey questioned current alignment with the LOIP priorities and how these are measured against.

A copy of the questionnaire used is shown in Appendix 3. Survey results when presented may not equate to 100% due to rounding. A summary of the results is presented in this report. Full results are shown in Appendix 4.

3 Detailed Findings

3.1 Aberdeen Culture Investment Programme (ACIP) and the LOIP

The 2024 Cultural Funding Review noted the plethora of council policies and strategies with no single overarching vision. It also noted the lack of Council ownership of the sector-led cultural strategy. The Review proposed that Aberdeen City Council needs to measure the impact of all of its investments against its priorities for the city.

Of all the various measures, the LOIP seems to have the most consistent and influential impact. The Council has asked cultural organisations to report against some of the LOIP outcomes in the past, but this has been in addition to outcomes for the cultural strategy and the specific requirements of the funding scheme concerned.

To try to rationalise and streamline this and to ensure the Council can more clearly see the benefits of its cultural investment against the measures it cares about, the LOIP has been proposed as the key policy document for the new investment programme. Ideally the recently refreshed version of the LOIP would have included a cultural dimension. Unfortunately, this does not seem to have been possible and there is still no direct cultural element to the new LOIP, although the activity of the sector does have measurable impact against it.

The intention to take a LOIP focussed direction was announced to the sector through the Culture Investment Programme 2025 Expression of Interest Guidance which was issued by ACC on 7 June 2024. It included the following information on the focus of the future investment:

Investment Focus Themes

The new Culture Investment Programme will be aligned to the Aberdeen Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP). The LOIP is a document which sets out how Aberdeen public sector partners will improve outcomes for and with local people and communities. The vision set out in the LOIP is that Aberdeen will be 'a place where all people can prosper' by 2026.

The plan has 16 stretch outcomes that we are working to achieve by 2026. They cover four themes: Economy, People, Place and Community Empowerment.

Economy: Diversify Aberdeen's economy and developing our workforce through skills support and employment opportunities.

People (Children and Young People): improve our children and young people's physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing. Improving education experience and post-school opportunities.

People (Adults): increasing healthy life expectancy, reducing adult convictions, substance abuse and homelessness.

Place: Addressing climate change by reducing Aberdeen's carbon emissions, protecting our natural and built environment.

Community Empowerment: building strong personal and community resilience, enabling people to participate in decisions that help change things for the better.

Sitting behind the LOIP is the Population Needs Assessment (PNA), which brings together a broad range of data covering the people, place and economy of Aberdeen and explores how this can be related to the services and interventions that are being provided by the Council and its partners.

Our Programme recognises culture's role as a change maker and its ability to have real impact on people's lives and opportunities, be it socially, economically or sense of community and place.

Our engagement with stakeholders assessed the suitability of the LOIP for investment in culture, and addressed the context of financial challenge set out in the Target Operating Model (TOM).

The majority of consultees understand the Council position and the challenge this poses for all future funding, not just cultural funding. They also understand the importance of the Council being able to see measurable impact against its core objectives from any investment it makes.

Our consultation revealed that many cultural stakeholders do not currently have a high level of awareness of the LOIP, and struggle to understand the strategic engagement of culture in how the LOIP is developed and managed. Comments included:

'What is the LOIP? Need to understand more about it'

'If culture is to fit in then it needs a seat at the table'

'Where does Culture Aberdeen sit in all this?'

'No presence for sector in the LOIP'

We addressed four levels of the LOIP in our consultation:

- Vision and ultimate measures of success
- Priorities – the critical LOIP themes of People (Adults), People (Children & Young People), Place, Economy and Community Empowerment
- Stretch Outcomes that seek to break down the overall vision into manageable thematic programmes of work.
- Key Drivers, expressing the motivators behind the outcomes and associated programmes of work

3.1.1 Vision and Ultimate Measures of Success

LOIP Vision is for Aberdeen to be “A place where all people can prosper.” The LOIP’s ultimate measures of success are that by 2026:

- *We still have highest GVA per head in Scotland*
- *Fewer than 10% of our children live in poverty*
- *We live in good health for at least 5 years longer*
- *Our carbon emissions are 61% lower*

While these outcomes – to address economy, child poverty, wellbeing and net zero - are fairly generic to Local Authority plans the length of the land, they set ambition for what Aberdeen can achieve. There was no disagreement with the importance of these to the city and its population and consultees can readily see and explain how their work contributes to these measures.

They also agreed that it is important that the city can see exactly how culture does make a difference and can help to achieve the success of these outcomes.

