

Item 3.

Public Exhibition - Cultural Strategy 2025-2035

File No: X099822

Summary

The Creative City Cultural Policy and Action Plan 2014-2024 (the Policy) has guided the City of Sydney's (the City's) cultural programs and investments for ten years. The Policy contains six strategic directions for supporting a creative and cultural city and 208 actions. 97 per cent of these actions have been commenced or completed and many are integrated into the ongoing work of the City. Three per cent (seven actions) were investigated and have not been implemented.

While delivering the Policy the City has sustained an average investment of \$34 million in culture each year, and dedicated a property portfolio with a replacement value of \$44 million for cultural purposes. These investments have supported over 14,000 opportunities for Sydney-based artists. The City has developed a significant annual calendar of events and cultural programs that provide our communities with free and low-cost access to cultural activity and employ a large number of creative workers.

The Policy has been delivered through a period of significant change and unprecedented challenges for artists, culture and the creative industries. The evolving, ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic has required efforts and investments to be refocused and has informed new research undertaken by the City. This research demonstrates the Creative Industries workforce of Greater Sydney has reduced by approximately six per cent (or just under 5,000 workers) since 2012, and in our local government area, commercial floorspace used by creative industries has reduced by more than 172,000m² over the same period. In the City of Sydney, artists, musicians, writers and performers (the core creative professions) have experienced the sharpest decline, reducing by 11 per cent (by place of residence - City of Sydney) in the past decade. The pressing challenge of retaining Sydney's creative spaces and cultural workforce requires renewed strategic consideration.

In 2022, the City adopted a new community strategic plan Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050: Continuing the Vision (the Plan). The Plan outlines the community's vision for a thriving cultural life in Sydney and identifies eight strategic outcomes that contribute to that vision. With the Plan as a foundation, City staff have consulted with local creative operators, artists and cultural organisations and developed a draft Cultural Strategy (the Strategy) to guide the City's support for arts, culture and creative industries over the next ten years.

The Strategy outlines a framework to respond to both immediate and long-term challenges and opportunities under the themes - "retain, rebuild, reimagine". The Strategy proposes some high-level actions to retain at-risk creative spaces and workers, rebuild capacity in a severely impacted sector, and reimagine a more sustainable, equitable, innovative and thriving cultural and creative life. It is recommended the Strategy be exhibited for two months to seek community and industry feedback and explore the proposed actions with stakeholders.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council note the finalisation of the Creative City Cultural Policy and Action Plan 2014-2024, noting 191 actions are completed, 10 actions are in progress and 7 actions will not be implemented as outlined in Attachment A to the subject report;
- (B) Council note ten years of significant achievements under the guidance of the Creative City Cultural Policy and Action Plan 2014-2024, as outlined in Attachment B to the subject report;
- (C) Council approve for public exhibition the draft Cultural Strategy 2025-2035 as shown at Attachment C to the subject report;
- (D) Council note that the Cultural Strategy 2025-2035, including any recommended changes, will be reported to Council for adoption following the exhibition period;
- (E) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to make minor editorial amendments for clarity or correction of drafting errors prior to the exhibition of the draft Cultural Strategy 2025-2035; and
- (F) Council note the Engagement Report summarising consultation for the development of the draft Cultural Strategy 2025-2035, as shown at Attachment D to the subject report.

Attachments

- Attachment A.** Creative City Cultural Policy and Action Plan 2014-2024 Close Out Report
- Attachment B.** Achievements and Highlights - Creative City Cultural Policy and Action Plan 2014-2024
- Attachment C.** Draft Cultural Strategy 2025-2035
- Attachment D.** Engagement Report - Sector Consultation for a Draft Cultural Strategy 2025-2035

Background

1. The Creative City Cultural Policy and Action Plan (The Policy) was adopted in August 2014, building upon many years of actively supporting the cultural and creative life of the city. The Policy elevated and articulated the role culture plays in strengthening our city and the value our community places in our cultural and creative life.
2. The Policy articulated the City's existing commitments to major events, local projects and public art programs and emphasised the importance of providing cultural infrastructure and workspace for artists so local cultural industries can thrive. More vulnerable parts of the sector were exposed, with particular concern for live music and performing arts venues. The Policy sharpened the City's focus on promoting local stories and history, in particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, along with the contemporary expression of First Nations living cultures. The Policy calls for more opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to be able to access and participate in culture, especially their own creativity through facilities, training and grassroots collaborations.
3. The Policy outlines six strategic priorities for supporting Sydney's cultural life and creative industries and 208 actions to deliver over ten years.

