

# PUBLIC REPORT SWANSEA

PHIL WOOD  
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PUBLIC  
REPORT





# SWANSEA

In the inevitable and inexorable process of global change, one of the most significant corollaries has been the intensified movement of people, within and between countries. Cities are the spaces where these flows can be most vividly experienced.

How should cities respond to this? Perceive it as a threat to the status quo, a problem to be policed, or simply feign indifference? There are many that do. But there are growing numbers of cities that are prepared to embrace complexity and change – learning to manage the challenges but also to welcome potential new opportunities, connections and assets that are offered.

Swansea is one such city. Whilst its history as a port and production centre has long exposed Swansea to human diversity, and it consequently hosts several well-established minority communities, the post-industrial city has taken a proactive stance to welcoming newcomers, particularly through hosting two universities and also by becoming one of the UK's first Cities of Sanctuary.

Yet ethnicity is only one of many ways in which human diversity is expressed. We all live our lives with multiple abilities, identities and affiliation and it is no longer acceptable to suppress these in the name of social cohesion or economic efficiency. The responsibility now falls upon public services in cities to acknowledge and adapt to diversity in all its manifestations, and this includes the ways in which local authorities support the arts and culture.



# SWANSEA AS A PILOT CITY

When Swansea joined the Pilot Cities initiative and, when the local arts and culture community conducted its **inaugural self-assessment**, it came to the conclusion that: “the lack of diversity reflected in the participant stakeholders within this self-assessment exercise... indicates one of Swansea’s on-going weaknesses [is the] lack of diversity in the formal cultural sector.”

So, in association with Pilot Cities consultant Beatriz Garcia, the City Council’s Cultural Services and other stakeholders elaborated a **series of pilot measures** that it would work upon over the subsequent three years. Principal amongst these have been a coordinated effort to expand and diversify audiences for the City’s existing cultural venues and programmes, through enabling people of diverse backgrounds and lifestyles to play a more active role in the design and presentation of programmes. This has encompassed a range of existing and new activities:

- The **Fusion Project**, which reaches to build relationships with NGOs and non-formalised groups within the community where none previously existed. Through such bipartisan relationships, but ideally through multi-stakeholder ‘fusions’, new cultural constituencies and producers are emerging.
- Growing out of this, Swansea Council commissioned artist Rabab Ghazoul, to lead consultations with residents and users of the St Helens Road and Sandfields in 2017 and 2018, which led to the **production of a film – INTERSECTION** - which was publicly screened. It is the city’s most diverse district mixing many businesses, homes, schools and places of worship alongside institutions such as the YMCA, the Swan Gardens residential home for elderly Chinese people and EYST (Ethnic Minorities & Youth Support Team Wales). It started a conversation on how the district can be renovated and maintained sensitively without jeopardising the rich network of local connections. This led to the Swansea@50 Street Party in Sandfields in June 2019 facilitated by Fusion. The street party itself brought over 500 residents together to celebrate heritage and diversity and supported local organisations to work together.
- The **Dylan Thomas Centre**’s ongoing programme of work has been recognised as a **good practice** within the context of Pilot Cities. Going back to its first collaboration with Swansea Asylum Seekers Support Group in 1999, the Centre has been a beacon for intercultural reading and writing. Several anthologies of new writing have been published over the years and, in 2017 it began collaborating with the Cameroonian writer Eric Ngalle Charles, who developed an immediate rapport with local asylum seeker and refugee writers, and now his classes have become a regular and popular feature.



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- Swansea Council has also participated in the country-wide **Cultural Ambition programme** which aims to provide young people who are not in education, employment and training with 12-month training placements based wholly in heritage sites, while remotely working towards a qualification as a registered student. Swansea Council has created a one-year 30-hour placement based at Swansea Museum and the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, and sees it as a great opportunity to engage a young person from a group traditionally under-represented in its workforce.
- The **Sport and Health Team** has identified four key areas of low participation: in areas of poverty; amongst BAME populations, disabled people, and women and girls. In response to this, it has set up working Forums in the latter three categories and works closely with community organisations, educational establishments and the third sector in the first. Each Forum has terms of reference scoping their areas of work including consultation, programme review, monitoring and evaluation. Forum membership is fluid with efforts made for members to be representative of each target area in terms of age, gender, community, education, industry. The Forums provide an essential interface between Council staff and the public, particularly enhancing the influence which PPCs can have on management decisions and the design of services. Within each Forum, Sports and Health encourages lead representation from targeted groups and supports this through training and support of volunteers. In Partnership with the Ethnic Youth Support Team and Disability Sport Wales, the Sport and Health team directly deliver awareness training in areas of BAME participation and disability inclusion to community groups, governing bodies of sport and local sports clubs as well as to staff members of partner organisations such as facilities operations. Within the team there are lead officers in identified areas of inclusion who will assist team members in developing fully inclusive plans.
- However, the most ambitious part of the work has been the plan to **develop a Cultural Hub at Swansea's Grand Theatre**. Working with 15 minority ethnic organisations in the city the partnership, led jointly by the Council and Race Council Cymru, will turn unused space into offices and studios with an events area for digital and cultural events. Substantial Welsh Government funding has already been granted for conversion works, but the most innovative and challenging element will take several years to reach fruition, i.e. the creation of an artistic programme and income-generation plan which will be both diverse and inclusive whilst financially robust and self-sufficient. In its scope it has few parallels in Britain or elsewhere and will be observed and learned from by many.



