

Reflections – Covid community responses:

Artist Briefs for three socially engaged artist commissions.

An outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic has been the importance of community-led responses that draw upon local knowledge and resources, and build capacity and channels of interconnectedness between government, community organisations and the public¹.

Cheshire West and Chester (CW&C) recognise the importance of **communities, culture & belonging** and are inviting artists to explore new and different perspectives which reflect community responses to Covid-19 in the Borough as part of a cultural programme.

Three socially engaged art commissions will develop and deliver projects that articulate responses that encourage social interaction and opportunities to enable deeper community engagement and creativity. The areas of focus for the artist commissions are:

- **Lived Experience** – everyone has experience of Covid-19 but for some it has been more amplified or had a bigger effect on their lives.
- **Societal Shift** – things have had to be delivered different and groups have adapted to meet their service for users or individual's needs. This in turn has changed attitudes and ways of working.
- **Under presented voices** – the lives and issues people face has been magnified. Marginalised communities and individual's voices must be listened to and amplified.

Budget: £30,000 + VAT per commission including fees and materials.

Timescale: Summer 2022-Spring 2023

1. INTRODUCTION

Cheshire West and Chester (CW&C) wish to appoint artists to work on the Reflections Cultural Programme that reflect the experience of Covid-19 and the pandemic on communities across the Borough. This accompanies and complements tree planting carried out in spring 2022 in six parks and open spaces (Winsford Marina, Whitby Park Ellesmere Port, Castle Park Frodsham, Stanney Fields Park Neston, Marbury Park, Grosvenor Park Chester). A series of micro commissions for each site with local artists will be commissioned as part of the cultural programme and autumn bulb planting to increase connections with nature. In the spring of 2023 there will be a moment that brings all of the Cultural Programme together in these Green Spaces to share the work with wider audiences. How this happens for each commission will be developed with the artists and communities to ensure it is appropriate.

¹ The Covid Decade – Understanding the long term societal impacts of COVID-19 published by The British Academy

The Reflections project is an important programme for the Council as many Council staff were involved in supporting communities during the pandemic and providing essential services and local governance including: shielding services, support cells, administrating funds, coordinating responses, data gathering and communication.

Need Support? Cheshire West & Chester Council is here for you

Mental health and wellbeing Housing Finances Business and employment Accessing food and essentials Self-isolation

For the latest COVID-19 advice visit:
[cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/virus](https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/virus)
If you need help or support call: 0300 123 7031

Cheshire West and Chester

Example of CW&C communication campaign

The COVID-19 pandemic began to impact on the UK from the start of 2020, with a national lockdown declared at the end of March. Due to the time taken to collate and report much of the information within the State of the Borough², the impact of the pandemic is only slowly showing in the data. Examples where the impact of the pandemic can be seen include a drop in vehicle miles travelled along with fewer visitors to town centres, amenities and tourist attractions. The impact can also be seen on the number of local businesses and life expectancy. CWAC website COVID-19 statement.

Initial research into the impacts of Covid-19 in the Borough has been carried out by the programme manager, Cathy Newbery, who will support all commissioned artists to focus and develop their work. This information will be made available to the appointed artists and includes:

- Understanding the impact of Covid-19 within Cheshire West and Chester
- Mapping of what's already been done within communities and within the Council
- Capturing the reflections of key people as part of the commissioning process

The impacts of COVID-19 on health and wellbeing have not been felt uniformly across society. COVID-19 has exacerbated existing structural and social inequalities, with particularly negative health outcomes for those already disadvantaged in society. COVID-19 in CW&C mirrors the national picture, Lower IMD³ areas had higher infection rates also lower vaccination uptake. Working classes, unemployment and lower occupational groups experience higher percentage of

² <https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/your-council/key-statistics-and-data/state-of-the-borough/state-of-the-borough.aspx>

