



Newcastle as a British Council Focus City

Briefing Note – April 2019

Background

We are delighted to have been selected to be one of nine UK Focus Cities for the British Council as part of their new approach to working with cities and devolved administrations, called the Global Cities Strategy 2019-2025. This provides a framework, approaches and tools to support cities' internationalism agendas and activities. The strategy is still in development and will be launched in Autumn 2019.

The British Council has a new Cities Team based in the UK, which will work with a small number of 'Focus Cities', who will benefit from the new framework. They will have access to British Council's extensive experience around urban challenges, its vast range of global relationships and to a global network of cities, data and research.

Focus Cities will be supported to develop new internationalist City Plans which identify challenges and ambitions and engage stakeholders. They will agree action plans to address their key priorities, as well as profiling and sharing their city's specialisms and expertise. Eight cities have already been confirmed as Focus Cities in the UK (Birmingham, Manchester, Belfast, Glasgow, Liverpool, Bristol, Swansea, Hull and Coventry).

The opportunity to be one of nine Focus Cities was offered to Newcastle following the IN Chair, Director and Board Members' engagement with the British Council's new Director of England and Cities and subsequent discussions with City Council leads and a selected group of key partners on 23rd November. City Council approval was needed to progress as a Focus City. IN prepared a paper for consideration by lead members and officers, a 'green light' to move forward was given on 31st January and there were further internal Council discussions in February.

The British Council's Director of England and Cities offered a small grant to International Newcastle to support this work in the coming year, which will provide greater capacity to evolve and support the city-wide partnership, increase stakeholder engagement and to develop and deliver the City Plan and actions to take this forward. There may also be opportunities to lever in additional resources as the plan develops and activities and actions are agreed.

What could it mean to be a Focus City?

The City Plan will provide a framework for internationalism and help city-wide partners make the most of all the partners' energy, links, specialisms and resources and delivering on the outcomes for internationalism for the city in the medium to long term.

There is genuine enthusiasm from those involved in discussions to date in joining up the approach to internationalism and a recognition of the potential to do much more by galvanising partners across the city and providing a framework within which we can work together and maximise our expertise, links and resources for the benefit of all.

The Focus city work will build on the strengths of International Newcastle's partners and wider community in building and sustaining international partnerships and programmes.

Recognising the negativity around Brexit and concerns about what will happen next and how the UK and the city will be perceived, Newcastle's emerging city narrative promotes the city as welcoming and outward looking. North of Tyne devolution seeks to promote internationalism, as a means to achieve common priorities and objectives. Newcastle also has significant international links across a wide range of partners operating internationally and involved in European and

international networks, including the City Council, universities, colleges and school, business and enterprise, voluntary and community sector, cultural sector and the wide range of international communities living here.

The opportunity

At a time when resources and capacity are increasingly restricted across organisations and sectors and international links, activities and ambitions are not joined up, being a Focus City can help:

- provide impetus for a more coherent and collaborative approach to internationalism
- lever in additional resources via the British Council and other funders/investors for activities related to the City Plan and action plan, as well as through wider partners involved from the city
- facilitate collaboration with a broad range of partners across the city and potentially North of Tyne, bringing together their expertise, experience and resources
- highlight shared challenges and ambitions where the city could learn from other approaches across the world and make relevant connections
- showcase on a global platform, areas where the city has specialisms
- support deeper, richer and more beneficial international links
- add value across the board by internationalising existing strategies, approaches and practice
- offer a wide range of insights, best practice examples and potential exchange with other cities globally
- enable City partners to access the British Council's resources and extensive networks and experience, which could bring economic, social and cultural benefits to the city and its residents

Working with the British Council as a Focus City will give the development of a city-wide partnership and City Plan impetus and gravitas, with the range of opportunities this would bring. Newcastle partners would also be learning from the processes already underway in other UK Focus Cities. The British Council's Focus Cities' framework could adapt to fit Newcastle's needs, bringing together city partners to identify shared aims, assets and resources to support this.

International Newcastle's role

- act as a strategic hub for the city's work with the British Council and partnership on internationalism
- co-ordinate and drive the development of the international City Plan and action plan
- develop, support and facilitate a city-wide partnership to support the City Plan and deliver the action plan
- monitor and report progress, profile successes and learning

International Newcastle will support the city-wide partnership with:

- communication and connectivity with British Council, other Focus Cities, partners across the city and beyond
- brokering links and facilitating discussion and learning – stakeholder engagement, partnership development
- identifying and profiling areas of innovation and expertise with city-wide partners
- seeking good practice from elsewhere (via British Council and city networks) on areas/issues the city would like to learn from around challenges
- supporting shared leadership in taking forward the action plan
- identifying and sharing of resources and expertise to support the work, rather than relying on one organisation, such as the City Council or IN alone.

Initial steps:

- **Liaison with British Council** on taking forward Focus City development in Newcastle, sharing learning on what other cities have done and what support the British Council's Cities Team can provide, as well as what is happening with the launch and next steps nationally (Mar+)
- **Convening a Focus City Partners' Workshop** To explore what the vision, principles and partnership approach for a draft international city plan, which can form the basis of wider discussion and action plans, (held 4th April 2019)
- **Taking forward next steps** to develop an international city plan and partnership around a key theme (May+)