Conclusion of the Creative City Cultural Policy and Action Plan 2014-2024

4. Since 2014, the City has spent an estimated \$344,259,779 on culture through its own programs, staff and operations and grants to third parties to deliver cultural outcomes. A year by year summary of total spending is included in Attachment A.
5. 97 per cent of the 208 actions included in the Policy have been commenced or completed.
 - (a) 118 actions have been completed.
 - (b) 65 actions have been implemented as ongoing work of the City.
 - (c) 8 actions were superseded, meaning they were delivered by other means or methods than originally outlined in the Policy.
 - (d) 10 actions are currently in progress and mostly relate to infrastructure projects that will be incorporated in the refreshed Cultural Strategy 2025-2035.
6. Three per cent of the 208 actions have been investigated and not implemented. It is recommended these 7 actions be closed.
 - (a) Action 1.37 proposes that the City encourage the activation of rooftop spaces. Research and pilot projects were undertaken, however, national construction code requirements for equitable access and fire safety make the activation of most rooftops in the city centre very challenging, and further projects have not been actively encouraged. Instead, the City continues to advocate for simple, flexible and low-cost approvals pathways for cultural activities and will continue to provide assistance on a case-by-case basis to cultural operators wishing to activate rooftops.
 - (b) Action 3.49 could only be implemented with changes to planning policy recommended in the City's Open and Creative City planning proposal that was not approved by the NSW Government.

- (c) Action 4.16 would have required the City to impose or subsidise lost revenue for a commercial tenant in a City-owned carpark and was not considered viable.
 - (d) Actions 6.02, 6.04 and 6.19 related to funding programs for trade and export initiatives that are the responsibility of NSW and Federal Government agencies and outside of the City's control.
 - (e) Action 6.13 was investigated but required action from Australian Border Force and Federal Department of Immigration and is outside of the City's control.
7. A high-level update on how each of the 208 actions was addressed is included in Attachment A.
8. While delivering the 208 actions of the Policy included significant achievements and investments, much of the City's work in support of creativity and culture was guided by the strategic priorities of the Policy and ongoing programs. These achievements are documented in Attachment B which outlines highlights from the ten year delivery program supporting the Policy.

Draft Cultural Strategy 2025-2035

9. In 2022 the City adopted the Community Strategic Plan *Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050: Continuing the Vision* (the Plan). The Plan is the result of extensive consultation with local communities, including the arts, cultural and creative industries. The Plan articulates a vision for a thriving cultural life in Sydney built upon the following 8 strategic outcomes:
- (a) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their cultural practices are visible and respected.
 - (b) We value our cultural life and champion our creative industries.
 - (c) An increasing number of creative workers live or work in our city.
 - (d) Sydney's cultural life reflects the diversity of our communities.
 - (e) There is an increasing supply of accessible creative spaces.
 - (f) Creativity and culture is embedded in the fabric of our city.
 - (g) Creativity and great experiences fuel the vitality of our city.
 - (h) There is equitable access to education and learning opportunities.

The draft Cultural Strategy 2025-2035 (the Strategy) aims to build a practical path towards achieving these ambitions, with consideration for the current context and ongoing research.

