

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANT DIRECTOR DECISION – ADD2755

Legal services procurement for Culture and Community Spaces at Risk cases

Executive summary:

The Culture and Community Spaces at Risk programme provides advice and support for creative businesses, cultural organisations, and community groups on a case-by-case basis. It aims to move at-risk cultural and creative spaces out of immediate threat and towards long-term sustainability. The ongoing risks to creative and community infrastructure, following the pandemic, have not abated; it is critical that the programme continues to provide uninterrupted support.

The programme has seen an increase in cases requiring specialist legal support. With this funding, we can secure such support for organisations in need – addressing issues such as leases, rent negotiations and disputes, and understanding the nuances associated with organisations in this space. Failure to secure this support may lead to the loss of these vital spaces that offer so much to London's communities. The funding will support the work of the Helping Local Economies to Thrive mandate. This work also supports the Celebrating London delivery plan.

This decision seeks approval for the expenditure of up to £25,000 to appoint a specialist legal firm to manage specific cases concerning cultural and community spaces at immediate risk.

Decision:

That the Assistant Director of Culture, Creative Industries and 24 Hour London approves expenditure of up to £25,000 to procure a specialist legal firm to manage cases specifically concerning cultural and community spaces at immediate risk.

AUTHORISING ASSISTANT DIRECTOR/HEAD OF UNIT

I have reviewed the request and am satisfied it is correct and consistent with the Mayor's plans and priorities.

It has my approval.

Name: Shonagh Manson

Position: Assistant Director for Culture, Creative Industries and 24 Hour London

Signature:



Date:

14 April 2025

PART I - NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE

Decision required – supporting report

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1. Since 2016, the Culture and Community Spaces at Risk programme has provided advice and support for creative businesses, cultural organisations, and community groups on a case-by-case basis. This programme was previously approved by Mayoral Decisions 3115 and 3229. The programme aims to move at-risk cultural and creative spaces out of immediate threat and towards long-term sustainability.
- 1.2. In 2024, the Culture and Community Spaces at Risk programme provided eight organisations with legal support. The average cost in each instance was between £1,500 and £2,000. This level of support has been consistent for the past two financial years, and has been purchased on an ad hoc basis using a specialist legal firm. Specialist legal support is vital for organisations at risk of immediate closure, as they often don't have the capacity, knowledge or means to negotiate on issues such as leases, rent issues, licensing and disputes threatening their existence.
- 1.3. The level of support is expected to rise in this financial year, based on historic and current activity. To guarantee specialist support for cultural and community organisations with spaces at immediate risk, a procured contract is needed. The appointed firm will have an obligation to provide support in a timely manner, and the services provided will be tailored to the needs of the organisation.
- 1.4. The need is established by in-depth casework reviews, after the organisation has registered for support; and evaluated against set criteria. Legal support is only offered to organisations whose space is at immediate risk.
- 1.5. This decision form seeks approval to spend up to £25,000 to procure a specialist legal firm to manage cases specific to cultural and community spaces at immediate risk. The service will be procured in accordance with the GLA Contracts and Funding Code.

2. Objectives and expected outcomes

- 2.1. The proposed £25,000 of GLA revenue funding will enable legal support for up to 15 cultural and community organisations whose spaces are at risk.
- 2.2. This will achieve the following outcomes:
 - the sustainability of London-wide cultural and community organisations will be protected
 - cultural and community organisations can remain open, ensuring the cultural infrastructure of London is maintained for access by all Londoners and visitors.

3. Equality comments

- 3.1. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, as a public authority, the Mayor of London must have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation; and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between people who have a 'protected characteristic' as defined in the Equality Act 2010 and those who do not.
- 3.2. The proposed programme will ensure that cultural or community space is protected and sustained in a way that reflects the identities, and meets the diverse needs, of all Londoners; and fosters cohesion. It means opportunities for Londoners can continue to be created, providing social and economic

benefits in the capital. The programme seeks to ensure that all of London – particularly organisations from underrepresented groups – can enjoy, experience and benefit from being creative and taking part in London’s cultural offering. Support is prioritised to organisations led by and serving communities historically excluded from using and securing space. This includes those from Black, Asian or minority ethnic background; children and young people; Deaf and disabled people; members of the LBGTQ+ community; those on a low income; older people; and women-led groups.

