

Grants and Sponsorship - Ad Hoc Grant - Qtopia (Support for Free Sundays)**File No: S118738****Summary**

On 17 February 2025, Council via a Lord Mayoral Minute, requested that the Chief Executive Officer provide a report to Council on the recommended response to Qtopia Ltd's request for further funding to enable free entry on Sundays for another period of 12 months.

Qtopia opened on 23 February 2024 as a centre for queer history and culture in the former Darlinghurst Police Station. Qtopia has advised that it has mounted 19 exhibitions and presented 87 productions in its first 12 months. One of its exhibitions received 2 awards, while another was nominated. The live productions attracted a total audience of around 9,000 across 276 performances. The Loading Dock Theatre was used as the Queer Hub during the Sydney Fringe Festival. The centre also advises that the free entry on a Sunday has enabled over 10,000 visitors in its first year.

The acquittal report for the initial sponsorship is due by 31 March 2025; however, the funding period will end on 1 March 2025. If this recommendation is supported, then City staff will work with Qtopia staff to provide an early acquittal and detailed proposal for the next 12 months prior to payment of the new sponsorship.

It is recommended that Council approve an ad hoc grant to Qtopia Ltd for \$100,000, to support programming, curation and artist fees, associated staffing and marketing costs. Qtopia will provide free access on Sundays for a period of 12 months from 1 March 2025 or from when the contract is signed.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council approve a \$100,000 (excluding GST) cash grant to Qtopia Ltd;
- (B) Council note that payment of this grant will only be made once the previous grant to support free entry on a Sunday has been satisfactorily acquitted and that Qtopia is encouraged to apply for funding for free entry through a funding round in the future;
- (C) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to negotiate, execute and administer the grant agreement with Qtopia Ltd on appropriate terms and conditions in relation to acquittal of grant funds and pre-conditions to payment of grant tranches to the subject report; and
- (D) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to correct minor changes to the matters set out in this report, noting that the identity of the recipient will not change, and a CEO Update will be provided to Council advising of any changes made in accordance with this resolution.

Attachments

Nil.

Background

1. On 11 April 2022, Council endorsed a proposal from Qtopia Ltd for a permanent LGBTIQ+ museum at the site of the former Darlinghurst Police Station, which was preceded by an interim museum in the Oxford Street precinct during Sydney WorldPride 2023
2. Further to the 11 April 2022 Council resolution, on 16 May 2022, Council approved a \$283,500 cash grant to Qtopia Ltd to cover a portion of the start-up costs identified in their business plan. On 5 September 2023 the NSW Government handed over the former Darlinghurst Police Station to Qtopia Ltd for a permanent LGBTIQ+ museum.
3. On 23 February 2024, Qtopia officially opened.
4. In 2024 Qtopia Ltd. provided a proposal for Sundays at Qtopia seeking \$100,000 to support free entry for 12 months. The council supported this proposal in February 2024. This funding is due to cease on 1 March 2025 and be acquitted by the end of March 2025.
5. Qtopia has sought a further 12 months of funding to enable them to offer free entry on a Sunday.
6. Based on the proposal received in 2024, Qtopia will achieve increased visitation through the offer of free entry. As at the time of opening, Qtopia aligns with Justice Sackar's recommendations to the NSW Government commissioned Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ Hate Crimes by hosting exhibitions exploring Sydney and Australian Queer history and implementing a pre-bunking strategy of the community. Access to these exhibitions will be facilitated by the provision of free entries on Sundays, which will encourage a broader attendance. This also aligns with actions from the Lord Mayor's LGBTIQ+ Safety Summit held in February 2024.
7. City staff will be seeking, through the acquittal report for the past 12 months of sponsorship, details on attendance numbers and the diversity of engagement with the community. If further funding is approved, payment of this contract will not be made until an acquittal report is approved.
8. Qtopia will be encouraged to apply through a funding round in the future.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

9. Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision renews the communities' vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2050. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the city, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This report is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 7 – Resilient and diverse communities – Sundays at Qtopia will drive visitation to the Oxford Street creative precinct and contribute to the character of the local area.

- (b) Direction 8 - A thriving cultural and creative life – Sundays at Qtopia will make a significant contribution to the cultural life of Sydney and provide an important program of events celebrating the history and contemporary experience of the city and its communities.
- (c) Direction 9 - A transformed and innovative economy – Sundays at Qtopia will contribute to Sydney's reputation as an inclusive city with a vibrant and diverse cultural life, contributing to innovation and talent attraction.

Risks

- 10. This recommendation is within the City's risk appetite, which states:
 - (a) We make decisions that align with our corporate objectives, policies and strategies and are committed to conducting our activities in full compliance with applicable laws, regulations and relevant industry standards.
 - (b) We foster a culture of ethics, integrity and responsible behaviour across our organisation. By creating a strong ethical foundation, we aim to minimise the likelihood of reputation-damaging incidents and enhance our ability to respond effectively when challenges arise.
 - (c) The City has a responsibility to ensure that it has sufficient resources in the short, medium and long term to provide the levels of service that are both affordable and considered appropriate by the community.

Social / Cultural / Community

- 11. Community engagement related to the Oxford Street Creative Precinct Planning Controls registered strong interest in the delivery of Qtopia within the Oxford Street precinct. Support for Sundays at Qtopia will help deliver this community aspiration and will provide a meaningful program of events for the LGBTIQ+ community and visitors to city.

Financial Implications

- 12. In the first instance, the required funding of \$100,000 will be drawn from forecast operational savings across the City Life 2024/25 budget. If the savings are not available any shortfall will be sought from the CEO's contingency fund

Relevant Legislation

- 13. Section 356 of the Local Government Act 1993 provides that a council may, in accordance with a resolution of the council, contribute money or otherwise grant financial assistance to persons for the purpose of exercising its functions.
- 14. Public exhibition of this sponsorship is not required because the funds are being paid to a not-for-profit organisation that is not operating for private gain.

Public Consultation

15. Extensive consultation was undertaken in the development of planning controls for the Oxford Street Creative Precinct. This consultation revealed a strong sentiment that the City of Sydney should actively work to maintain the LGBTIQ+ culture and character of the Oxford Street precinct. In response, the City has published the LGBTIQ+ Social and Cultural Place Strategy for Oxford Street with 5 priority areas:
- recognising historic LGBTIQ+ places and spaces
 - reflecting the contemporary LGBTIQ+ community within local businesses and venues
 - increasing LGBTIQ+ cultural and social spaces
 - increasing LGBTIQ+ visibility and identity throughout the precinct, and
 - ensuring the local community is safe and supported.

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