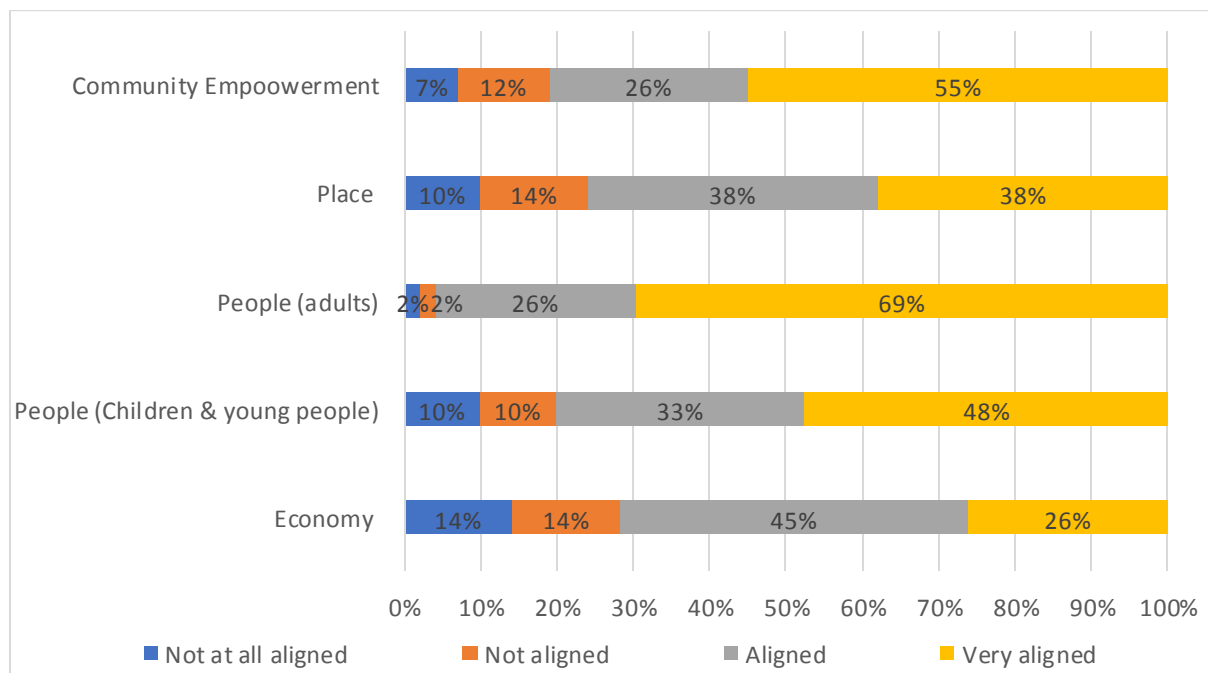
3.1.2 Priorities

The LOIP has 5 priorities as noted above:

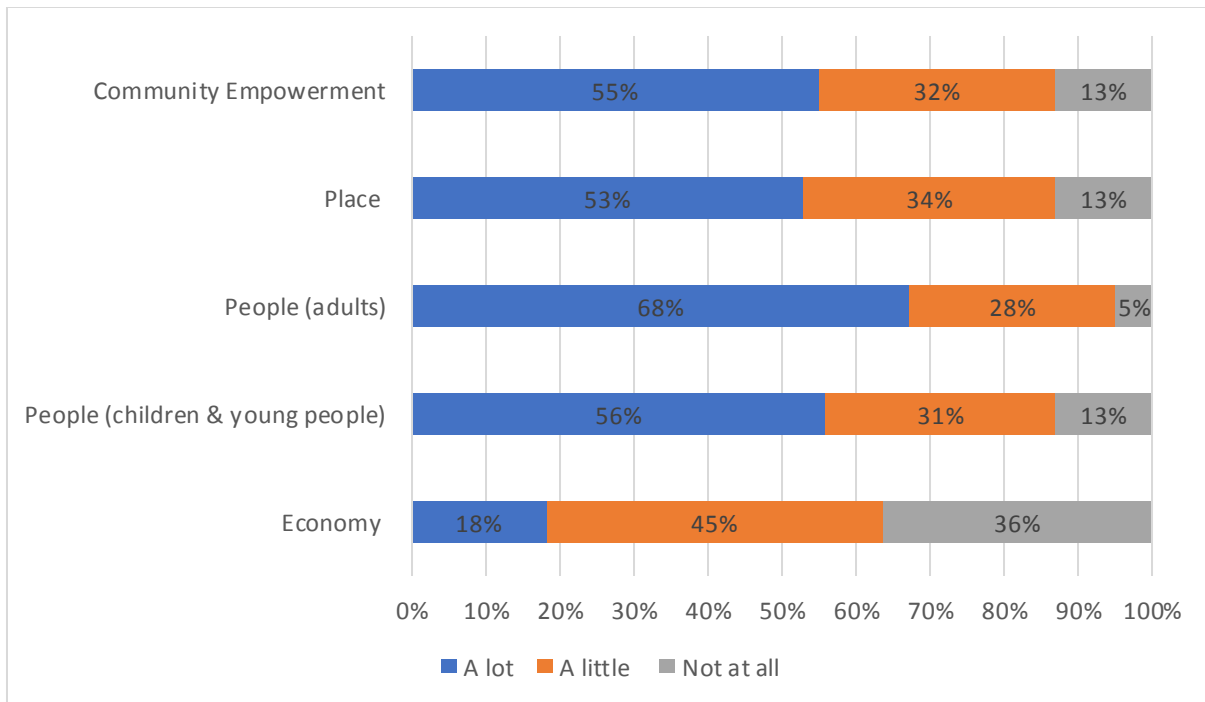
- Economy: Diversify Aberdeen’s economy and developing our workforce through skills support and employment opportunities.
- People (Children and Young People): improve our children and young people’s physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing. Improving education experience and post-school opportunities.