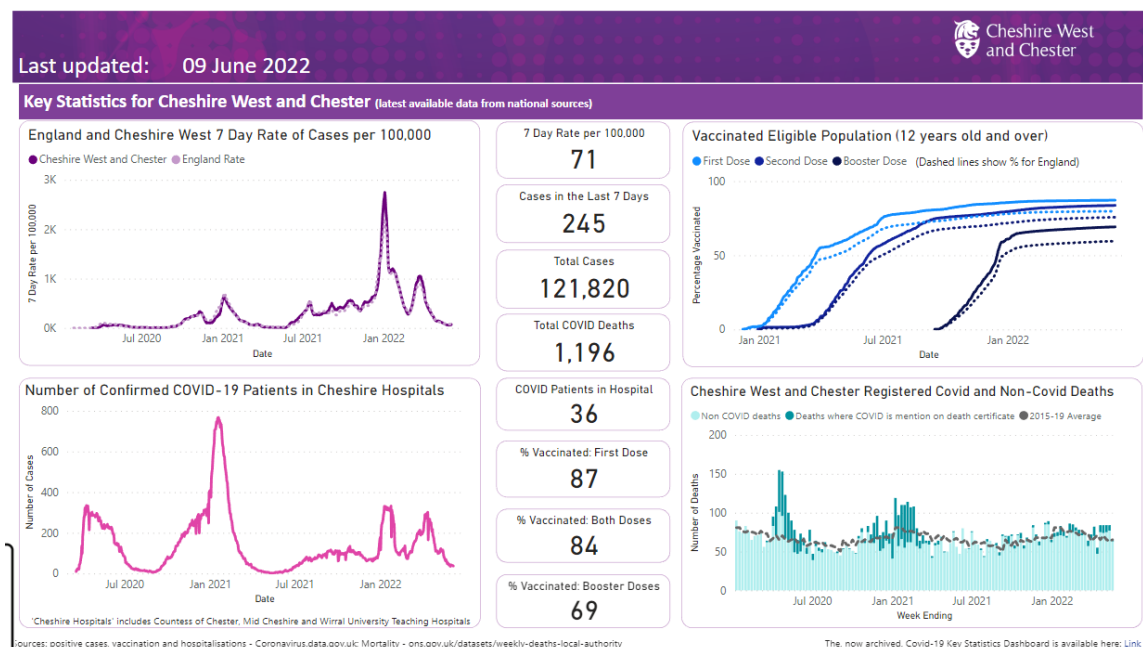
³ IMD – The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015 is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas (or neighbourhoods) in England. The Index of Multiple Deprivation ranks every small area in England from 1 (most deprived area) to 32,844 (least deprived area).

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cases as have the urban areas: Ellesmere Port, Winsford, Northwich and Chester Garden Quarter. Services are still reacting to the impacts of Covid-19 so we are not entirely in a reflective space.

The Reflections Programme is not the only Covid-19 cultural project as many organisations and individuals have already carried out work in the Borough. An important part of the process will be to ensure we recognize and celebrate the breadth of community engagement during Covid-19 in CW&C through this project and beyond the commissions e.g. enable people to capture personal reflections if they want to. Sensitivity to how people feel and impact on their lives will still be present so the commissioned work and artists approaches need to be mindful on the contexts they are working in.

COVID-19 working and social practices will need to be observed and contingency planning maybe needed throughout the project.



Example of Covid-19 data collected by CW&C

2. REFLECTIONS/CULTURAL PROGRAMME

Vision

To engage creatively with a broad range of communities across CW&C allowing time for meaningful reflection on how Covid-19 has had, and continues to have, impact on individuals and communities.

Aims

- For co-creation to be at the heart of the programme enabling continuous engagement from inception to realising the completion of projects
- To engage with key people including representatives from civic roles, public health and key workers
- Informed approach to reach a range of people and communities

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- Ensure engagement with diverse communities to uncover hidden stories
- To complement the tree planting scheme and reflect the importance of connections to nature
- To ensure a permanent record of the impact of the pandemic is captured as part of this process

Objectives for the artists

- To work with communities to establish how they would like to record their reflections and/or see these presented; working within communities to deliver this
- Focus on people whose experience is not generally reflected in the narrative around Covid-19 – ensure the programme reaches people from diverse communities, for example people who have experienced homelessness.
- To take a collaborative approach - working with colleagues, partners and other stakeholders who have been at the frontline of delivering services and working with communities (e.g. Poverty Team, Localities, Library staff)
- For the programme to be accessible and inclusive - reducing barriers that might prevent some people from participating.
- To ensure that, as far as possible, the outputs from the programme can be preserved permanently

The Reflections programme is timely as people are already losing the chronology of the narrative but want to reflect and remember the achievements made as well as the trauma and turbulence of that period.

