

Milton Keynes Arts Strategy 2008 - 2013

1. Executive Summary

Context

Milton Keynes Arts Strategy 2008-13 provides a strategic framework for arts direction and delivery across the Borough; to drive forwards and celebrate Milton Keynes' arts locally, regionally and nationally.

For 40 years, the arts in Milton Keynes have made an important contribution to physical and social development of the Borough. Forward thinking attitudes and healthy investments in the arts during the 1970s and 80s led to Milton Keynes becoming an exemplar. This strong arts heritage has led to an expectation and understanding that arts should be integral to the way Milton Keynes develops and grows. Unfortunately, over the last decade, investment in the arts has diminished: this has led to the arts not flourishing in the way they could. This strategy offers a revived focus for the arts and a commitment from Milton Keynes Council and other partners to strategically resource and re-enforce the arts.

Defining the Arts

Reaching 40 years of age in 2008, Milton Keynes is different to most places, and the way we define the arts has to reflect the role arts has played in our adolescence and as we mature. As such, it is recognised that the arts, its audiences and appreciators grow and evolve.

The arts community (artists, arts organisations and arts audiences/appreciators) are curious and keen to use the city as a source of inspiration. Artists draw from and contribute to the social fabric and sense of community in Milton Keynes; they respond to this unique place and add to its identity through their work. Seen in this context, arts in Milton Keynes is different from arts in other more established places. Youth, energy and pride should feature strongly in our understanding of what arts are in Milton Keynes.

Milton Keynes is forward thinking, it is a place that celebrates the existing and welcomes the new. Collaborations, creative thinking and innovation are encouraged in the arts. The term 'arts' currently recognise the following creative practices or disciplines: theatre, drama, dance, festival/carnival, music, literature, visual arts, photography, film & media, craft, design, public art, digital technology.

Focus for the Arts

After testing a number of statements for the arts, the following was welcomed by the arts community as supporting current achievement as well as future aspiration. The arts statement is:

Milton Keynes flourishes with artistic energy

This statement recognises that in areas we already flourish with artistic energy; this strategy embraces these successes and builds upon them. The strategy also addresses the barriers which prevent flourishing.

To achieve this statement across the Arts in Milton Keynes, this Strategy has identified five focus areas. These have been identified through significant research and consultation which can be found in section 6.

The five focus areas are:

- Creativity & Experimentation
- Engagement
- Collaboration
- Commitment
- Recognition

Each of the above focus areas has a number of projects assigned to them, to enable us to deliver work to meet need. The projects are described in section 3.2. Below is a summary of the projects which have emerged as HIGH PRIORITY for the next 12 months.

Endowment - We will seek to secure an endowment which would offer security to the Milton Keynes Council Cultural Grant-Aid scheme, support the arts team, fund project delivery, revenue and commissioning.

Arts Agents - We will inspire and engage officers from across Milton Keynes Council departments to become Arts Agents. These Agents will be supported to engage the arts with their non-arts agendas. Artists and arts organisations from Milton Keynes will be invited to 'buddy' the Agents and support them in the development of project ideas and delivery.

Artists in Schools - We will work with Schools across Milton Keynes to engage artists to work in unused classrooms, available whilst schools are enhancing their pupil intake. Artists will be invited to use the space to develop their creative practice as well as working with school on delivering the arts curriculum, Extended Schools programmes and Cultural Entitlement.

Performance Indicators - We will work with our regional partners and development agencies to develop common and appropriate Performance Indicators for the arts, and engagement in the arts. This will include identifying robust outcomes, action plan for improvement and triple bottom line reporting.

The Edge - We will work with the landowners in Central Milton Keynes to undertake research and identify an area which could be used by artists (cross-artform) to develop and share their work. A creative energy centre for our artists to work collaboratively and for us to welcome national/international artists. Further work will include type of place need, function, form and sustainability.

Arts Team

From January 2008 Milton Keynes Council reprioritised the work of individuals within the Culture team to focus on the Arts. The Arts Team now provides:

- Strategic planning
- Advocacy and promotion
- Dissemination of information
- Project development and delivery
- Inspiration
- Professional partnerships and connections
- Specialist support, Advice and Guidance
- Revenue and project grants
- Performance Monitoring and Review

This Strategy will be implemented by Milton Keynes Council arts team and partners.

1.1 How to use the strategy

This strategy is split into four sections:

1. **Intro** – this sets the context for the strategy, discussing how the arts have grown in Milton Keynes and what they have become. In this section you can find out how we define the arts and arts activity in Milton Keynes alongside analysis of arts organisations, funding and geographic spread.
2. **What** – this section states what we intend to do with and for the arts in Milton Keynes, including our arts statement, priorities and projects. There is a short description for each project, linking them back to our priorities for arts delivery in Milton Keynes.
3. **How** – the action plan is the heart to this strategy with data on exactly how we will achieve this strategy. Information is provided on the arts teams role, funding and delivery partners, timescales and milestones for the projects.
4. **Why** – the strategy is built on evidence which has been collated over the past 2 years. This section outlines each piece of research, the lessons learnt, and how they are being addressed through our projects. The latter half considers other strategies and strategic papers which directly impacts on arts delivery within Milton Keynes.