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With the departure of Beatriz Garcia, Phil Wood was engaged to round off the three-year Pilot Cities programme. His approach was to guide Swansea Council towards a strategic framework in which to situate these burgeoning projects and relationships. It was agreed that Swansea Council's Cultural Services should step even further out of its 'comfort zone' by making a commitment to the citizens and visitors of Swansea that it will better reflect their diversity in everything it does. This has been dubbed the Swansea Diversity Pledge.



# TOWARDS THE DIVERSITY PLEDGE

The city has taken the broadest concept of diversity to include all people with 'protected characteristics' under equality legislation, i.e. relating to age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex and sexual orientation - as well as Welsh speakers and those living in economic disadvantage. It has also taken the broad concept of culture so the Pledge encompasses the work of Special Events Team, Sports and Health, Tourism & Marketing, Community Centres, Swansea Museum, Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea Grand Theatre, Dylan Thomas Centre, the Fusion Project, Cultural Partnerships and Swansea Libraries.

The Pledge is values-based, asserting that all people have an equal right to benefit from, and express themselves through, culture and that Swansea Council must be proactive in facilitating this. But it is also a pragmatic exercise, responding to some very tangible challenges that the Cultural Services face. Namely, that traditional audiences for Swansea Council's venues and services are changing and numbers are in decline. If the Service is to remain viable and relevant in a period of financial difficulty then it must attract and hold on to new audiences – from a much more diverse population base.

The format of the Pledge is very practically orientated. It sets out to challenge the Service through asking new questions and seeking new solutions through the formation of new relationships often beyond its traditional remit. However, it does not start from a blank canvas, acknowledging there are already examples of good practice within the Service which should be more widely adopted and expanded. The Pledge sets some minimum standards of quality beneath which the Service should not fall – and the public is invited to hold Swansea Council to account on this. It also puts up some aspirational targets for how the Service should improve over coming years and indications of how this can be measured and evaluated. This methodology is applied across four strands of work:

- **Telling, Listening and Sharing - Relationships, Communications & Participation.** How we'll reach out, build relationships and involve more people in dialogue around the City's culture and sport offer.
- **Ideas into Action - Plans, Projects & Programmes.** How we'll ensure events and activities in our venues reflect the experiences of all by drawing on a broader pool of people, ideas and inspiration.
- **Making the Most of Us - Audience, Ticketing, Welcoming & Access.** How we'll make it easier and attractive for more people to use our services, by getting to understand what they want, and be smarter at delivering it.



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- **Behind the Scenes - Organisational Culture, Governance, Recruitment & Representation.** How we'll ensure that, from top to bottom, our cultural and sports organisations will look, think, act more like – and be more representative of – our diverse population.

The result is a strategic document which can be easily accessed by staff and public alike to readily appreciate what their responsibilities and rights are.

To give added weight to the commitment, the Pledge introduces mechanisms by which the Service can be made accountable for its actions. Firstly there is provision for a Pledge Panel to be formed of independent people who understand and experience the diverse needs of service users. The role of the Panel is to review progress on the goals of the Pledge, to offer guidance, to comment upon the allocation of priorities and resources, and to communicate the Pledge's message to the wider community.

Secondly it is suggested that, each year, a Pledge Convention will be held at which broader communities of PPCs will come together to review and to re-energise the Pledge. Partner organisations should be invited to the Convention and invited to make their own pledges.

Swansea Council acknowledges that whilst it is the principal provider of cultural infrastructure and services in the city, it sits within a rich tapestry of other protagonists. The aim is that, in due course, all the main actors across the public, NGO and private sectors will also 'sign the Pledge' and agree to abide by it and add to it.

In conclusion it can be seen that Swansea has kept to the spirit of Pilot Cities, by honestly acknowledging its shortcomings and robustly responding. It has set itself some very ambitious and serious challenges and has invited the public to scrutinise its efforts to address them. It is doing this at one of the most difficult times in Swansea Council's recent history, with the effects of a decade of financial austerity and the ongoing disruption of Brexit taking their toll. But it has concluded that neither 'business as usual' complacency, nor a defensive exercise of 'protect and survive', would be acceptable. Only by a complete reappraisal of what it does, why and for whom, can it continue to be relevant and viable. There is much to be learned by other Pilot Cities from observing Swansea's progress.





# CONTACT

For additional information about this exercise, please contact:



## Swansea City Council

Chris Mellor, Strategy Manager Arts, Culture and Creative Economy

Email: [Christopher.Mellor@swansea.gov.uk](mailto:Christopher.Mellor@swansea.gov.uk)

Web: [www.swansea.gov.uk](http://www.swansea.gov.uk)



## Committee on Culture of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)

Email: [info@agenda21culture.net](mailto:info@agenda21culture.net)

Web: [www.agenda21culture.net](http://www.agenda21culture.net)





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