

TITLE	Arts & Culture Strategy
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 25 March 2021
WARD	None Specific
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Regeneration - Charlotte Haitham Taylor

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The report seeks approval for the Arts & Culture Strategy following consultation on a draft as agreed by the Executive in the spring of last year.

The Council currently does not have a cultural strategy but has an aspiration that the Borough's cultural offer will grow and develop into the future from a strong base of existing activity. The strategy has the potential over time to significantly further enhance the cultural and leisure offers in the Borough to the benefit of the vast majority of residents, improving quality of life and enhancing well-being. The strategy is closely aligned with the principles and priorities of key national agencies such as Arts Council England (ACE) and Public Health England (PHE) and has the potential to leverage external funding. The strategy is potentially a key strand for delivering the Council's Community Vision: 'for Wokingham Borough to be a great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business.' In particular it addresses the linked strategic priority for 'Enriching Lives' but it also contributes to 'Safe, Strong Communities' as well as addressing elements of the Health and Well-being Strategy.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) approves the attached Arts & Culture Strategy;
- 2) notes the appended Action Plan for implementing the Strategy over the coming year;
- 3) endorses the establishment and role of the Arts & Culture Alliance as the key strategic partnership for implementing the Strategy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the context of a growing population and the Borough's reputation as an excellent place to live with a high quality of life, the quality of the cultural offer can play a significant role in enhancing the Borough's reputation and enriching the lives of residents. Building from a strong base of events and activities (see the indicative annual programme at Appendix 5) the strategy seeks to further develop the cultural offer and extend the many associated social and economic benefits. Of course the existing offer has been and continues to be impacted by the pandemic but as the year progresses and into the future the exciting and wide-ranging programme of events right across the Borough can return and be further developed.

Following approval of the draft strategy by the Executive consultation has taken place with the public, arts & culture organisations and Town & Parish Councils. Whilst the Covid pandemic has significantly restricted the nature of the consultation, especially as regards to face to face interaction with the public, there has been a good and positive overall response.

Effective delivery of the arts & culture strategy will be dependent on the actions and resources of a wide range of agencies, partners and stakeholders, including our residents. A key element of progress since the consultation draft strategy was approved has been the establishment of the 'Arts & Culture Alliance' (in October 2020) as a partnership vehicle involving key stakeholders for taking forward implementation of the strategy. The Alliance includes cross-party political representation as well as a range of key local arts & culture organisations.

The Arts & Culture Alliance has had a key role in developing the initial Action Plan for delivering the strategy. The Action Plan is attached to this report for information and it seeks to ensure that there is progress against each of the high level priorities identified in the strategy. The Action Plan will be a live and iterative document that will be reviewed by the Alliance every 6 months. Ongoing public and stakeholder engagement will be a key priority for the Alliance into the future, as will its own further development as an effective strategic partnership.

Appendices:

1. Arts & Culture Strategy
2. Arts & Culture Strategy: The Arts & Culture Alliance Action Plan
3. Arts & Culture Strategy: Equality Impact Assessment
4. Arts & Culture Strategy: Summary Report - Consultation Responses
5. Indicative Annual Programme of Events

BACKGROUND

The Arts & Culture Strategy is set firmly in the context of national policy and guidance and with the associated priorities of key national agencies: Arts Council England and Public Health England. Over recent years national policies have shifted from a focus on activity to outcomes and particularly the impact on health and well-being of residents and an increasing focus on environmental sustainability.

As recently as 2016 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) produced and presented to Parliament its 'Culture White Paper', the first for over 50 years. The White Paper was very clear about the benefits of culture and why the Government should invest to support its development:

- The intrinsic value: the enriching value of culture in and of itself;
- The social value: improving educational attainment and helping people to be healthier; and
- The economic value: the growing contribution culture makes to economic growth and job creation.

Arts Council England launched its new ten year strategy 'Let's Create' in January 2020. The new strategy for 2020-30 focuses on individual creative potential and the need for artists, arts organisations, museums and libraries to play an important role in every community, bringing people together, supporting local economies and helping to improve lives. The four key investment principles for the next 10 years will be inclusivity and relevance, dynamism, environmental responsibility and ambition and quality. There is also a specific pledge to boost library spending.

PHE have a strong influence on policy and practice nationally with regard to promoting enhanced well-being and, in parallel, the NHS has a challenging target to make a step-change in the quantum of 'social prescribing' over the next three to four years. They also have a strong evidence base of what works and are a key source of data for informing local strategies and priorities.

BUSINESS CASE

In the context of a growing population and the Borough's reputation as an excellent place to live with a high quality of life, the quality of the cultural offer can play a significant role in enhancing the Borough's reputation and enriching the lives of residents.

