

Meeting of the Cabinet - 8th August 2024

Report of the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise

Dudley Borough Cultural Strategy

Purpose of report

1. To seek Cabinet approval for the proposed Dudley Cultural Strategy and Action Plan.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended:-
 - That Cabinet approves the Dudley Borough Cultural Strategy and Action Plan (Appendices 1 and 4 respectively) noting paragraphs 17 to 20 about governance and resources;
 - That Cabinet endorses the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities, Climate Change and Economic Delivery, to implement the strategy and align the spend of available grant funding with its delivery;
 - That Cabinet endorses the Castle Hill Vision (appendix 2), recognising its role and contribution towards the Cultural Strategy;
 - That Cabinet notes the 2020 *Art in the Public Realm* Strategy and agrees that it be reviewed and refreshed to align with the Cultural Strategy and other relevant strategies/policies.

Background

3. In June 2023 the Council appointed SQW to prepare an Economic Regeneration Strategy (ERS) for the borough. This was adopted by the Council in March 2024. As the strategy was being developed there was a clearly identified need for a Cultural Strategy – both in recognition of the

emergence of 'culture and the visitor economy' as one of the four main themes of the ERS, and the need for a culture strategy to underpin applications and business cases for increasing availability of culture funding. The Council is currently in receipt of nearly £650k from the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) for different aspects of cultural activity in 2024/25 and is anticipating being able to bid for a similar amount again for 2025/26. This is in addition to funding received from other sources such as £1,458,688 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for the Townscape Heritage Initiative which concluded March 2024, and just over £2m from Historic England for Brierley Hill's Heritage Action Zone (HAZ).

4. The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) has launched a process to support the development of 'Place Based Strategies' across the West Midlands area. These are to be based around five pillars, one of which is local growth and place which includes culture, tourism and heritage. Therefore, the development of a Cultural Strategy for Dudley also helps to inform and support the WMCA's place based work and positions the borough of Dudley for related support and funding which may flow as a result.
5. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) funding was secured under the Communities & Place pillar for the development and delivery of a Cultural Strategy. The Council commissioned "A View From a Hill" to undertake the development of a Cultural Strategy. The Strategy is intended to be a Strategy for the borough, recognising the breadth of what culture means to people and the diversity of organisations, businesses, partners and stakeholders who all contribute to the Cultural economy of Dudley.
6. The development process by A View from a Hill, included analysis to create a baseline assessment, a set of three exploratory workshops with stakeholders followed by a further three feedback workshops to test the emerging themes and ideas, one-to-one conversations with partners, and alignment with the ERS. Throughout the process there has been close liaison with a core group of Council officers.
7. The strategy represents a refreshed approach to the definition and delivery of cultural activity and services. Culture has a significant role to play across multiple agendas and how these synergies can be exploited will be explored through implementation of the strategy. For example:
 - The economic contribution of the UK creative industries grew by 6.8% in 2022 to reach £124.6bn. In real terms, this means the economic value of the UK creative industries was 12 per cent bigger in 2022 than before the COVID pandemic and more than 50 per

cent larger than its size in 2010. (Source: [The Creative Industries Council](#))

- Research undertaken on behalf of the WMCA in 2023 indicated that 46,000 people are employed across the cultural sector in the West Midlands creating £1.2 billion gross value added (GVA) and £559 million indirect GVA, with heritage tourism in the West Midlands totalling £780 million.
- In addition, the research undertaken by A View from a Hill to support the strategy development estimates that the culture and creative sector in the borough equates to 12,794 jobs and over £88m in GVA
- Arts Council [research](#) identifies that, while arts and culture cannot be expected to bring about significant behavioural change in relation to reoffending, the skills, creativity and social connections made through culture and the arts can reduce 'risk factors' and can help ex-offenders tackle problems linked with their identity away from crime.
- Recently [Historic England](#) has published a report with findings that overall wellbeing value for people's day-to-day encounters with heritage is estimated to be worth £29 billion every year in England.

