

# Somerset West and Taunton Council

## Full Council – 7 September 2021

### SWT Cultural Strategy

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Portfolio Holder for Culture (Councillor Caroline Ellis)

Report Author: Dan Webb - Strategy Specialist

#### 1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1. This report introduces the Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) Cultural Strategy (see appendix A). It includes a vision, three key themes and related objectives that build on the Council's intention to '*support the enhancement of arts and culture provision within the District*' as stated in the Council's Corporate Strategy 2019- 2023.
- 1.2. This strategy further sets out that strategic commitment to shaping our District around a Creative Economy that includes harnessing the power of our Arts and Heritage and supporting local creative industries – with refocused objectives to respond to the economic and social recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.3. The Cultural Strategy does not describe the specific actions that need to take place nor who will carry them out – it acts as a 'framework' upon which an iterative delivery plan is being developed and implemented in partnership (predominantly envisaged as sector led delivery, supported by SWT in a leading and convening role).

#### 2. Recommendations

2.1 That Full Council resolves to:

- Approve the vision and objectives within the attached appendix
- Authorise the Strategy Specialist and Communications team (in consultation with the Culture Portfolio holder) to agree the final design and publication style for the Strategy.

#### 3. Risk Assessment

3.1 Without the Council clearly articulating its priorities and ambitions for a vibrant creative and culturally rich environment for the District, there is a risk that activity and resources are not targeted to where they are most needed, and reduced / lost opportunity to seek or secure external support and funding.

#### 4. Background and full details of the report

## Background and full details

- 4.1 The purpose of the Cultural Strategy (see appendix A) is to build on the Council's intention to *'support the enhancement of arts and culture provision within the District'* as stated in the Council's Corporate Strategy 2019- 2023. It further sets out that strategic commitment to shaping our District around a Creative Economy that includes harnessing the power of our Arts and Heritage and supporting local creative industries – with refocused objectives to respond to the economic and social recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 4.2 It includes a vision, three key themes (Place, People, and Prosperity) and related objectives that seek to address some key challenges and opportunities stated within the document.
- 4.3 The process of developing this strategy began in 2018/19 when representatives from key cultural organisations (eg Arts Taunton) articulated to Taunton Deane Borough Council a shared recognition of a need for a cultural strategy. A consultant was commissioned to support this work and engage key stakeholders from the cultural sector.
- 4.4 Key research and stakeholder engagement activity was undertaken during 2019-20 to inform the strategy, which included:
- A conference (November 2018)
  - A Cultural Forum was established in 2019. This was originally intended to be part of the Taunton Garden Town governance arrangements, however the scope has been widened to cover the whole District area. The Terms of Reference are shown in appendix B (NB – to be reviewed in 2021)
  - Review and analysis of existing and previous national and local background intelligence, data and reference materials eg:
    - SW&T Cultural Resources Audit (undertaken by the consultant)
    - Arts Taunton Survey Results 2017
    - Consultations (focus groups, workshops and one-to-one meetings)
    - National studies and reports (eg Arts Council England's 'Let's Create' strategy 2020-30, Warwick Commission, Value of Arts & Culture, Arts & Place Manifesto, Cultural Cities Enquiry, DCMS Cultural White Paper 2017, Culture Led Regeneration, Creative Industries Sector Deal)
  - An audit of cultural assets, resources and organisations was initially drafted during the development of the strategy – this has recently undergone a comprehensive refresh and update by the Portfolio Holder, and will be maintained and published as a live reference document
- 4.5 The Cultural Strategy does not describe the specific actions that need to take place nor who will carry them out – it acts as a 'framework' upon which an iterative delivery plan is being developed and implemented in partnership (predominantly envisaged as sector led delivery, supported by SWT in a leading and convening role).
- 4.6 Following the Coronavirus pandemic and significant impact on the cultural sector in 2020/21, priority for the cultural delivery plan in the immediate and short-term will be given to activity that enables and supports the recovery of the sector as it re-opens throughout 2021. Initial projects and initiatives being developed in partnership) and in some cases already implemented include:

- **Communications & Marketing:**
  - exhibitions / events promo using vacant shop fronts etc
  - co-promotion of a collaborative Taunton cultural programme - Spring 'restart' and rest of the year
  - engage cultural partners in Taunton Garden Town place marketing project, and Inward Investment strategy
- **Outdoor events / cultural activity:**
  - review spaces availability to encourage the biggest and best possible cultural programme
  - consider development of an events equipment business case
- **Investment in cultural and creative assets & projects** – SWT 2021-22 budget - funding / grants allocated aligned to cultural strategy objectives
- **Community cultural & arts projects**, eg: SWT & new Govt funding, and support for rural touring schemes
- **Enhancement of public realm** - encourage town centre visits and enable cultural events and activities (to enrich lives as well as create commercial opportunity) – linked to Town Centre / High Street Economic Recovery plans

Some of the longer-term projects to be developed during 2021/22 include:

- **Creative People** - develop programme of activities / projects for **Youth**, and **Health & Wellbeing**
- **Creative Industries sector** - Recovery and Growth Support, through delivery of Cultural Strategy and Innovation plan objectives
- **Creative career opportunities for young people:** link to employment, skills & education activity, eg employment & skills hubs, apprenticeship & traineeship programmes

## 5. Links to Corporate Strategy

5.1 The Cultural Strategy very much aligns with the Somerset West and Taunton Council Corporate Strategy. The Corporate strategy includes 'Our Environment and Economy' as the first theme, with the stated objective being to 'Support the enhancement of arts and culture provision within the District'.

5.2 A number of other strategic aims and objectives are also reflected in the Cultural Strategy, such as carbon neutrality, the built and natural environment, economic growth, regeneration projects, and community initiatives.

## 6. Finance / Resource Implications

6.1 There are no new budget or expenditure approvals requested in this report. Current resourcing commitments are identified within this year's business plans and any approval for any future commitments would be via the expected governance processes.

6.2 Although there are no direct implications arising from this report at this stage, the Cultural Strategy may lead to projects and interventions that may be subject to their own business case and approval route, and resourced by appropriate and available internal SW&T and / or external sources.

6.3 Specific Council funding (as part of the annual Economic Development Revenue budget) has already been made available to support the arts and cultural sector. It may also be

appropriate in some cases to consider funding for the sector through the Reopening High Streets Fund (ERDF) (£70k), or Emergency Town Centre Recovery Fund.

## **7. Legal Implications**

7.1 There are no legal implications that relate directly to this report.

## **8. Climate and Sustainability Implications**

8.1 The Cultural Strategy recognises that the creative and cultural sector can play a role in shaping our response to Climate Change, for example helping to convey complex messages about climate change to communities. It further states that SWT wants to foster relationships between environmental and creative partners that can result in projects that enhance our environment whilst promoting sustainability.

## **9. Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications**

9.1 Although there are no direct implications arising from this report, the Cultural Strategy is intended to have a positive influence on the quality of life for the community.

## **10. Equality and Diversity Implications**

10.1 There are no obvious implications for people with protected characteristics coming from this report. Please see the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) at appendix C.

10.2 The Strategy includes an objective to 'Ensure equality of access to quality creative and cultural experiences for communities and audiences across Somerset West and Taunton'.

## **11. Social Value Implications**

11.1 The Cultural Strategy (and within its themes and objectives) recognises that social value is one of a number of impacts and benefits from a strong cultural and creative sector.

## **12. Partnership Implications**

12.1 Extensive stakeholder workshops have been convened in the development of this strategy. On-going effective partnership working will be essential as the delivery plan is developed and implemented.

12.2 The objectives, in many cases, will not be achieved by the council alone. We will continue to work with existing partners to achieve our cultural strategy objectives and we will seek additional opportunities to work in partnership where this will deliver a better outcome for our communities.

## **13. Health and Wellbeing Implications**

13.1 The Cultural Strategy recognises that health and wellbeing is one of a number of impacts and benefits from a strong cultural and creative sector, and is intended to have a positive influence on the quality of life of residents and businesses.

## **14. Asset Management Implications**

14.1 There are no specific asset management implications that relate directly to this report, however stated objectives include: 'invest in our cultural assets, and work with other building or land owners to make sure the needs of creative enterprises are considered'; and 'Germinate and grow sustainable arts and cultural venues as hubs that foster excellence in the region'.

## 15. Data Protection Implications

15.1 There are no direct Data Protection implications associated with this report, however the strategy recognises that more detailed work and data research is still needed on measuring the impact and value of investment in the cultural sector. This will clearly be within the parameters of what is permissible under GDPR

## 16. Consultation Implications

16.1 Representatives from key cultural organisations across Somerset West and Taunton have a shared recognition of a need for a cultural strategy, and have come together with the council to form a Cultural Forum to shape this strategy. Extensive stakeholder workshops have been convened with the Council's Cultural Forum.