Cultural activities are universal in their ability to contribute to well-being and impact on all residents across all age-groups. In addition they can support better outcomes for more vulnerable groups, be this tackling social isolation, improving health and well-being or educational attainment. Unsurprisingly the strategy therefore links to a range of the Council's key priorities and has touch points with a large number of Council services. The Borough does not currently have a cultural strategy and with increasing interest in, and support for, developing the cultural offer and identity of the Borough this is a substantive gap. An up to date approved strategy that aligns with both national imperatives and local priorities is extremely useful in shaping future provision, extending reach to more vulnerable cohorts and communities, co-ordinating and aligning activity across a range of partners and stakeholders and for maximising the impact of collective resources. Set within the context of national policy, the attached strategy sets out an

ambitious vision, key priorities and desired outcomes; supported by the appended more detailed initial action plan to support delivery of the longer-term outcomes.

Consultation on the strategy elicited responses from 5 Town & Parish Councils, 11 arts & cultural organisations and 99 members of the public (via an on-line survey). A summary of the consultation responses is attached at Appendix 4. Whilst the Covid pandemic has significantly restricted the nature of the consultation, especially as regards to face to face interaction with the public, there has been a good and very positive overall response.

Many of the more detailed and specific responses to the consultation will need to be picked up in the ongoing implementation and via the Action Plan. They also highlight the acknowledged and ongoing need for further engagement and collaboration into the future: with arts & cultural organisations; our Town & Parish Councils; and with local residents and communities, including children and young people who were not strongly represented in the feedback to date (this links with one of the key priorities in the strategy).

With regard to the Strategy itself, the consultation responses have directly resulted in the following significant changes to the draft:

1. The Covid pandemic – the draft Strategy was written immediately prior to the pandemic, indeed it's consideration by the Executive was delayed by a month because of the resulting cancellation of the scheduled meeting in March 2020. Feedback was that it was important to reference this context because of its widespread impact directly on the arts & culture sector and residents' lack of opportunity to engage other than virtually. This has been addressed in the re-drafted introductory section of the Strategy.
2. Climate Emergency – there was a desire to ensure that the Strategy made a more explicit connection to the issues of environmental sustainability given the significance of this in the context of the Borough's declaration of a Climate Emergency. How the Arts & Culture Strategy links to environmental issues has therefore been added, along with a commitment to ensure that the aspiration to be carbon neutral is fully factored in to implementation plans and related activities.
3. Cultural Venues – whilst the wealth of local arts and cultural organisations and activities was strongly supported, the absence of 'major' cultural venues or a 'cultural hub' was a feature of responses from both arts & cultural organisations and the general public. Addressing this 'gap' is undoubtedly a major challenge but for an aspirational 10 year strategy it feels appropriate to articulate this need. New and enhanced cultural venues have therefore been included within the desired outcomes for Priority 1 in the Strategy: Enhancing cultural identity and sense of 'place'.

In parallel with the consultation process work has been undertaken to establish the Arts & Cultural Alliance as a partnership vehicle involving key stakeholders for taking forward implementation of the strategy. The Alliance held its first meeting in October 2020 and has subsequently played a pivotal role in the development of the initial Action Plan to progress implementation of the Strategy and this pays testimony to the enthusiasm and commitment of the many cultural organisations in the Borough. The Alliance includes

cross-party political representation as well as a range of key local arts & culture organisations.

The Action Plan is attached to this report for information and it seeks to ensure that there is progress against each of the high level priorities identified in the strategy. The Action Plan will be a live and iterative document that will be reviewed by the Alliance every 6 months. Ongoing public and stakeholder engagement will be a key priority for the Alliance into the future, as will its own further development as an effective strategic partnership.

It is worth noting that the Council has also developed a refreshed Leisure Strategy (also on the agenda for the Executive) and that both strategies play a complementary role in ‘enriching lives’, as well as having connections between them, particularly in relation to the shared use of indoor and outdoor leisure venues and country parks, creating animated spaces and some areas of activity, such as dance, contributing to both.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1) 2021/22	£0	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	

Other Financial Information

The strategy will be delivered in partnership under the auspices of the Arts & Culture Alliance and for the Council from within existing budgets supported by income generation and external funding.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Stakeholder and public consultation on the draft strategy and action plan has taken place though was limited to on-line consultation due to the pandemic. The Arts & Culture Alliance has also been established as a vehicle for further engagement on an ongoing basis, including with children and young people, and it has had an active role in the development of the initial Action Plan.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Due regard has been taken to the Public Equality Duty and an Equalities Impact Assessment is attached to this report.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

Environmental responsibility is one of the Arts Council’s key investment principles as part of its 10 year strategy. The strategy acknowledges the links to the Climate Emergency and the value of arts & culture as a means of exploring and promoting the linked themes and issues. Aspirations for carbon neutrality will be explicitly addressed through the action plan and practical actions linked to delivery.

List of Background Papers

None

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