The Strategy

8. The Strategy is based around a 10 year vision, a set of outcomes that the strategy should achieve, five themes which should shape activity to be taken forward, and proposals for the governance, structures and resources that may facilitate delivery of the actions, outcomes and vision. All of these have been derived through data-led research, and consultation and engagement.
9. The Strategy sets out an ambition for the Borough of Dudley to *"become a place where everyone can participate in culture how and if they want to. There will be equity of opportunity from community led co-creation, to culture that reflects the ethnicity and demographics of all communities, to work that is ambitious and covers every art form. Everyone will be able to access culture as they want to - from the many green spaces within the borough, beside a canal, on a high street, in a neighbourhood, in a venue or on a stage."*

It is therefore covering the cultural creators and contributors as well as those who participate and consume, recognising that culture means different things to different people, but everyone should have an opportunity to engage because of the range of benefits culture brings.

10. The strategy seeks to achieve the following outcomes for the borough:
- Increased numbers of people and organisations will be able to produce cultural activity
 - Cultural activity will support increased vibrancy and activity on local high streets and within neighbourhoods.
 - There will be a greater variety of cultural activity, reflecting the changing ethnicity and demographics of the borough.
 - There will be increased ambition within the cultural sector
 - Greater numbers of people will participate in culture - diverse and multi-generational, reflecting the change demographics of the borough.
 - New cultural clusters will be formed and external cultural organisations will choose to locate to the borough, forming a new cohesive cultural ecology.
 - The profile of the borough will be raised, supporting higher levels of growth for the culture, creative and tourism sectors.
11. It then provides a framework of five key themes which should inform and shape priorities for activity and investment:

Theme 1: investing in capacity building to build stronger resilience within the creative and cultural sectors

12. This theme seeks to help the creative and cultural sectors grow, develop and thrive through facilitating networks, training and capacity building within the sector. Through a strengthening of the sector this should not only ensure the longevity of cultural activity but also its adaptability and expansion of what's on offer.

There are three key actions recommended to contribute towards this theme:

1a) business support to help the sector develop and lead activity.

1b) resource(s) to support collaboration in the sector and provide an interface between relevant Council services and cultural / creative organisations.

1c) External funding and bid writing capacity to lever in funding to support delivery of the strategy.

These support delivery of Theme 3 of the Economic Regeneration Strategy: Creating a vibrant creative and cultural environment, and

supporting the Visitor Economy, as well as Theme 4: Reinventing town centres across the borough.

Theme 2: continuing to invest in skills development to support future culture leaders and to support life-long learning

13. This theme recognises the role that culture has in upskilling – which has benefits in terms of economic contribution and health and wellbeing -, and the strong adult education programme which is already being delivered across the Borough. It recommends continuation of this and expansion into a leadership programme for young, aspiring leaders in the sector with a view to developing and retaining their skills and talents in the Borough.

2a) Continue current education programmes to ensure that through cultural activity, opportunities for life-long learning are supported.

2b) Develop a leadership programme for the sector to develop young people as the next generation of culture leaders.

These outcomes support delivery of Theme 2 of the Economic Regeneration Strategy: Investing in people and building skills for tomorrow.

Theme 3: increased diversity of programming

14. This theme seeks to expand and enhance the cultural activity in the Borough to make it accessible to different groups, particularly young people. It particularly refers to where cultural and creative activity is commissioned and how these opportunities can support a range of cultural producers as well as reaching a wider audience.

3a) Work with new and existing partners to specifically deliver activity which engages younger people in culture.

3b) Facilitate area-based culture programmes ‘Cultural Action Zones’ (CAZ) opening up delivery of, and access to, cultural activity at a local level.

3c) Work with Town Boards to use CAZs to contribute to regeneration agendas locally.

3d) To bring together relevant organisations to attract and develop high quality work across different art forms to further add to the diversity of the cultural offer.