Things are still quite difficult and people are acting differently so working through organisations and groups with information of peoples lived experiences is the route we are adopting. Through these people and services mapping the community groups and individuals who have acted locally, and areas of work, have come to the fore. This has provided a picture of activity and areas of work that can be celebrated and amplified and has informed the focus of the commissions.

3. COMMISSION SOCIETAL SHIFT

A Mass Participation Commission – things have had to be delivered different and groups have adapted to meet their service users or individual's needs. Food Hubs and new distribution networks were set up to maximise services and deliver to as many people in need as quickly as possible. This in turn has changed attitudes and ways of working.

CW&C wide working with the food hubs and distribution network as a mechanism to reach people who are in real need. These services were essential for people during Covid and showed how the pandemic created a societal shift to ramp up supply networks. This continues to be important to reach people whose need is greatest. The project can reach many individuals and families and develop a meaningful contribution that doesn't cost the participants but brings them together in a collective action.

CW&C visits to foodbanks increased from 16,494 in 2019 to 22,427 (6,447 to children) in 2020 a 36% increase. The percentage of local pupils eligible for free school meals increased from 13.3 per cent in 2019 to 17.7 per cent in 2021 and unemployment increased from 2.1 per cent in 2019 to 3.6 per cent in 2020. Whilst west Cheshire is an affluent borough the overall picture masks stark gaps between areas of prosperity and deprivation. The median local household income is £28,525 per year but 15 per cent of local households have an annual income of less than £15,000. Some 24,670 local people live in neighbourhoods ranked in the most deprived 10 per cent in England and 9,003 local children lived in low-income houses during 2019/20.

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Working with the network of food hubs to reach a wide range of people across CW&C. The Library Service are also using this distribution network to deliver creative packs and the recycle packing into creative projects. This project will focus on an idea(s) that can be easily replicated and created using these networks and shared either virtually or physically. This could create a moment like the clap for the NHS or rainbows in windows or an exhibition or performance (these acts were simple but very powerful).

Possible Organisations/services: Localities, Welcome Network for Food Hubs, Library Service

Climate change – the artist approach to the project will be aware of resources being used and where possible measure carbon impact.

4. WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Support structure for Artist

The artist will work with local **project groups** set up by the programme manager that will inform and advise on the direction of the project made up of representatives from the area or focus area. Each commission will have representation that will support the commission so membership will vary and be influenced by the artist who is selected. CW&C has four different locality areas Ellesmere Port, Chester, Northwich & Winsford and Rural, with Locality workers who provide connections to the local communities and groups <http://www.yourwestcheshire.co.uk> The project groups will include representatives from local services and local communities.

An overall **Steering Group** has been set up for the project which the programme manager will attend and feed-back progress on the individual projects. The Steering group will support the strategic direction of the cultural programme and inform councillors and officers of progress.

The Reflections project is an important programme for the Council and many Council staff were involved in supporting communities during the pandemic and providing essential services and local governance including: shielding services, grants, vaccine coordination and communication.

5. PROGRAMME

| Date | Stage |
|------------------------------------|--|
| June - July | Artist appointed |
| | Inception meeting – timetables to be agreed between project team and artist |
| | Selected artist begins research process |
| Timetable to be agreed with artist | Creative engagement |
| | Support Creative programme development |
| | Detailed designs for project outputs |
| Summer-Autumn-Winter | Temporary projects/ installation |
| | Documentation |
| Mid-February 2023 | Celebration/sharing events in the green spaces before CW&C enters pre- election purdah |
| March 2023 | Project completion and Evaluation |

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A more detailed programme with agreed milestones and outputs will be developed after appointment.

6. CONTRACTS AND FEES

The artist will be appointed on a commission contract with CW&C . This will include details of copyright, moral rights, insurances, fees and payment schedules.

The total budget for this appointment is **£30,000** + VAT. This will include a fee of **£10,000** (including expenses) and all work relating to creative consultation/engagement. A materials budget of **£20,000** to realize the resulting work.