- People (Adults): increasing healthy life expectancy, reducing adult convictions, substance abuse and homelessness.
- Place: Addressing climate change by reducing Aberdeen's carbon emissions, protecting our natural and built environment.
- Community Empowerment: building strong personal and community resilience, enabling people to participate in decisions that help change things for the better.

The majority of those responding to the survey felt that they aligned to the LOIP priorities. They felt more aligned some priorities than others, particularly people (adults) (95%), community empowerment (81%) and people (children and young people) (81%). Although they felt less aligned to place (76%) and economy (71%), the figures still show a significant majority. The figures also show that the sector generally is delivering across all priorities.



Survey respondents were also asked how they currently measured their impact against the LOIP priorities. Encouragingly many are already measuring themselves against these. 87% or more are measuring at least “a little” against Community Empowerment, Place, People (adults) and People (children and young people). 63% are measuring at least a little against economy. This is positive for the new framework as it shows that any measurement and impact requirements will be unlikely to be seen as an additional burden as it is already part of regular practise.



A small number (18%) of focus group participants struggled to see strong alignment with LOIP priorities and disagreed with the instrumentalism of this approach. They simply want to be funded to make art and measured on that basis.

Others also observed that addressing these wider priorities may open opportunities for cultural organisations to access other funds across the Council by evidencing the impact culture can have on other agendas or to explore the potential for commission and contracts in the way that has proved so effective for Station House Media Unit (SHMU).

We asked each group to consider how their existing work addresses each of the priorities and the groups quickly generated extensive and relevant lists of examples:

Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide opportunities for interns to upskill Provide opportunities at every level of the skill set Provide opportunities for outside organisations to come into the city Provide £ for £ growth – return on investment Provide some projects for free but get partners in to run – links to communities Business startups – creative industries Economic impact multipliers – providing economic impact to the city Consider use of Brand Aberdeen Increase Tourism – culture is a key attraction Provide opportunities for work in the cultural sector Provide opportunities for freelancers Careers Sector provides opportunities Culture increases spend in local economy Job creation Place making – pride Skills and training for those in cultural sector Employment
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	<p>Creating commercial opportunities for creatives</p> <p>Fair work</p> <p>Using local workforce</p> <p>Using local artists</p> <p>Using local materials in production and activities</p> <p>Connecting with further education sector to encourage training, development and career progression</p> <p>Bringing visitors to the city</p>
Adults	<p>Decreasing loneliness and isolation</p> <p>Bringing people together</p> <p>Providing intergenerational activities</p> <p>Opportunities for audiences – social time</p> <p>Opportunities for participation – increasing confidence, developing skills, increasing networks</p> <p>Enhancing quality of life</p> <p>Creating engagement and connection</p> <p>Encourage and creating nostalgia</p> <p>Providing a sense of belonging</p> <p>Overcoming loneliness</p> <p>Encouraging creativity</p> <p>Teaching and learning</p> <p>Activities supporting those with additional needs</p> <p>Encouraging volunteering</p> <p>Community adhesion</p> <p>Empowerment</p> <p>Building communities</p> <p>Recreation</p> <p>Recuperation</p> <p>Using culture as a transformational tool</p> <p>Connecting with other departments to deliver positive change</p>
Young People	<p>Providing life skills</p> <p>Empowerment</p> <p>Supporting good mental health</p> <p>Opportunities for career development</p> <p>Opportunities for skills development</p> <p>Signposting to education, training and opportunities</p> <p>Overcoming barriers to participation which also links to place</p> <p>Increasing confidence</p> <p>Personal, career and professional development</p> <p>A sense of identity</p> <p>Providing opportunities for learning and development</p> <p>Schools activities</p> <p>Achievement</p> <p>Creative problem solving</p> <p>Embedding culture in education</p>
Place*	<p>Building and brand of Aberdeen</p> <p>Taking product to people</p> <p>Not all about the city centre</p> <p>Engaging with communities</p> <p>Investment in communicating</p> <p>Telling the stories</p>