This theme of commissioning and leveraging funding is consistent with the *Art in the Public Realm Strategy*, commissioned by the Council in 2020. It is therefore proposed that the *Art in the Public Realm Strategy* is reviewed and refreshed where appropriate to further support delivery of the Culture Strategy where relevant.

Facilitating a diversity of programming aligns with theme 3 of the Economic Regeneration Strategy: Creating a vibrant creative and cultural environment, and supporting the Visitor Economy.

Theme 4: fostering and adopting a more collaborative culture

15. This theme speaks to strengthening collaboration and networks in and across the creative and culture sectors to facilitate knowledge sharing, best practise and identify new opportunities. It also refers to the Council's use of Discover Dudley and continued partnerships with regional partners to raise the profile of the Borough's cultural offer with a view to attracting more visitors for longer.

4a) Using commissioning of cultural activity to encourage collaboration.

4b) Strengthening engagement with and across the cultural sector in the Borough.

4c) Working with regional partners to raise the profile of the Borough's cultural offer,

The outcomes of the activity above will support delivery of Theme 3 of the Economic Regeneration Strategy: Creating a vibrant creative and cultural environment, and supporting the Visitor Economy

Theme 5: having ambition regarding cultural infrastructure and production.

16. Theme 5 identifies an initial set of specific, generally larger scale projects which would serve as anchors and flagships in the Borough's cultural landscape thereby raising confidence and ambition as well as creating a step change.

5a) A feasibility study for the evolution and development of a creative cluster for future glass makers, leveraging the Stourbridge glass quarter.

5b) Explore the viability of a joint bid to the Arts Council for NPO National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) status relating to the glass industry. National Portfolio Organisations are "leaders in their areas, with a

collective responsibility to protect and develop national arts and cultural ecology.”

5c) Supporting the development of the Steamyard project in Lye.

5d) An ‘audience development study’ to explore opportunities to attract new national audiences to the Borough.

5e) Continue to support the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark.

5f) Continue to be ambitious for Dudley’s cultural offer and opportunities. The strategy suggests a further application for another NPO organisation in the borough. It is further proposed that the Castle Hill Vision (phase 2), developed in 2019 be recognised and progressed under this action.

The Castle Hill Vision (phase 2) seeks to bring the rich historical, archaeological, geological and zoological significance of the Castle Hill site to an increased number and wider demographic of visitors, placing it at the heart of wider developments, in an innovative and sustainable way.

This recognises the key role the different elements of Castle Hill have in relation to the Borough’s cultural heritage and identity, and outcomes of the vision align with those of the Culture Strategy.

The outcomes of these projects would support delivery of Theme 3 of the Economic and Regeneration Strategy: Creating a vibrant creative and cultural environment, and supporting the Visitor Economy, as well as Theme 1: Unlocking enterprise and innovation

Governance and Resourcing

17 The final section of the strategy covers governance and proposes a Cultural Partnership as a central group overseeing the strategy and related actions. Since the strategy was commissioned, ‘Culture’ as a Council service is in the process of moving into the Economic Growth & Skills team to lever synergies with the Economic Regeneration Strategy and other activity and resources.

It is therefore recommended that the proposal for a Cultural Partnership be reviewed alongside other related boards/groups and partnerships with linked agendas to ensure strong, coherent relationships between them, best use of resources and seeking to avoid ‘volunteer fatigue’ as people are asked to sit on one or more groups. This is not to suggest that there isn’t a need, or opportunity, for collaborative oversight, monitoring and ownership of cultural activity, but that it is appropriate to pause before anything is implemented to ensure best fit with other groups and activity.

18. The Council does not have a resource dedicated to culture nor a budget to implement actions within the strategy. However, there are currently tranches of funding available, namely UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Commonwealth Games Legacy Enhancement Fund (CWGLEF), and allocations from WMCA for cultural activity, which can be utilised to fund initial activity and some temporary resource with a view to that being a route to securing more funding in the future via WMCA single settlements discussions for instance.

