

Executive

Date of Meeting: 19th February 2020

Report by: Mekhola Ray, Community Wellbeing Programme Officer

Report title: Draft East Herts Cultural Strategy

Ward(s) affected: All

Summary

The report provides background to developing the draft Cultural Strategy. The Executive is asked to consider the draft Strategy, propose any amendments for the Head of Housing and Health and Executive Member to consider prior to consideration by Council and recommend the Strategy, with any amendments, to Council for adoption.

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT:

- (a) The draft Cultural Strategy, incorporating the feedback from the public engagement exercise and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, be considered and recommended to Council for adoption**
- (b) The Head of Housing and Health incorporates any amendments to the Strategy suggested by the Executive, acting in consultation with the Lead Member for Wellbeing, prior to presentation to Council for adoption.**

1.0 Proposal(s)

- 1.1 It is proposed that the Executive reviews the draft Cultural Strategy and recommends it to Council for adoption having first proposed any amendments they see fit.

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 having been significantly impacted by the Covid pandemic.

- 2.2 The Cultural Strategy (2021-2025) aims to see statutory bodies, community organisations and individuals come together to grow, adapt to the changing environment, lever in funding by acting in partnership and deliver a thriving cultural offer in East Herts.

3.0 Context

Public engagement in drafting the Strategy

- 3.1 A public engagement exercise was undertaken in November 2020 during which views on the draft Strategy were invited. This exercise elicited a total of 51 responses from a wide range of organisations and individuals as summarised in the following table.

	Number
Local arts and cultural organisations	10
District, town and parish councils and individual councillors	10
Charities, support organisations and community groups with a remit extending beyond arts and culture	8
Local residents and individuals working in the local arts and cultural sector	7
Anonymous responses	16

- 3.2 The public engagement exercise asked respondents which of the six ambitions highlighted in the Strategy (see page 4 of the Cultural Strategy at Appendix A) they most supported. The full results are given in the public engagement analysis report at Appendix B. The three ambitions which garnered the highest levels of 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%).

3.3 Respondents were asked to highlight their key priorities from the 29 detailed actions listed in the Strategy (see the complete list of detailed actions presented in Section 3 of the Strategy at Appendix A). The top three 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%).

3.4 The engagement exercise asked a series of question about difficulties and possible barriers partners foresee with regard to making a success of the Strategy. The full results can be seen in Appendix B. In summary, around a quarter of respondents highlighted the following issues:

- lack funding and need for financial support
- limited volunteers and the need to increase volunteers with the right skills, group members, users or participants
- a lack of knowledge about how best to promote activities, including how to encourage the confidence to return to group activities once the Covid pandemic begin to ebb.

3.5 Some individual responses 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.

3.6 The feedback from the public engagement exercise has been analysed and incorporated in to the latest draft of the Cultural Strategy. This is summarised in the table below.

Key issue arising from the public engagement exercise	Response
Concerns about lack funding and need for financial support	<p>The Strategy already states in the 'Delivery and measurement of success' section:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>the efforts and actions of all stakeholders, working together in support of our shared ambitions, are absolutely vital to the success of this Strategy so we will... work in partnership to secure funding to support delivery of cultural activities in East Herts</i> <p>Ways in which the council can use its position as a community leader have been expanded to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>promote funding opportunities facilitated by East Herts Council, for example, East Herts Lottery</i> • <i>explore opportunities to use the wide range of cultural assets in East Herts to enable increased local delivery of cultural activities</i>
Concerns about limited volunteers and the need to increase volunteers with the right skills, group members, users or participants	<p>The actions specifically for East Herts Council have been amended to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>we will work closely with organisations from all communities to promote volunteering opportunities</i> <p>The Strategy already includes that a key outcome will be the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>numbers of jobs, traineeships, apprenticeships, internships and</i>

	<p><i>opportunities for volunteering in the sector made available</i></p>
<p>Concerns that a lack of knowledge about how best to promote activities, including how to encourage the confidence to return to group activities once the Covid pandemic begin to ebb</p>	<p>New action to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>support residents from all communities, circumstances and abilities to participate in cultural activities across East Herts</i> <p>The Strategy already asks partners to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>use social media and other marketing innovations to reach new audiences</i>
<p>The Strategy would benefit from making support for residents from more diverse religious, black and minority ethnic backgrounds more explicit</p>	<p>New clearly worded action to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>ensure residents of all religious and black and minority ethnic backgrounds across East Herts are fully involved in the development of cultural opportunities in the district</i>
<p>The Strategy should recognise the district's rural, agricultural and countryside heritage and include a focus on developing a cultural offer to rural communities</p>	<p>The introductory section of the Strategy has been amended to read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>the district has a distinct cultural heritage reflecting its market towns and countryside, including its rural and agricultural landscape</i> <p>New actions added to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>support the development of local, cultural opportunities working with local community groups and village halls, to reduce the need for travel to participate in cultural activities</i> • <i>encourage communities to establish activities close to home, reducing the barriers to access and supporting residents in rural communities to participate in cultural opportunities</i> <p>The Strategy's actions already include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>identify how the potential of the district's assets, such as village and community halls, can be maximised to achieve its</i>

	<p><i>cultural vision, bringing in the relevant partners to identify projects and deliver initiatives that benefit residents in East Herts</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>support all partners to develop cultural opportunities in all corners of our district, allowing our residents to participate in a rich cultural life in their own communities, whether in the rural villages or the bustling town centres</i>
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Outcome of consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

3.7 The Overview and Scrutiny considered the draft Strategy, as amended following the public engagement, at its meeting of 2nd February 2021. The Committee raised a number of points which have been reflected in the further amended version of the Strategy now before the Executive. The amendments are summarised in the following table.

