

Report of	Assistant Director Communities	Author	Claire Taylor ☎ 282655
Title	Review of Colchester Borough Council's partnership arrangements with The Mercury Theatre, Colchester Arts Centre and Firstsite		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Review of the partnership arrangements between CBC and organisations in receipt of a Strategic Arts Grant from the Council: The Mercury Theatre, Colchester Arts Centre and Firstsite.

1.2 Representatives from the three organisations will attend and present to the Panel at the meeting:

Mercury Theatre:	Steve Mannix, Executive Director and Tracey Childs, Executive Producer
Colchester Arts Centre:	Anthony Roberts, Director
Firstsite:	Sally Shaw, Director

The Chairs of the respective Boards of Trustees have also been invited to attend.

2. Action Required

2.1 The Panel is invited to review the range of programmes delivered by each organisation and how effectively they support the Council's strategic priorities and provide value for money for the funding provided.

3. Reason for Scrutiny

3.1 Regular reviews of Colchester Borough Council's strategic arts and cultural partners are undertaken by the Panel at their request

4. Background Information

4.1 Introduction

Colchester's leading cultural organisations help make the Borough a vibrant place to live, learn and visit. Together they play a vital role in ensuring a diverse range of experiences and activities are accessible to all, and vulnerable and hard to reach groups have positive ways to engage with their local community and wider society. These organisations are also integral to the creative industries and tourism, priority sectors for economic growth.

In partnership with CBC each is custodian of a key landmark building and community asset. They work closely with the Council to ensure these remain fit for purpose, and crucially to lever in external funding and inward investment to maintain and improve these facilities.

The Mercury Theatre, Colchester Arts Centre and Firstsite are Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio Organisations and in receipt of ACE funding in the current cycle 2018-2022. The funding partnership between the Council, the organisations and ACE delivers a strong cultural asset base for Colchester, underpinning the wider creative community.

4.2 The Organisations

The Mercury Theatre

The Mercury engages with over 130,000 people in Colchester and the surrounding area each year, through a broad programme staged across two auditoria and community education partnerships. The organisation has a proven track record of attracting people into theatre for the first time.

With an annual turnover of £3.7m the theatre is a significant local employer and a major driver of the restaurant and hospitality economy in Colchester. Under the Made in Colchester brand, the Mercury reaches audiences and generates critical attention regionally and nationally, helping to raise the profile of Colchester more generally.

The Made in Colchester programme, together with the Community and Education programme and apprenticeships, nurtures new creative talent, providing opportunities and experience for local people looking to forge careers in the performing arts sector.

Backed by the ACE Major Capital Grant Scheme and supported by the Council with £1million of match funding, an £8.9 million project to redevelop the Mercury site is currently underway, and productions will move to a temporary home on Abbey Fields later in 2019 for the duration of the major works. The project will transform facilities on the site and safeguard the building for the community into the future.

Colchester Arts Centre

Housed in St Mary's Church, Colchester Arts Centre reaches over 40,000 people a year with a full and diverse programme across a wide range of contemporary performing arts and popular events. It takes a leading role in the development of live art through commissions and partnerships.

The sheer variety and number of events taking place at the venue, on almost every day of the year, make it a key asset in attracting people into the centre of Colchester.

Backed by the ACE Small Capital Grant scheme and supported by the Council with match funding of £30K, a major project to transform the venue's accessibility for deaf and disabled artists and audiences, as well as improving energy efficiency and technical infrastructure, is currently underway.

Colchester Arts Centre aims to be accessible to the local community in every way, and has recently raised the funds to transform an old London Route Master into a Community Bus which will take a programme of events and activities out and around the local area.

Firstsite

Housed in a landmark building designed by international architect Rafael Viñoly, Firstsite is leading contemporary visual arts organisation presenting free exhibitions of both local and internationally renowned artists, as well as events, activities and workshops that aim to bring art to the heart of the community. The organisation is a national leader in commissioning new art, providing innovative learning opportunities, and supporting the professional development of local and regional artists.

The venue provides an accessible space in the heart of the town centre for diverse individuals and groups to interact and engage in a variety of ways, from participating in outreach and education programmes to relaxing in the café run by social enterprise We Walk The Line. As a unique building and a free attraction is it an important tourism asset for Colchester.

In 2017/18 Firstsite achieved 155,005 visitors, the highest annual attendance since the building opened in 2011 and an increase of 42,005 (37%) on the previous years' attendance, demonstrating the facility's growing importance as a generator of footfall on the eastern side of the town centre, and as anchor for regeneration in the St Botolph's Cultural Quarter.

4.3 Partnership Delivery Arrangements

Annual Funding Agreements are agreed in close consultation with each organisation and set out the activity and targets around delivery. The Funding Agreements for the previous financial year with outcomes and the current agreements for 2018/19 are attached as Appendices.

A Member of Colchester Borough Council is nominated to sit on the Board of each organisation. Currently these are:

Mercury Theatre:	Cllr Lyn Barton
Colchester Arts Centre:	Cllr Theresa Higgins
Firstsite:	Cllr Tim Young

4.4 Financial Arrangements

The Council determines the level of grant funding that will be provided on an annual or bi-annual basis. The funding is agreed by Cabinet and full Council.

The terms and conditions of funding including eligibility criteria and performance monitoring arrangements are set out in the Funding Agreements attached here as Appendices.

Between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019, the Council will provide funding of:

- £195,02 to The Mercury Theatre
- £55,950 to Colchester Arts Centre
- £112,450 to Firstsite

5. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

5.1 Not applicable

6. Standard References

6.1 There are no consultation or publicity considerations; or financial; community safety; health and safety or risk management implications of this review.

7. Strategic Plan References

7.1 The relationship between Colchester Borough Council and its arts partners is relevant to the following objectives of the [Strategic Plan 2018-21](#).

Growth:

- Help make sure Colchester is a welcoming place for all residents and visitors
- Ensure residents benefit from Colchester's economic growth with skills, jobs and improving infrastructure
- Work with partners to ensure a shared vision of a vibrant town centre

Opportunity:

- Promote and enhance Colchester Borough's heritage and visitor attractions to increase visitor numbers and support job creation

Appendices

Appendix A	Funding Agreement with The Mercury Theatre 2017/18 outcomes
Appendix B	Funding Agreement with The Mercury Theatre 2018/19
Appendix C	Funding Agreement with Colchester Arts Centre 2017/18 outcomes
Appendix D	Funding Agreement with Colchester Arts Centre 2018/19
Appendix E	Funding Agreement with Firstsite 2017/18 outcomes
Appendix F	Funding Agreement with Firstsite 2018/19