The Long Term Plan for Towns, while it doesn't cover the whole borough, also has some culture and heritage outcomes associated with it and may likewise be a route to some funding via the investment plan depending on the priorities identified and agreed through the Town Board.

19. The strategy recommends the appointment of a 'Cultural Broker' under Theme 1. This should be reviewed in the context of the funding available and the priorities which are agreed following adoption of the strategy.
20. The funding referred to in paragraph 3 is currently delivering a range of activity which contributes to the vision, outcomes and themes of the Cultural Strategy.

This includes:

- UKSPF funded business support, including start up support
- Destination marketing to attract a wider visitor audience.
- Events
- Community engagement with culture
- Dudley Castle public engagement

Action Plan and next steps

21. An initial action plan has been developed which sets out short, medium and long term actions for each of the themes. A summary of these is available at appendix 4 while a more detailed plan will be used to inform decisions about priorities, actions and funding as well as for monitoring.

There is a recognition that the delivery of the strategy needs to reflect and respond to the current economic and funding landscape: leveraging grant funding where it is available, identifying opportunities for co-funding, sharing financial, people and physical resources across the sector and collaborating with many different partners.

In the absence of existing dedicated funding some of the activities identified for the Council to lead in the strategy will be contingent on securing funding to deliver, and therefore one of the first actions will be to

utilise some of the existing grant funding to resource the preparation of funding bids and support information as well as informing a governance review as set out in paragraph 17.

Finance

22. The development of the strategy has been funded through external funding.

There is external funding currently in place which can support some of the early activity in delivery of the strategy and action plan. Beyond that resources and activity will be contingent on the Council and/or partners its securing further funding.

Therefore, at this stage, no financial approvals are required from Cabinet. When the Strategy has been agreed and adopted, the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise will undertake the above next steps and, in consultation with the Cabinet Member, advise Cabinet on financial implications.

Law

23. Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 provides the Council with power to do anything which is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions. Pursuant to Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 a local authority has a general power of competence to do anything that individuals generally may do

Risk Management

24. The approval and adoption of the Cultural Strategy mitigates the risks of not being in a position to secure investment and support for the sector. Risk registers will be developed, as appropriate, for projects which deliver against the strategy.

Equality Impact

25. The Council's Equality and Diversity policies will be applied throughout the implementation of the Strategy, including the identification of any specific equality impacts. Where required equality impact assessments/statements will be prepared.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

26. Resources to contribute to the delivery of the strategy will come from a combination of existing resource, where it interfaces with other teams and projects, and through the utilisation of external funding. Where any new posts and / or secondment opportunities arise this will require a separate decision taking into account any spending control measures in place.

Commercial/Procurement

27. Any contracts or commercial agreements needed to deliver the actions and interventions set out in the Action Plan will be let in accordance with Contract Standing Orders.

Council Plan

28. The approval and adoption of the Cultural Strategy and its implementation thereafter contributes to a number of priorities in the Dudley Council Plan 24/25:

Supporting Businesses and the local economy: the strategy has specific outcomes, themes and actions which relate to supporting businesses, volunteers and leaders in the cultural and creative sector, enabling it to grow in resilience, strength, volume and value. This includes a focus on skills, employment, economic growth and place based activity.

Delivering for our customers, residents and communities: the vision set out in the strategy specifically refers to equity of access to culture and the wider benefits of access to culture, such as health and wellbeing, are identified in this report.

Financial sustainability, efficiency and providing best value: the approach to delivery through collaboration and utilising external funding seeks to provide best value.



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Appendices

- [Appendix 1 – Culture Strategy 2024-2034](#)
- [Appendix 2 – Art in the Public Realm Strategy](#)
- [Appendix 3 – Castle Hill Vision \(phase 2\)](#)
- [Appendix 4 – Action Plan Executive Summary](#)

[All appendices are available to view on the Committee Management Information System \(CMIS\)](#)

List of Background Documents

West Midlands Cultural & Economy

https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/qhndvaqp/1_culture-economy_west-midlands.pdf

Dudley Economic Regeneration Strategy