10. The City's research demonstrates significant challenges facing the arts, culture and creative industries. The City's research analyses census data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, longitudinal creative employment research undertaken by the Federal arts agency Creative Australia, the City's Floorspace and Employment Survey, the City's Wellbeing Survey, evaluation of the City's cultural programs and grants, and community consultation. The key findings are:
 - (a) The number of people who live in Greater Sydney and work in the creative industries reduced by six per cent (or 4,918 workers in real numbers) between 2011 and 2021.
 - (b) The number of people who live in the City of Sydney and work in the core creative professions (artist, musician, performer, writer) reduced by 11 per cent (or 155 workers in real numbers) between 2011 and 2021.
 - (c) Sydney is the only Australian capital city to see a reduction in core creative professionals during this timeframe.
 - (d) The average cost of a rental unit in Greater Sydney is the equivalent of 62 per cent of average incomes for core creative professionals, and sector consultation confirms that the cost of rental housing is the primary driver of migration of artists out of Sydney.
 - (e) 61 per cent of the residents of the City of Sydney rent.
 - (f) Commercial floorspace used by the Creative Industries in the City of Sydney has reduced by 172,000m² since 2012.
 - (g) Commercial floorspace used by the core creative professions (artists, musicians, performers, writers) has reduced by 14,376m² since 2012.
 - (h) The diversity of Sydney's creative workforce has reduced. 44 per cent of people who live in the City of Sydney identify as having British, Irish or Australian ancestry, however 70 per cent of those working in the core creative professions in the City of Sydney identify with this ancestry. Consultation suggests cost-of-housing pressures and unaffordable creative studio workspace are driving the increased homogeneity of the local creative workforce.
11. To develop the draft Strategy, City staff consulted with the City's Cultural and Creative Sector Advisory panel and conducted eight engagement workshops with sub-sectors of the creative industries. Consultation focused on understanding the lived experience of the above research findings, exploring the context for these changes, and identifying primary challenges and emerging opportunities for the sector. The key findings are:
 - (a) Unaffordable housing is displacing creative workers with impacts on local production, supply chains, and peer groups.
 - (b) The cost and complexity of planning and regulatory compliance continues to be a barrier to operating creative spaces, producing events, and sustaining creative careers.

- (c) Both infrastructure and grant funding investments tend to favour presentation outcomes over production and development. This is seen as directing government subsidy more towards marketing and audience engagement strategies than artist incomes. Cultural investment is not seen to be adequately supporting individual creative practice as the source of creative innovation.
 - (d) A missing mid-tier in Sydney's cultural sector is impacting the viability of the creative ecosystem and sustainability of creative careers. Sydney has a large number of major national cultural institutions, but not enough mid-sized venues and organisations to support pathways from the small and independent scale to the major institutions, as well as viable export products.
 - (e) The sector is suffering from burnout following years of unprecedented challenges. The local sector is reliant on a relatively small number of cultural leaders who have sustained a personal toll through the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent cost-of-living crisis. Recovery will take time and over-burdening the sector with short-term stimulus and expectations to deliver fast results will make things worse.
 - (f) The sector is seeking a more collaborative future, less focus on competitive merit-based opportunities that favour only a few, and more focus on ecosystem-wide investment that unlocks peer-to-peer learning, resource sharing, and process-led collaborations.
12. Noting that the City's research and consultation presents challenges that require different scales of urgency of response, the draft Strategy proposes a response framework organised by three themes - "retain, rebuild, reimagine" that relate to:
- (a) Retain - urgent actions to retain Sydney's creative workforce and cultural infrastructure.
 - (b) Rebuild - strategic interventions to rebuild strength in Sydney's creative sector following years of unprecedented challenge.
 - (c) Reimagine - systemic change to guide Sydney's cultural sector towards a more diverse, inclusive, green and equitable future with innovative approaches to unlocking potential.

The draft Strategy uses these themes to propose actions for each of the 8 strategic outcomes.

13. The draft Strategy groups the strategic outcomes and actions under four cultural pillars that align with counterpart strategies at a federal and state level, including *Revive* the national cultural policy, and *Creative Communities* the NSW Government's arts, culture and creative industries policy. The four pillars are:
- (a) Right to culture - we respect and protect First Nations people's connections to Country and Culture, we celebrate the many cultures of our diverse, multicultural and inclusive city, and we acknowledge culture as vital to liveability and wellbeing.
 - (b) Creative workforce - we champion our creative workforce and build opportunities for creative employment, talent retention, cultural exports and a sustainable local sector.