	Promoting the brand – Aberdeen Encouraging and supporting connections Heritage Supporting environmental priorities Facilitating and supporting festivals and events Activating public spaces Building civic pride Cultural Centre beyond council buildings Creating Aberdeen as an attractive destination Fostering a sense of place Creating a sense of welcome Improving the image of Aberdeen Making it more attractive An exciting place to be Celebrating the heritage of the city Buildings fit for purpose Using culture to capture stories
Community Empowerment	Communities are not just place based they are subsets of people with similar characteristics Helping overcoming isolation Creating a voice for communities Developing a sense of pride in communities Creating connections Linking organisations with community groups and projects Linking communities Multicultural communities Reducing isolation Positivity making Developing positive change

* The sector consultees interpreted the intent of the ‘Place’ priority in the LOIP to be placemaking, whereas the current LOIP Place Priority is actually about environmental issues. It is therefore probably better to consider the sector Place contributions listed above as further examples of how they contribute to economic impact.

3.1.3 Stretch Outcomes

The stretch outcomes of the LOIP are very granular and specific. For example, under the Economy priority the two stretch outcomes are:

- 1) 20% reduction in the percentage of people who report they have been worried they would not have enough food to eat and/ or not be able to heat their home by 2026.
- 2) 74% employment rate for Aberdeen City by 2026

Unsurprisingly sector consultees began to struggle to see their fit with stretch outcomes. While they felt strong alignment with the ultimate measures of success and priorities of the LOIP, the stretch outcomes were felt to be too narrow in focus to form an effective bridge between the two.

The comment was made more than once that these very narrow stretch outcomes are representative of the specific interests of the organisations and agencies that make up the Community Planning Aberdeen board. None of these are cultural projects and culture has no seat at this table (see below).

This runs the risk of Aberdeen City Council missing the opportunity for culture to make a powerful contribution to the ultimate measures of success in the LOIP.

3.1.4 Drivers of the LOIP

The Drivers may offer a halfway house between LOIP priorities and stretch outcomes, providing potential connection to cultural activity. While some consultees still found the drivers problematic and potentially reductive, most could see alignment with their core cultural activity.

We asked consultees to highlight which Drivers they felt their work contributes too (or could contribute to). The results are highlighted below.

Economy
Mitigating the causes of poverty and supporting those experiencing poverty.
Supporting labour market to recover from impact of Covid-19 on employment.
Increasing the number of people in Aberdeen in sustained, fair work.
Fewer employers reporting skills gaps

People – Young People		People – Adults	
Ensuring that families receive the parenting and family support they need.	Improving pathways to education, employment and training for all our children	Those who are convicted are supported to engage with relevant services and reduce re-offending.	Supporting Recovery from alcohol and drug issues.
Improving health and reducing child poverty inequalities.	Young people receive the right help at the right time to improve outcomes for young people at risk of becoming involved in the Justice System.	Taking targeted interventions to reduce the impact of crime on communities.	Reframing perceptions of homelessness
Improving timely access to support.	More people appropriately diverted from Justice System to effective interventions aimed at reducing the likelihood of reoffending, where appropriate.	Changing attitudes about domestic abuse in all its forms and ensuring victims receive access to the right support.	Universal prevention of homelessness and addressing root causes

Increasing children's knowledge and understanding of their own physical and mental wellbeing and take an early intervention and prevention approach.	Tackling antisocial behaviour in problem areas with appropriate and effective interventions.	Supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged people, families and groups.	Ensuring adequate supply of housing across all tenures and homes are the right size, type and location
improving education and health outcomes for care experienced children and young people.	Improving pathways to education, employment and training for our children with ASN/disabilities	Provide individuals and communities with the social resources needed to reduce feelings of loneliness and social isolation.	
Supporting attainment of balance of care where children are able to remain more often at home and or with kin.	Ensuring young carers receive the support they need.	Encouraging adoption of healthier lifestyles through a whole family approach.	
Supporting children and young people to understand and access multiagency through care and aftercare services.	Ensuring our children with ASN/disabilities and their families receive the support they need	Whole family approach to prevention of young people developing alcohol and drug problems	
	Improving timely access to support	Reducing harm, morbidity and mortality caused by alcohol and drugs.	

Place	
Reducing emissions across the city through delivery of Aberdeen's Net Zero Vision & Route-map.	Supporting and empowering communities to care for their neighbourhoods to make all feel positive and secure and support their wellbeing.
Contributing to the delivery of Aberdeen Adapts by developing a bottom-up approach to community resilience to encourage greater ownership and independent action	

towards understanding communities' risks from climate change and adapting to them	
Supporting different ways for active travel in everyday journeys, using partners and volunteers to address safety, infrastructure, fitness, wellbeing and confidence.	
Increasing the diversity, quality and use of the Aberdeen's green spaces by facilitating community participation in them to restore nature and increase people's satisfaction, health, and wellbeing.	
Increasing the area of public, private and community land managed for nature, in recognition of the nature crisis and in alignment with global and national ambitions to protect 30% of land and 30% of water by 2030 (30-30-30).	