4. Other considerations

4.1. The programme outlined in this decision also links to the following Mayoral strategies and mandates:

- Helping Local Economies to Thrive Mandate: this reflects the key role played by London’s small and medium-sized enterprises, in generating employment opportunities and sustainable growth in areas of the economy that provide essential goods and services for everyday life.
- London-level outcomes: this work ensures that London is an attractive and high-quality destination for visitors, and that Londoners feel able to take part in the city’s cultural life.
- Culture for All Londoners, the Mayor’s landmark strategy for culture: this outlines an ambitious vision to ensure all Londoners can engage with, and contribute to, the capital’s rich cultural offering on their doorsteps.
- The Cultural Infrastructure Plan: this sets out how London can support and grow cultural spaces in London for generations to come.

Impact assessments and consultations

- 4.2. The Mayor’s Culture and Community Spaces at Risk team surveyed 84 premise-based organisations in November 2022 – including arts centres, community spaces, artist workspaces and theatres – on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. The survey showed that organisations are twice as likely to be at risk of closure within three months, if they are led by ethnic minorities; children and young people; or people in low-income groups.
- 4.3. In 2024, the Mayor’s Culture and Community Spaces at Risk team commissioned research to understand the disparities and barriers faced by organisations led by underrepresented groups, making it hard for them to secure and sustain spaces for cultural and community uses. The report identifies barriers to achieving equity in access to space – with imbalance of power being a common theme. This imbalance exists in the processes that affect London’s community-led organisations and cultural spaces – for example planning, land and property ownership, and funding decisions. Overcoming these barriers requires all stakeholders to consider how they can shift power to the operators and users of space. This shift should mean involving communities as partners when shaping plans and making decisions that affect their assets. Understanding the barriers faced by underrepresented groups in securing and sustaining spaces for cultural and community uses is a vital first step in making tangible change happen.
- 4.4. The Mayor’s Cultural Infrastructure Plan identifies five ‘underlying conditions’ that threaten spaces’ survival:
- land value increases
 - the national planning system
 - business rate increases
 - licensing restrictions
 - funding reductions.

- 4.5. Organisations at immediate risk of closure often need legal support to mitigate the risks around the underlying conditions detailed above. As such, this funding is crucial to their future survival.

Risk

- 4.6. The main risk, and its mitigation, is outlined in the table below.

Risk	Mitigation	RAG rating
The number of organisations requiring support exceeds the agreed budget.	Organisations that register are assessed on a case-by-case basis, against set assessment criteria, to establish what legal support is required. Support will only be provided to organisations that meet criteria and are at immediate risk of closure.	Green

Conflicts of interest

- 4.7. There are no conflicts of interest to note for any of the officers involved in the drafting or clearance of this decision form.

5. Financial comments

- 5.1. This decision seeks approval for the expenditure of up to £25,000 to appoint a specialist legal firm to manage cases specific to cultural and community spaces at immediate risk.
- 5.2. This programme is linked to the Helping Local Economies Thrive delivery plan and there is budget within this plan to support this programme.

6. Planned delivery approach and next steps

- 6.1. The project will be delivered according to the following timetable.

Activity	Timeline
Start procurement of contract	April 2025
Legal specialist appointed	August 2025
Legal support provided to up to 15 organisations	March 2026

Appendices and supporting papers:

None.

Public access to information

Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA) and will be made available on the GLA website within one working day of approval.

If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary. **Note:** This form (Part 1) will be published either within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

Part 1 – Deferral

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? YES

If YES, for what reason: Details of the budget allocated for the service are commercially sensitive; this publication may unduly influence GLA's ability to achieve value for money through its tenders. Therefore, the publication must be deferred until all procurements are completed.

Until what date: 14 July 2025

Part 2 – Sensitive information

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under the FoIA should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form? NO

ORIGINATING OFFICER DECLARATION:

Drafting officer to
confirm the
following (✓)

Drafting officer:

Catherine Foxwell has drafted this report in accordance with GLA procedures and confirms the following:

✓

Mayoral Delivery Board

A summary of this decision was reviewed by the Mayoral Delivery Board on 14 April 2025.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, FINANCIAL SERVICES:

I confirm that financial and legal implications have been appropriately considered in the preparation of this report.

Signature:

Anna Gustaf

Date:

14 April 2025