7. INSURANCE AND LIABILITY

The Artist will ensure that appropriate public liability and professional indemnity insurances are in place relating to the work undertaken for this project. Copies of these shall be provided to the Commissioner on request. Professional Indemnity insurance cover of not less than £1,000,000 and Public liability cover of not less than £5,000,000 is required to be provided by the Artist.

8. SELECTION PROCESS

CW&C are working with a the programme manager in the selection and appointment of the artist.

We are expecting to commission artists of national repute and quality, so they bring a range of experiences to the place they are working in.

A selection panel including representation from partners and local communities will select a shortlist of artists for interview. The final selection will be through informal interview.

The process for selecting an artist will be in accordance with Corporate Procurement Regulations at Cheshire West and Chester (CW&C) and best practice as recommended by national bodies, such as Arts Council of England.

Application submissions include:

- a precise statement outlining their approach to the commission (no more than one side of A4)
- 10 digital examples of relevant work
- a CV including evidence of prior community work
- contact details for two referees.

Deadline: Monday 11th July

9. DOCUMENTATION AND EVALUATION

We would like the artist to keep an artist's diary and to document the project, as these will form a key element of evaluation process. As part of the project we want to include elements of the project in the CW&C archive and will provide details of the process. Data protection guidance will also need to be undertaken and will be provided for the artist. A separate evaluation of the project will be carried out and we will asks artists to contribute to this.

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If you have any questions please contact Cathy Newbery 07770 714103 email: cathy@cathynewbery.co.uk

Appendices:

Appendix 1 : CW&C reports

<https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/your-council/policies-and-performance/annual-report/our-covid-19-response.aspx>

[Key statistics and data \(cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk\)](https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

Cheshire West and Chester

- over 344,000 people
- 354 square miles
- 14,960 businesses
- almost 200 square miles of grass and farmland
- one walled Roman city
- the UK's most popular zoo
- one university
- 37 million visitors a year
- one of Europe's largest oil refineries
- the first designer outlet in the UK
- the oldest racecourse in the world
- and the UK's largest salt mine.

Population

343,823 people are estimated to live in west Cheshire, with just over a quarter living in rural areas. Some 18 per cent of residents are 0-15 years old; 21.8 per cent are over 65; and 60.2 per cent are of working age (between 16 and 64 years old). This is an older population than the England average.

The population is forecast to increase by about 12 per cent to 381,000 by 2038. Older age groups will see the biggest increase, with the number of residents aged 65 plus expected to increase by 44 per cent. It is predicted that there will be more than 100,000 local people over 65 by 2038.

According to the 2011 Census around 5 per cent of local residents were from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, far less than the 20 per cent England average. Polish is the most frequently spoken non-English language.

Appendix 2:

6 Micro commissions for local artists responding to Covid-19 aligned to the planting areas. Budget £1k each. Tree planting in 6 parks / open spaces across the borough:

Park

- Stanney Fields, Neston.
- Whitby Park, Ellesmere Port
- Marbury Park, Marbury
- Winsford Marina, Winsford.

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- Castle Park, Frodsham
- Grosvenor Park, Chester.

Autumn bulb planting with local communities in those areas and focus on nature connections. An example of one planting scheme in Grosvenor Park is below.



Appendix 3 :

Public Art Strategic Framework

Cheshire West and Chester (CW&C) have recently adopted a Public Art Strategic Framework which exemplifies good practice and reflects the current recommendations of organisations such as the Design Council, the government's advisor on architecture, urban design and public space, and ixia, an independent body for public art that promotes research and innovation for public art practice.

To enable the consistent commissioning of high quality public art across the authority the strategy sets out 6 objectives for commissioning public art, these are:

1. Public art should be **site specific**; it ought to be reflective and responsive to character of the place it is commissioned for; the personality and identity of our city, towns and rural areas are the starting point for an artist's research.
2. Public art needs to be **embedded** within a project or development
3. Artists should be brought onto project or design teams at an **early stage** of the process.
4. When funded, or part-funded, by CW&C, public art needs to respond to and deliver against **CW&C priorities**
5. Public art projects should utilize **creativity in its broadest sense** and engage with the local and regional cultural infrastructure where possible.
6. When commissioning public art, we should be mindful of the wider context of creating a **high quality public realm**, and look to national, regional and local policies and guidance

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around innovative place making for support.

These objectives will be applied at the outset of this public art commission and will guide its development.