Community Empowerment
Conditions for collaboration enable delivery of shared objectives and a focus on action rather than hierarchy
Social connections and networks working together is supported and encouraged.
Capacity building to support people and communities to work together.

3.1.6 LOIP Priorities as a focus for ACIP – Application and Monitoring processes

It is clear that the LOIP Priorities resonated and felt relevant for consultees, and it is recommended that LOIP Priorities are the key area of focus for the ACIP. Below, we consider how this can be approached with applicants.

Application Process

To keep the ACIP relevant, simple and accessible key questions (and assessments and monitoring) could be framed around each of the Priorities, inviting applicants to explain how they will deliver in their own terms.

Questions could be written in plain language and in such a way that an applicant does not have to have in depth knowledge of all aspects of the LOIP, making the application process more inclusive and accessible. For example:

1. Tell us how your work will make a contribution to the economic success of Aberdeen. How will you measure this and let us know about it? Who will benefit from this activity?

2. How will your work help Aberdeen to ensure a greener future and reduced carbon emissions. How will you measure your impact and tell us know about it?

Relevant examples of Drivers, as detailed in the examples above, could be included in ACIP guidance as a prompt for what applicants might consider addressing in regard to each Priority.

ACC should consider whether the ACIP should require every applicant to be able to address all of the Priorities. Whilst a large award of revenue funding to a well-resourced organisation would likely expect to see return on investment against all five priorities, we would suggest that a project grant to a single artist or more modest revenue support to smaller companies would require an applicant to choose one priority where they can have the greatest impact and talk about that in detail.

It could also be reasonable to ask everyone to address any cross-cutting themes relevant to the LOIP or Council priorities. In regard to the LOIP priorities this may be that everyone should respond to the environmental issues of Place. This may also be where a cross-cutting question about EDI might sit.

It is also recommended that Aberdeen City Council does not lose sight of the artistic, cultural and creative practice that is at the core of activity funded through the investment programme. The ACIP application form should give applicants the chance to explain what they will do artistically and why. We would suggest this question is a good opportunity to enable applicants to discuss the purpose of their work and any evidence of demand for it.

Evidencing Impact and Measurement

To ensure an accessible and effective workflow for the new ACIP it is vital that the application process, assessment process and evaluation and monitoring processes are conceived simultaneously.

The current reporting is regarded as overly complex and demanding, especially in relation to more modest investment levels.

Using the metrics recommended as part of the Cultural Funding Review, which are already being readily collected across the sector will ensure effective impact measurement without being onerous in terms of data required.

In the past the Council has tried to lead on how the sector collects data and has reported struggles in doing so. The suggestions for question formats made earlier puts the onus on the applicant to explain how they will measure and report and is one option for how a very diverse sector may best handle its reporting obligations.

The survey suggests the sector may be least confident in reporting on its economic impact, but the Council has previously commissioned a tool from EKOS for awardees to do this and this tool is used by some existing awardees and could be tested with others and rolled out as part of ACIP.

Consultees recommended a core and consistent set of data capture requirements across all strands of the ACIP and wherever possible alignment with the data requests and formats made by Creative Scotland for instance matching age bands and EDI formats.

They also advocate for the collection of case studies and softer more qualitative information. This is now common amongst trusts and foundations and is often important in bringing funded activity to life for stakeholders and councillors.

Consultees also suggest a core set of monitoring information common to all strands of ACIP but that the level of discretionary reporting should be proportional to the funds awarded and the capacity of awardees to respond. (the same is true of the application process as noted earlier).

The sector wants to understand why things are being measured and what will happen to the data. Ideally, they would like access to the data to plan their future work (e.g. considering gaps in community delivery) or to be able to lobby and apply for leverage funds.

3.1.7 Future of LOIP and culture

Part of the job of ACIP guidance and any roadshows about the new programme will be to raise awareness and inform the sector about the LOIP as a critical plank of Council policy. This will be particularly important for smaller organisations and individual practitioners.

Ideally and looking forward to the next revision of the LOIP in 2026, it seems imperative that culture – perhaps through the leadership of a refreshed Culture Aberdeen – has a place at the Community Planning Aberdeen board and that the benefits of culture can be made manifest in future LOIP Stretch Outcomes and Drivers, which can then be reflected in future iterations of the ACIP.

3.2 A fair and equitable Cultural Investment Framework

We explored with the consultees what a good cultural funding programme in Aberdeen would look like.

Lessons from the IVAR principles

As previously noted, IVAR is a foundation which works with a number of trusts, foundations and organisations to develop best practise in the delivery and administration of grant funding.

We asked consultees to rank the principles to help ACC consider the design of the ACIP.