## 17. Scrutiny/Executive Comments / Recommendation(s)

17.1 Comments by Members were captured during:

- Informal Executive committee 5<sup>th</sup> May
- All Member briefing 10<sup>th</sup> May
- Executive committee 26<sup>th</sup> May
- In addition to the above committee meetings, the Portfolio Holder was invited to attend Corporate Scrutiny committee 2<sup>nd</sup> June to share an update for her Portfolio and work undertaken in the last month around the Culture Strategy

17.2 A summary of key comments received from Members is shown below, along with some responses provided by the Executive Portfolio Holder for Culture (shown in italics).

- Councillors agreed that it was important to highlight that there were many creative ways to support the culture sector within the district.
- Councillors were really enthused to hear how passionate the Portfolio Holder for Culture was in presenting her report to the Committee.
- Councillors agreed that it was the right time to start to showcase the arts within the district. Due to lockdown easing, residents needed to start focusing on culture rather than survival.
- Concern was raised on the communication aspect of the Strategy, as councillors struggled to find out what events were taking place across the wider area. *The Portfolio Holder for Culture advised she would look into ways of engagement and communication. The delivery plan being developed includes a workstream around communications and marketing, and additional resources are being sought for a communications and marketing project for culture. The Portfolio Holder has subsequently initiated a What's On Guide which is district wide available here: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1k9VungR\\_G-iLB9eLgFoYzwULYz11pq/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1k9VungR_G-iLB9eLgFoYzwULYz11pq/view?usp=sharing)*

*Links have also been established with Porlock Visitor Centre and Visit Dulverton among others and we are actively promoting the cultural offer across all parts of the district. Longer term this will be addressed through a new 'marcomms' project*

- Concern was raised that the Strategy was too Taunton centric and that the wider district area needed to be included.  
*The Portfolio Holder for Culture understood their concern. However, other areas of the district were mentioned, including the National Parks, Harbour Towns and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and Strategy will deliver support and action district wide. Work is ongoing to identify and engage with stakeholders from the cultural and creative sectors across the whole district.*
- Councillors suggested an audit was periodically carried out to monitor the work done through the Strategy.  
*The delivery plan is a 'live' document and is regularly reviewed as part of operational delivery (within the Development & Place directorate), and with external groups such as the Cultural Forum and its sub-groups. Regular progress reports and successes will also be provided in Executive Portfolio reports to Full Council.*
- Councillors agreed that a budget needed to be found to support culture activities within the area, as it had a positive impact on resident's wellbeing especially after lockdown.  
*The annual revenue budget for arts and culture has an indicative spending allocation which aligns with the key objectives of the Cultural Strategy. Additional external and SWT funding sources are being sought.*
- Councillors highlighted that the Brewhouse Theatre was not the only venue within the district. The Regal Theatre in Minehead survived without any funding from the Council and was the venue for many varied events.  
*Work is ongoing to identify and engage with cultural organisations and venue operators across the whole district, and SWT will seek to provide support in the most appropriate way.*

The additional comments below have been noted by the Portfolio Holder, who will work with Officers and external partners to identify the appropriate ways forward:

- Need to enhance the focus on Heritage (and bring our area's history and traditions to life – locations as well as buildings)
- Ensure specific sectors are represented and supported (eg live music, visual arts)
- Ensure that arts and cultural activity are accessible and that SWT support partners to change any perception that programmes are exclusive (eg to low income and rural populations)
- Need to help partners link cultural activity to the education sector (eg touring theatres to schools)
- Need to support organisers deliver a wide range of events and cultural activities
- Open discussions were encouraged with Councillors in relation to the culture strategy and promotion of culture
- Encouraging participation for all members of society as parts of the local arts and culture offering was emphasised
- The future of the cultural offering in Taunton was considered alongside a new venue and the future of the Brewhouse
- It was questioned if the County Council were worked with in respect of the Cultural strategy

- Increased bus services were needed as part of an improved culture offering to enable access across the district

**Democratic Path:**

- **Scrutiny / Corporate Governance or Audit Committees – No**
- **Cabinet/Executive – Yes**
- **Full Council – Yes**

Reporting Frequency:     Once only                     Ad-hoc     Quarterly  
     Twice-yearly                     Annually

**List of Appendices (delete if not applicable)**

Appendix A	SWT Cultural Strategy
Appendix B	SWT Cultural Forum Terms of Reference
Appendix C	Equality Impact Assessment

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