



## Report on Chatham Row

I have been asked by the CE arising from Elected Members queries to review and report on the Open Call process conducted by the City Arts Office to secure a potential occupant for the former DIT School of Music at Chatham Row.

The SPC on debating the short term occupancy granted to Dean Studios of this building in January 2022, set up a Subcommittee to examine the options for Dublin City Council in engaging the Arts, Cultural and Creative communities in a sustainable and successful use of this landmark building. Following consideration of these uses, the Working Group recommended that an Open Call process be established seeking ideas for the possible future uses for the building.

The City Arts Office have in recent years conducted staged Open Call processes for other cultural buildings at 15 Bachelors Walk, the former Filmbase in Temple Bar and at Artane Place. The City Arts Office led the Open Call process for Chatham Row. This process was designed by the executive in CRES, in consultation with the Development Department, with input from the Subcommittee of the Arts, Culture, Leisure and Recreation SPC.

I have reviewed the process, and have taken advice from the Law Agent, and I note that the Open Call process contained, as in previous applications of this kind, three distinct stages.

**Stage 1:** An Open call was widely publicised, requiring a simple statement of vision and a financial overview of this vision from each applicant. Information sessions were conducted on Zoom and viewings of the building were organised for prospective applicants. This first stage encouraged applicants into the process, as it was less daunting than the more technical stages that occurred later. Twenty seven applicants applied in Stage 1, proposing a range of diverse arts and cultural uses. A shortlisting Panel consisting of the City Arts Officer, An External Arts Curator with Venue experience, supported by the Chair of the Subcommittee proposed that 10 of the 27 applications proceed to Stage 2. The criteria applied at Shortlisting in Stage 1 and Stage 2 was based on the following: 1. Track Record 2. Quality of Offer 3. Feasibility.

**Stage 2:** The 10 shortlisted applicants were invited to respond to a set of further questions as part of Stage 2, and to produce evidence of their ability to programme and manage this building for Public Use, Rentable Use and Private Use by Artists or other cultural practitioners. An honorarium of €500 was offered to each of the applicants in Stage 2, to defray costs in preparing their applications. The responses were further considered by the shortlisting Panel, and it was agreed that 7 applicants proceed to interview for Stage 3. The Dean Arts Studio participated in all stages of this process as an applicant and were called to interview.

**Stage 3:** The interviewees were furnished with questions in advance, to assist them in preparing for the interview, where they were invited to make a presentation followed by a Q&A session. The evaluation of Stage 3 process was based on the following: 1. How the public could use the building either as a destination space or a drop in space 2. How communities, groups and individuals could use the building through rental use, through invitation to events or through collaboration and 3. How individual practitioners such as artists or other cultural practitioners could use the building privately to develop their practice. The interviews took place on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2023. The Assessment Panel consisted of the City Arts Officer, the Executive Manager Acting CRES, Cllrs Byrne and O'Driscoll and the External Arts Specialist found the standard of presentations to be very high and were faced with a difficult task in choosing the lead candidate. The results were communicated to all candidates. Those that sought feedback were given their scoring sheets and written feedback to specific queries. Naturally there was disappointment expressed by the unsuccessful parties, given the high calibre of qualified and experienced Stage 3 applicants.

The outcome of the process is that the successful applicant, an organisation called Flux will be invited to see if an agreement can be reached. The agreement will agree terms and conditions for Flux to occupy the building initially on a short term basis, based on their successful submission. The Property Department will work with the successful applicant to negotiate a one year Licence. Any proposal for a disposal that is subject to Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001, must be brought before the elected members for approval in a full Council meeting.

Following this review, I can confirm that there is no provision for an Appeal in this process. The process allowed for the executive function to negotiate terms for occupation of this Council buildings through the management of the Open Call process. The policy function of the SPC members was fulfilled through the Working Group and recommendation that an Open Call process be instigated. The Open Call process was carried out by the executive and it facilitated the participation of a number of the members of the Working Group.

Some aspects of the process could be improved upon, if a similar process is used in the future. The nature of the process may have led to the belief that the Arts SPC was the entity running the process, when is incorrect as the process was led by the executive with the support of the Arts SPC. In future it may be more advisable to have a selection process, which involves executive members only as this would reduce the risk of any confusion and the possibility of any potential disputes being raised in a public arena, regarding the outcome of a competition. Improvement could also be made in the quality of communication to applicants in providing feedback on the Stage 3 decision process. However having carried out this review, I am of the view that despite the opportunity to make some improvement if a similar process is used in the future, overall the process that was followed was transparent and robust. While it is acknowledged the disappointment expressed by unsuccessful applicants, I believe it is now time to move forward with the process for the successful applicant, to seek to agree a new licence agreement for this landmark building that will continue its cultural and artistic use.

**Anthony Flynn**  
**A/Assistant Chief Executive**  
**26<sup>th</sup> February 2024**