Ranking	IVAR Principle
1	Priorities are communicated clearly
2	Application form/criteria is clear and jargon free
3	Funding is flexible, unrestricted if possible
4	Reporting is proportionate
5	Transparency of decisions
6	Speed of decisions
7	Feedback is provided, including reason for rejection

In addition to this, consultees also suggested the qualities of the ACIP should also include:

Stability

84% of those responding to the survey felt that the availability of multi-year funding was important. When asked why, planning, security and sustainability were key reasons given.

Multi-year funding (2 or 3 years at a time) as recommended in the report, was considered vital to give organisations time to plan – even though consultees accept that council funding can only ever be confirmed on an annual basis and therefore may be subject to change.

When probed on the possibility of future reductions to council funding in line with achieving TOM outcomes, multi-annual funding agreements were the most quoted example of how the sector can plan and take action to cope with such changes. The prospect of tapered reductions in funding over a 3-year horizon, though not welcome, was felt to be most manageable in the context of multi-annual support.

A city and regional priority

Consultees favoured funding prioritising the artists and organisations of Aberdeen over funding imported culture. Providing space for artists and new organisations as well as established organisations in the design of the ACIP was also a priority.

Many consultees asked for the opportunity to have a conversation / advice session with the Council before making an application². Several advocated for support to upskill the sector in writing applications not just to the Council but to other agencies.

Types of funding

The majority of those responding to the survey felt that the options for both project and core/revenue funding was important (55%).

Should both strands be affordable, there was no clear majority view on if the ACIP should have linear progression built into it, e.g. should a new organisation be moved through project funds, to larger projects and then to see revenue support as the end goal.

*‘The end point is different for everyone could be project to core or project to project’
‘Lots of entry and access points’*

Leeds and Bristol city councils have recognised that organisation and project needs are often not linear and have recently experimented with offering choice and agency to applicants through the availability of either 2-year revenue or project grants depending on need.

Award levels

The Aberdeen Culture Delivery and Funding Review Pt1 and 2 noted:

‘Awards to some of the core cultural independents (Aberdeen Jazz festival and Sound) are now almost as low as the project grant awards made available via the Creative Funding programme where single projects can receive up to £8,000 (this was £10,000 or £15,000 in previous years). Any future grants programmes need to address this anomaly.’

We would recommend that this question is revisited and settled in the development of the ACIP.

Festivals

Given the prominence of festivals in Aberdeen and that the festival 365 strategy is a council-led cultural plan, we explored with consultees if they felt festivals should be treated differently in the ACIP³.

³ Belfast City Council’s cultural strategy and funding review led to the creation of dedicated strands of funding to develop and support major festivals.

Opinions varied. It was pointed out that festivals are not just projects but their success rests on year-round resourcing, development and then delivery.

It was felt very strongly that the Council should stop outsourcing and parachuting in events and should instead prioritise the development of embedded and relevant festivals.

'Stop buying in projects, allow the sector to thrive'

The Aberdeen Culture Delivery and Funding Review Pt1 and 2 noted:

Common Good – The Aberdeen Culture Delivery and Funding Review Pt1 and 2 noted:

A significant amount of the Council's external investment in the city's culture and in the core independent cultural providers comes through the Common Good Fund. Whilst the process of fund allocation remains opaque, cultural activity is a strong fit to the remit of the Common Good, particularly festivals in the Promoting Aberdeen strand. This fund could be an obvious future location for Spectra alongside Nuart (already funded via Common Good) and perhaps also for the festivals delivered by APA, Jazz Scotland, Sound and City Moves.

This would alleviate some of the budget pressures on the Council's core culture budget however consideration must be given to assessment, monitoring and reporting of activity as well as the connectivity to the culture team and whatever clear priorities the Council sets for cultural investment.

An ideal solution would be for parts of the Common Good to be ringfenced for appropriate cultural activity and managed through a single coordinated cultural grants programme.

Heritage

Consultees asked that ACIP should be clear if it is there to support heritage activity as well as arts.

Eligibility Criteria

There was a feeling that significant funding should require some evidence of track record and experience, financial and corporate competence and resilience; but that ACIP should also have light touch funds to seed new activity and artists.

Windfall funds

Consultees would like to see funds which come into the authority like UKSPF being processed using the same ACIP systems and reporting as far as possible and distributed via transparent open calls.

Other support from the Council

Survey respondents were also asked about the additional support that they would benefit from that could be provided by the Council. This is in light of the potential of cuts and that not all support necessarily needs to be financial. Many here mentioned access to venues and spaces owned by the Council or help with venues (including rates support). Training and networking opportunities were highlighted as being useful as well as signposting to other funding sources.

Consultees had similar opinions on support, but also noted that support could include facilitating increased collaboration in the sector and with other sectors, increased communication with the sector as to council plans, and communicating about the sector across the city.

Priorities and Principles

As noted earlier, 'Principles' and 'investment focus themes' for ACIP were published as part of the Culture Investment Programme 2025 Expression of Interest Guidance issued by ACC on 7 June 2024.

Our principles

Ambition - Encourage creative ambition and excellence in delivery.

