

Civic Voice's Plan for 2023

Background

In April 2022, Civic Voice Trustees discovered that the organisation had been the victim of theft from one of its bank accounts. The loss of more than £90K posed an immediate threat to the future of Civic Voice.

An appeal to members for loans, advance payments of subscriptions and donations, along with consultancy work during the period has raised £63,250. This, together with normal membership revenues, allows Civic Voice to continue as a going concern into the spring (see financial plan Appendix 1).

This paper sets out a plan for the short-term consolidation of Civic Voice activity and recovery in the medium to long term, marrying both the external policy environment and membership need with the most likely sources of funding.

A focus on pride of place

Significant work was undertaken during the course of 2021 through a lottery funded project to develop a strategy which placed capacity building and local action at its heart. The intention was to prepare a "second stage" large scale lottery bid to embed this work in the medium and long term. Unfortunately, the theft has paused this work (though it may be revived in the next 12 months), but the key findings remain relevant and provide a platform for the recovery of Civic Voice. As the only national body with 'pride in place' at our heart, we want to build capacity and capability in civic societies by supporting local volunteer place leaders to engage new audiences, inspire civic action, and share best practices through a mutually supportive and more resilient network

Thus, the suggested overarching focus for 2023 is "pride of place" – a catch-all term that encapsulates much of what the civic movement is about but crucially is also a touching point with the UK Levelling Up Mission 9 and supports the UK Shared Prosperity Fund objectives. Mission 9 is very similar to the statement in the Civic Voice strategy which envisages a society in which everyone can say "I am proud of where I live." (Appendix 2 provides further information on this)

Based on this overarching statement, the following broad strands of work are proposed for 2023 to delivered

- Heritage at risk high streets
- Conservation areas at risk
- High quality design

These three areas have been chosen because they align with priorities identified from within the movement, they providing a clear purpose and rationale for individual societies, they directly address government policy priorities and offer the prospect of attracting external funding.

These priority areas are not intended to be exclusive - for example we will continue to support the movement by providing the membership with a platform for mutual learning on a wide variety of topics through the membership Monday initiative.

Activity programme

The delivery of these initiatives will be through a programme of activity to take place in the first few months of 2023. This is designed to flex according to resources, but the cornerstone of our offer will remain:

- 1) Regular email civic updates
- 2) Membership Mondays
- 3) An “in conversation” series of online discussions aligned with external policy priorities
- 4) Three APPG meetings in the Houses of Parliament in the first three months of 2023
- 5) Building up to a National Civic Day focusing on heritage high streets and the pride of place agenda

We will aim to deliver at least one membership Monday, one in conversation event and one APPG per month (when parliament is sitting), with the possibility of increasing this activity as resources allow. An indicative programme of events will be shown as part of the AGM presentation.

Resources

The working assumption is that until additional funding is raised, Civic Voice will only be able to employ one member of staff (Ian Harvey) with some temporary clerical assistance if affordable. This places a limit on what can be achieved.

One way in which this reduction in resource can be managed is by drawing on the expertise of the wider membership. A major focus for this will be through four working groups which we plan to establish in the new year. Each one will be chaired by a Trustee with support from the wider membership. They will focus on:

- **Campaigns and Policy.** Taking account of the external political environment in developing a focus for future campaigns and identifying how these campaigns should be run to maximise effectiveness as well as developing Civic Voice’s 2024 manifesto for the likely General Election in 2024
- **Fundraising.** Civic Voice has historically relied on external income for its activity. Only about one third of its income has come from membership subscriptions. The next six months are critical in enabling Civic Voice to ...firm footing. This group will identify funding opportunities and prepare funding bids. It will also make recommendations to the Board of Trustees about how by changing the subscription arrangements could be changed and more members attracted
- **Events.** This group will focus on identifying, supporting and delivering high quality events for the membership and key collaborators and stakeholders
- **Impact.** This group will look at how Civic Voice can maximise its impact and how it can best publicise this and influence policy makers

We will also be undertaking a review of our governance arrangements during the course of 2023, and a group will be identified to support this..

We will also re-establish and strengthen regional meetings using online facilities and will support direct engagement with and support to individual civic societies as resources allow.

Identifying new Trustees

There are currently five vacancies following the resignation of Trustees during the course of 2022. We want to fill these places initially by co-opting people to join the Board. We will be looking to identify (via recommendations from an independent membership panel) potential

Trustees who can offer support and expertise considering in particular the remit of the working groups identified above. Their positions will be confirmed in the usual way by election next October. A timetable for this process will be presented to the membership following the AGM.

Funding Opportunities

The working assumption must be that most or all of the funds stolen will not be recovered. However, we will continue to pursue all legal avenues until it becomes clear that this is a lost cause. That being said, we set out our current plans for seeking medium-long term funding to support Civic Voice and the civic movement

Discussions have commenced with **Historic England** about the submission of a funding bid focusing on Conservation Areas at risk.

