

East Herts Council Report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: Tuesday 2 February 2021

Report by: Mekhola Ray, Community Wellbeing Programme Officer

Report title: Draft East Herts Cultural Strategy 2021-2025

Ward(s) affected: All

Summary

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. That the draft Cultural Strategy, incorporating the feedback from the public engagement exercise, be considered and any additional areas be highlighted for the Executive's consideration when determining whether to recommend the Strategy to Council for adoption.

1.0 Proposal(s)

1.1 Committee Members review the draft Cultural Strategy ahead of submission to the Executive's determination of whether to recommend the strategy to Council for adoption on 2nd March 2021.

2.0 Background

2.1 In the run up to the Hertfordshire Year of Culture 2020, senior officers and members identified the need to develop a Cultural Strategy for East Herts. The need remains despite the Year of Culture have concluded and, indeed, having been significantly impacted by the Covid pandemic.

2.2 The draft Strategy (2021-2025) seeks to support community organisations and individuals to grow, adapt to the changing environment, and deliver a thriving cultural offer in East Herts.

2.3 A public engagement exercise was undertaken in November 2020 and received 50 responses with the vast majority of responses showing support for the strategy.

2.4 A wide range of organisations responded to the public engagement exercise, including museums, arts organisations, Town Councils and libraries amongst others. The full list of organisations responding to the survey is available in **Appendix B**.

2.5 The public engagement exercise asked respondents which of the ambitions highlighted in the strategy they supported and if the vision for the Cultural Strategy was fitting. As many as, 84% of respondents agreed that the overall vision was fitting and the ambitions that drew most support were:

- strong partnerships resulting in a resilient cultural infrastructure (88% of respondents prioritised this)
- investment in arts and culture contributing to tangible gains (86%)
- interested parties support each other to encourage entrepreneurial and innovative cultural practitioners to invest in East Herts (80%).

2.6 Respondents were asked on which of the highlighted actions the Strategy should focus. The most popular responses were:

- provide opportunities for engagement in cultural activity that extends across our communities (90% of respondents prioritised this)
- support all partners to develop cultural opportunities in all corners of our district (90%)

- ensure digital delivery is accessible to all residents (90%).

2.7 Respondents were asked which of the highlighted areas were key to their organisation being able to contribute to the Strategy's ambitions. Answers were varied, however the most frequently given responses were:

- financial support or grant funding (30% cited this)
- increased members, users or participants (28%)
- increased volunteers with the right skills (22%).

2.8 Respondents were asked which of the highlighted barriers to successful delivery of the strategy needed to be addressed by partners. Answers varied, however the most frequently given responses were:

- lack of funding (20%)
- not enough staff or volunteers (16%)
- individuals are anxious about returning to group activities (16%).

2.9 Respondents were asked which of the highlighted areas were most likely to prevent cultural activities being delivered in rural areas of East Herts. The most frequently given responses were:

- not enough staff or volunteers to run activities (14%)
- lack of funding (12%)
- lack of knowledge on how to promote and market activity (10%).

2.10 Responses to the public engagement also highlighted a need to reflect an increased focus on developing a cultural offer in rural communities, as well as among residents from more diverse religious, black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

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- 2.12 The feedback from the public engagement exercise has been analysed and incorporated in to the latest draft of the Cultural Strategy.

3.0 Context

- 3.1 The Cultural Strategy aims to support all community organisations in East Herts to operate in a self-sustained way and reduce reliance on council funding.
- 3.2 The development of the strategy has been overseen by a small group of East Herts officers (from Housing and Health, Strategic Policy, Economic Development, Communications and Hertford Theatre,). Their contributions and feedback have been incorporated in the Strategy.
- 3.3 A public engagement exercise was undertaken in November 2020. The results have been analysed and incorporated in to the latest draft of the Cultural Strategy.

4.0 Options -

- 4.1 Do not review the strategy and results of public engagement. NOT RECCOMENDED. If the Strategy is to be a success, it will need to have the support and understanding of our whole community. Developing a strong cultural offer in East Herts offers the opportunity to help improve the quality of life for residents in East Herts.
- 4.2 Review the strategy; identify any gaps or areas for development ahead of the Strategy being submitted to full Council. RECCOMENDED as this will ensure our officers, residents, community organisations have all had an input in to the strategy and understand what is required to ensure its

success.

5.0 Risks

- 5.1 Responses from the public engagement exercise highlight funding as one of the main areas that might act as a barrier to the success of the strategy. To mitigate this risk the Council shall provide a range of networking opportunities to bring organisations together to identify funding partnership funding opportunities, and where possible, support bids for external funding. The Council shall continue to provide funding opportunities through the East Herts Lottery and Community Grants programmes.
- 5.2 Responses from the public engagement exercise noted a need to have adequate staff and volunteers available to help deliver activities. To mitigate this risk, the Council shall help promote activities and opportunities to support organisations. In addition to this, the Council is working with Team Herts to promote volunteer opportunities.
- 5.3 Transport links, travel difficulties and lack of suitable venues to hold event have also been highlighted as potential risks. To mitigate this, the Council is working with partner organisations including Age UK and Clarion Housing to deliver digital training, giving residents the skills to be able to access online activities. The Council shall also explore opportunities to map cultural assets in rural locations that can provide suitable venues to deliver cultural activities locally.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

- 6.1 Public engagement on the cultural strategy was undertaken in November 2020. 50 responses have been received - the vast majority of feedback has been positive, with 44 out of 50 responses in agreement that proposed vision and ambitions are right.

6.2 Council Members and East Herts Officers have been consulted in the development of this Strategy. Their feedback has been incorporated in the Strategy.

Community Safety

Perception and fear of crime and maintaining good community safety is closely connected to enjoyment of civic life and good health and wellbeing. More targeted arts related programmes in tackling anti-social behaviour will be explored and developed through the rolling action plan.

Data Protection

Data sharing agreements and proportionate sharing of data needs to be considered by the Partnership Steering group.

Equalities

Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) will be developed ahead of the Strategy being adopted at full Council.

Environmental Sustainability

The Strategy encourages aims to enable, and encourages the cultural sector, to operate in an environmentally sustainable way, reducing the it's carbon footprint.

Financial

There may be pressure for the Council to support activities financially. The Strategy outlines the need for organisations to work together in a sustainable way, reducing the dependence on Council funding. The Council shall continue to provide funding opportunities through the East Herts Lottery and Community Grants programmes.

Health and Safety

Standard Risk Assessment will be in place for all cultural deliveries.

Human Resources

The East Herts Community Wellbeing and Partnerships team will support the oversight and delivery of this Strategy.

Human Rights

No direct implication.

Legal

No

Specific Wards

Wards are targeted according to specific needs, whilst more universal programmes would focus on district wide communities.

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 Appendices:

Appendix A – East Herts Draft Cultural Strategy 2021-25

Appendix B – Organisations and individuals responding to the public engagement exercise

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