Public benefits - Ensure Council investment is used for public benefit, demonstrating impacts to evidence investment is delivering on our priorities.

Local Impact - to support the local cultural economy to develop capacity and capability to be more sustainable and successful.

Diversity - Reflect the growing diversity of the city and foster creativity in every community.

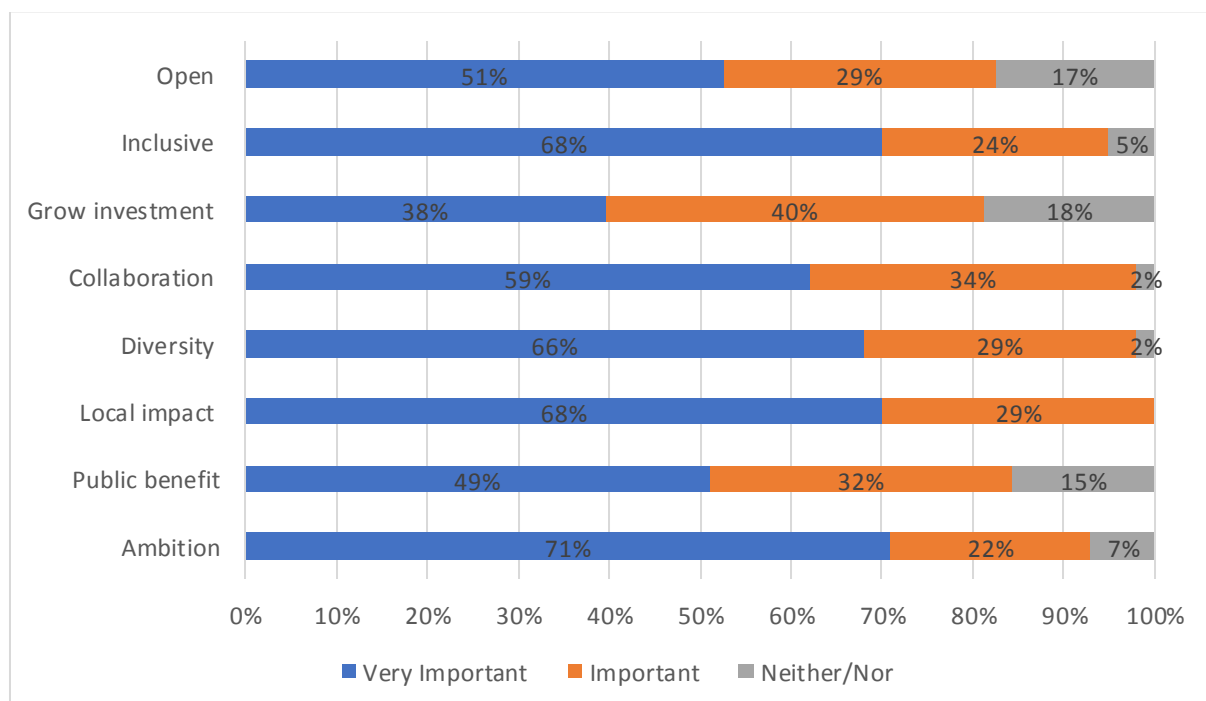
Collaboration - Encourage organisations to work mutually and in collaboration and to support grass roots organisations and individual practitioners, ensuring fair pay and opportunities to develop their activities and careers in Aberdeen.

Grow investment – To foster the conditions for the culture sector to maximise opportunities and grow inward investment for culture and creativity in Aberdeen.

Inclusive - Make funding guidance clear, easy to understand, accessible and inclusive. To make monitoring consistent and proportionate to the levels of investment.

Open - Make decisions based on open applications, share data on decisions openly and use monitoring data collected to inform future investment choices.

The survey asked respondents to rate these principles which had been circulated in the EOI relative to their importance to them.



When asked, the majority felt that most of the potential principles for culture were important. Highest importance was placed with Ambition (93%) and Inclusive (92%). Least importance was placed with Grow Investment (78%) and Public Benefit (81%).

It will be important in launching and advocating for the ACIP that the reason for investment - addressing council priorities – is made clear to applicants and recipients. As noted earlier for many in

the sector this connecting is clearly understood. The survey suggests that for smaller organisations and individuals this reality needs to be communicated clearly.

Given that ACIP principles have already been published and met with reasonable approval as above there may be little need to modify them.

To drive home the connection between cultural investment and council objectives, a supporting set of over-arching ACIP Aims (currently absent from the EOI) could be developed:

- To support the ambitions of Aberdeen City Council to make Aberdeen a 'place where all people can prosper' and to ensure that everyone has 'the right to take part in a cultural life'⁴
- To encourage exceptional cultural activity in the city
- To contribute to the success measures of the Local Output Improvement Plan by making tangible contribution to its 5 priorities:
 - Economy: Diversify Aberdeen's economy and developing our workforce through skills support and employment opportunities.
 - People (Children and Young People): improve our children and young people's physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing. Improving education experience and post-school opportunities.
 - People (Adults): increasing healthy life expectancy, reducing adult convictions, substance abuse and homelessness.
 - Place: Addressing climate change by reducing Aberdeen's carbon emissions, protecting our natural and built environment.
 - Community Empowerment: building strong personal and community resilience, enabling people to participate in decisions that help change things for the better.
- To leverage cultural investment into Aberdeen from business, trusts and regional and national funders.