- (c) Cultural infrastructure - we provide, protect, advocate and plan for the infrastructure needed to support our creative industries and a thriving cultural life.
 - (d) Creative participation - we ensure there are pathways for everyone to engage in a creative practice and participate in the cultural life of Sydney.
14. The draft Strategy expands the City's definition of "culture" to include:
- (a) the arts, cultural and creative industries
 - (b) the heritage, knowledge and cultural practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
 - (c) the expressions of identity, and shared experience and aspirations of our diverse and multicultural communities.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

15. Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision renews the communities' vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2050. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the city, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This plan is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
- (a) Direction 3 - Public places for all - the Strategy proposes an approach to public art and creative urban design and draft actions to support:
 - (i) Outcome 3.3 - Creativity and culture is embedded in the fabric of the city.
 - (b) Direction 6 - An equitable and inclusive city - the Strategy proposes an approach to library services and cultural programs and draft actions to support:
 - (i) Outcome 6.6 - There is equitable access to education and learning opportunities.
 - (c) Direction 8 - A thriving cultural and creative life - the Strategy proposes an approach to cultural infrastructure, cultural grants programs, events, cultural programs, sector capacity building, and draft actions to support:
 - (i) Outcome 8.1 - We value our cultural life and champion our creative industries.
 - (ii) Outcome 8.2 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultural practice are visible and respected.
 - (iii) Outcome 8.3 - An increasing number of creative workers live or work in the city.
 - (iv) Outcome 8.4 - Sydney's cultural life reflects the diversity of our communities.
 - (v) Outcome 8.5 - There is an increased supply of accessible creative space.

Organisational Impact

16. The draft Strategy does not propose an expansion of the City's ongoing cultural programs and services or changes to the composition of the business units responsible for delivering support for culture and implementing the Strategy. Rather the approach to designing cultural program and services will be informed and shaped by the new Strategy, with particular focus on areas of highest need as evidenced by the Strategy.

Risks

17. The draft Strategy is an evidence-based approach to delivering the community's aspirations and vision. Risk has been managed by ensuring the City's cultural investments respond to current issues facing the cultural and creative sector, drawing upon the most current available data and analysis and community consultation.

Financial Implications

18. The draft Cultural Strategy 2025-2035 proposes new actions that require additional investment of \$20 million over ten years, in addition to the City's current investment in culture. If the Strategy is adopted, \$2 million will be funded, for these new actions, from within the City's overall operational budget for each financial year from 2025/26 to 2034/35.
19. The draft Cultural Strategy 2025-2035 proposes dedicated spaces for artists be delivered in suitable City-owned properties. If the Strategy is adopted, these will be delivered within existing asset renewal budgets in the long term financial plan.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

20. If approved, the draft Strategy will be placed on public exhibition for 2 months. It is anticipated a post-exhibition draft will be reported to Council in November 2024. The Strategy is intended to commence in 2025.

Public Consultation

21. City staff have developed the draft Strategy and an engagement plan in consultation with the City's Cultural and Creative Sector Advisory Panel.
22. City staff conducted eight engagement sessions with sub-sectors of the creative industries. Attendees included leadership staff from local cultural organisations, sole-trader creative practitioners, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and organisations, and senior staff from Create NSW, Screen NSW, and Screen Australia. The sessions were:
 - (a) 7 March 2024: Committee for Sydney in conversation with Bloomberg Philanthropies, discussion on cultural infrastructure.
 - (b) 12 March 2024: Creative production and screen sectors

- (c) 14 March 2024: Small-to-medium organisations and independent producers
 - (d) 15 March 2024: Design, fashion and creative tech
 - (e) 19 March: Contemporary music
 - (f) 20 March 2024: Major festivals and cultural institutions
 - (g) 2 May 2024: 'UNESCO City of Film' deep-dive follow-up session
 - (h) 2 May 2024: Mixed additional session
23. An engagement report has been prepared outlining the outcomes of these consultations.
24. If approved, the draft Strategy will be placed on exhibition for two months. The community will be able to provide feedback through a Sydney Your Say survey and written submissions. City staff will conduct further consultation sessions with the cultural and creative sector.

KATE DEACON

Director Strategic Development and Engagement

Lisa Colley, Manager Cultural Strategy

Lex Davidson, Strategy Advisor - Culture