Key issue raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Response
<p>The Strategy could be clearer about its overall purpose and that there will be an accompanying action plan</p>	<p>Text has been added to the introductory ‘Big Picture’ section to stress the overall purpose of the Strategy. The added wording states:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>we will use this Strategy to demonstrate to partners and funders alike, how the cultural sector is working together in East Herts. For example, some funding streams require evidence of joint working, while other funds are only available to community groups, rather than statutory bodies. This Strategy provides a means by which all partners can play to their strengths and support each other through the sharing of best practice, lending support to each</i>

	<p><i>other's funding bids or arranging joint initiatives and funding proposals</i></p> <p>Text has been added to the 'Delivery and measurement of success' section to read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>each year the partners who have come together to deliver this Strategy will devise and agree an action plan for the coming year with clear goals, targets and named lead partners</i>
The Strategy could be more explicit about supporting people with physical and/or learning disabilities	<p>A new action has been added:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>ensure residents with physical and/or learning disabilities participate in the planning and enjoyment of cultural opportunities in East Herts</i>
The Strategy should recognise affordability can be a barrier to accessing arts and cultural	<p>The action about easing access has been amended to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>support the development of local, cultural opportunities, working with local community groups and village halls, to minimise the cost of and/or the need to travel to participate in cultural activities</i>
A better explanation of the inclusion of Community Voice and references to the night time economy needed	<p>The relevant action has been amended to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>support initiatives to promote a high quality Night Time Economy in East Herts, for example, by supporting the use of the Police's Community Voice engagement tool</i>

3.8 With the issues listed in the table above addressed, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorsed the presentation of the draft Cultural Strategy to the Executive to determine whether to put it forward to Council for adoption.

Structure of the Cultural Strategy and how it will be delivered

3.9 The draft Cultural Strategy under consideration provides

the strategic blueprint for improving the arts and cultural offer in East Herts. It is arranged in the following sections:

- Introduction from the Executive Member Wellbeing and a commitment from a number of organisations to work in partnership. It is acknowledged that the Strategy marks the beginning of the work to be done and also that the number of organisations signing up to the Strategy in continuing to grow
- Section 1 presents the overall vision
- Section 2 provides a high level overview of the socio-demographic context for the Strategy
- Section 3 highlights the priorities for action
- Section 4 explains the different ways in which the partners can act including the additional 'community leadership' role of the council
- Section 5 lays out how the Strategy will be delivered and success measured.

3.10 It is important to note that the detailed actions required to make a success of the Strategy will be drawn up on an annual basis by the partnership overseeing the Strategy's delivery. Delivery against the action plan will, of course, be open to scrutiny and oversight by elected members through the established processes.

Outcome of equalities impact assessment

3.11 An equalities impact assessment (EqIA) has been carried out as part of the Strategy's development. This is included at Appendix C.

3.12 The assessment has identified a number of high priority and medium priority actions – see section 2 of the EqIA for full details. The measures requiring high priority actions by March 2023 are:

- measures to address the limited information about the needs and experience of individuals with the

following protected characteristics – race, religion and faith, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, gender reassignment and pregnancy/maternity

- measures to increase participation in the Cultural Strategy strategic and delivery groups from those with protected characteristics known to be under-represented – race, religion and faith, people with physical and/or learning disabilities, older people
- measures to counteract low participation in cultural opportunities where this has already been identified – older people, young adults, people with disabilities and people from different faiths and black and minority ethnic.

3.13 The EqIA and the Strategy itself makes provision to keep the diversity of participation under regular review. The annual action plans will be devised to address issues as they become known.

4.0 Options

- 4.1 Do not review the Strategy and results of public engagement and thus do not recommended it to Council for adoption. NOT RECOMMENDED. 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. Many organisations and individual have participated in drafting the Strategy with a large number signing up to working together on its delivery.
- 4.2 Review the Strategy and identify any gaps or areas for development ahead of the Strategy being submitted to full Council. RECOMMENDED as this will ensure a well-considered Strategy can be put forward to Council for adoption.

5.0 Risks

- 5.1 Responses 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, and where possible, support bids for external funding.
- 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 will 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. A total of 51 responses were received with largescale support for the Strategy. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has also considered the Strategy. Feedback received has been incorporated into the latest draft of the Strategy as discussed earlier in this report.

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

An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been conducted. The complete EqIA is presented at Appendix C. The most pressing issues are summarised in section 3 of this report. It is believed that by acting on the findings of the EqIA and keeping the annual action plans under review, all residents in East Herts can benefit from the arts and cultural opportunities in the district.

Environmental Sustainability

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

Financial

There may be pressure from partners for the council to support activities financially. The Strategy, however, stresses the need for organisations to work together in a sustainable way, without being dependent on council funding. The council will continue to provide direct funding opportunities through the East Herts Lottery and Community Grants programmes. The council will also provide organisations and individuals with information on grants related to arts, culture and heritage and recommend joining the [grants on line website](#) which advertises grant opportunities from other sources such as the National Lottery and the Arts Council.

Health and Safety

A standard risk assessment will be applied to individual cultural deliveries as appropriate.

Human Resources

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

Human Rights

No direct implications.

Legal

No direct implications.

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

Appendix A – Draft East Herts Cultural Strategy 2021-25

Appendix B – Analysis of the results of the public engagement exercise

Appendix C – Equalities Impact Assessment

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