We have plans to approach the **Heritage Lottery Fund** as part of their 'financial resilience' fund created as a legacy of the impact of Covid on the heritage sector.

In the medium term, a revisited and reworked lottery bid to support the resilience of the civic movement will be re-considered during the course of 2023. This becomes more realistic due to the **National Lottery Community Fund** recently publishing a new report looking at Pride in Place: <https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/news/press-releases/2022-11-22/new-report-reveals-how-national-lottery-funding-boosts-sense-of-local-pride-and-belonging>

We are in early stages of a conversation with a **Charitable Foundation** who were one of the founding funders for Civic Voice in 2010. This will be for general core costs and capacity support.

A focus on these the areas identified earlier Civic Voice with a platform to attract new funding. It is likely that as part of the Levelling Up legislation, further opportunities may arise for other consultancy income, and paid-for webinars and events around the priorities expressed in with planning reform and Levelling Up.

All of the above are likely to be about supporting the civic movement as a whole (not just Civic Voice) and our aims with any funding will be that the movement comes out strengthened. We recognise that to successfully obtain funding from these and other sources, we will need to be alive to the diversity and inclusion issues that go beyond the basics of community participation and voice. The civic movement is not the most inclusive and this will be an important barrier to overcome. This was an issue that Civic Societies identified themselves in our roundtable-discussion at the start of February 2022.

We recognise that securing external funding is challenging, but it is something we have been successful at doing over the last ten years. In that sense, the situation is no different from any other year. That being said, all of this needs to fit in with broader discussions around the current membership funding model and efforts to increase baseline income, to provide long term sustainability for the movement.

Next Steps

If the membership supports this approach, an update report on progress will be produced for an all-member meeting in May 2023. An online member meeting will also be held early in the new year to present these plans to the wider membership.

Appendix 1 Outline financial plan until November 2023

An appeal to members for loans, advance payments of subscriptions and donations, along with consultancy work during the period has raised £63,250 in the financial year to date.

We are assuming that if 80% of those societies who have not paid their membership in advance renew as normal, this will bring in another £30,000 during February and March 2023

Assuming no other income is forthcoming, and one member of staff (Ian Harvey) is employed, this would allow Civic Voice to continue as a going concern until November 2023. Clearly, we hope that we are successful in obtaining funding from at least one of the opportunities outlined below, but the financial plan gives Civic Voice up to 12 months to secure further funding.

Cash in hand on 1 December 2022	£9,438
Income (pledges) to be received	£15,668
Income (membership renewals)	£30,000
Income (grants/consultancy)	£11,000
Total income to 1 November 2023)	£66,106
Expenditure (staff)	£48,750
Expenditure (non staff)	£14,863
Total 30 November 2023	£2,493

Appendix 2 Levelling Up White paper Mission 9

Page 34:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1054766/Technical_annex_-_missions_and_metrics.pdf

Mission 9: By 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.

Key related capital(s): Institutional capital and Social capital

Principal objective(s): Restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they are slipping

How does this mission relate to spatial disparities? The extent to which people are satisfied with the place they live in varies significantly across the UK (Figure 11).¹²⁶ Local area satisfaction is connected to a number of variables including community engagement, local heritage, engagement in cultural life, access and quality of local amenities, and quality of town centres. These vary considerably across the UK and further research is required to understand what drives these variables.¹²⁷ Improvements are an essential component in building stronger and more cohesive communities. This mission is about strengthening social and institutional capital in left-behind areas, both crucial elements in driving long-term levelling up outcomes.

How will this mission be measured? Survey-based measures of pride in place are still in their infancy. These measures are subjective and, in some cases, not yet developed or designed to enable analysis at a spatial level. For example, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) runs the Community Life Survey, which measures aspects such as "sense of belonging". However, these data cover England only and can only be broken down into very large spatial units.¹²⁹ Likewise, think tanks such as Local Trust and Demos have made progress in researching what matters for pride in place and local area satisfaction.

The UK Government intends to carry out further work to identify and develop the most appropriate measures of pride in place, improve the evidence base on what determines it and assess how policies might be designed to improve it, especially in communities where it is low. There are considerable challenges to developing measures for pride of place. For example, there is currently no recorded measure of satisfaction with town centres and it will take time to expand existing surveys and collect enough data to identify trends and disparities. Additionally, further work is required to understand how measures such as town centre satisfaction and engagement in local culture and community respond to the levers available to government among other factors, how to define these measures, and how to best isolate the effect of interventions in the data. Is this mission ambitious, specific and achievable? This mission is exploratory. In order to set a credible and specific mission, the UK Government will undertake further work to supplement existing data on pride in place at a subnational level, as well as to understand the drivers of pride in place and identify the most impactful levers available to policymakers.