⁴ In reference to article 15 Scottish Human Rights Bill

4 Summary of Key Recommendations

The consultation and engagement exercise has resulted in a number of key recommendations that have been communicated in this report.

The summary below highlights the key recommendations which we propose should be critical in influencing the development of the cultural investment framework.

1. The Council should develop the Cultural Investment Programme to address the LOIP at Priority level. The Drivers, or some of them at least, could be included in ACIP guidance as example of what applicants might consider addressing with regard to each Priority. Part of the job of ACIP guidance and any roadshows about the new programme will be to raise awareness and inform the sector about the LOIP as a critical plank of Council policy. This will be particularly important for smaller organisations and individual practitioners.
2. At the next revision of the LOIP in 2026, it is imperative that culture – perhaps through the leadership of a refreshed Culture Aberdeen – has a place at the Community Planning Aberdeen board and that in future the benefits of culture can be made manifest in LOIP Stretch Outcomes and Drivers, which can then be reflected in future iterations of the ACIP.
3. The Council should ensure that expectations and obligations on recipients are commensurate with the level of award. While it would be reasonable to expect larger, well-resourced organisation in receipt of substantial funding to address all 5 priorities, it is recommended that support to smaller organisations and individuals at a more modest level should require the applicant to choose one priority where they can achieve the greatest impact.
4. Key questions in the application should be framed around each of the Priorities of the LOIP, inviting applicants to explain how they will deliver in their own terms. Questions should be written in plain language and in such a way that an applicant does not have to have detailed knowledge of the LOIP. The application form should give applicants the chance to explain what they will do artistically and why. We would suggest this question is a good opportunity to enable applicants to discuss the purpose of their work and any evidence of demand for it.
5. The Council should balance the need for significant funding to be awarded to those with a clear track record and appropriate financial and governance structures in place, with a light touch approach that can support new activity and artists.
6. To ensure an accessible and effective workflow for the new ACIP it is vital that the application process, assessment process and evaluation and monitoring processes are conceived simultaneously. Using the metrics recommended as part of the Cultural Funding Review, which are already being readily collected across the sector will ensure effective impact measurement without being onerous in terms of data required. A core set of monitoring information common to all strands of ACIP should be developed but that the level of discretionary reporting should be proportional to the funds awarded and the capacity of awardees to respond.
7. A core and consistent set of data capture requirements across all strands of the ACIP and wherever possible alignment with the data requests and formats made by Creative Scotland for instance matching age bands and EDI formats are recommended. The collection of case studies and softer more qualitative information is also recommended which is important in

bringing funded activity to life for stakeholders and councillors. Communicating with the sector about what will happen to the data provided by them is also recommended.

8. Multi-year funding agreements (2 or 3 years at a time) are recommended as the best way for the sector to plan and take action to cope with reductions. The prospect of tapered reductions in funding over a 3-year horizon, are most manageable in the context of multi-annual support.
9. The options of both core and project funding should be made available to organisations.
10. Funding should be directed at supporting the artists and organisations of Aberdeen.
11. The opportunity to have a conversation / advice session with the Council before making an application is welcomed and recommended. The availability of support to upskill in writing applications not just to the Council but to other agencies is also recommended.
12. As noted in the Cultural Funding Review an ideal solution for festival funding would be for part of the Common Good to be ringfenced for appropriate cultural activity and managed through a single coordinated cultural grants programme. This would then align with the new ACIP and allow for application and monitoring through this.
13. The currently published principles via the EOI have been met with approval and as such it is not recommended that these are modified. To drive home the connection between cultural investment and council objectives, a supporting set of over-arching ACIP Aims (currently absent from the EOI) could be developed:
 - To support the ambitions of Aberdeen City Council to make Aberdeen a 'place where all people can prosper' To provide for everyone to have the right to take part in a cultural life⁵
 - To encourage exceptional cultural activity in the city
 - To contribute to the success measures of the Local Output Improvement Plan by making tangible contribution to its 5 priorities:
 - Economy: Diversify Aberdeen's economy and developing our workforce through skills support and employment opportunities.
 - People (Children and Young People): improve our children and young people's physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing. Improving education experience and post-school opportunities.
 - People (Adults): increasing healthy life expectancy, reducing adult convictions, substance abuse and homelessness.
 - Place: Addressing climate change by reducing Aberdeen's carbon emissions, protecting our natural and built environment.
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