

Decision Report

Committee: Executive
Forward Plan Reference - FP/22/11/09
Meeting Date – 5 August 2024
Key Decision – yes



Cultural Strategy

Chair of Committee: Cllr Bill Revans – Leader of the Council
Executive Member(s): Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts - Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture.
Local Member(s) and Division(s) affected: All
Executive Director: Chris Hall – Community Services

Executive Summary

This Cultural Strategy has been created by Somerset Council using funding from Arts Council England and is being put forward for adoption.

There are key elements of the Strategy that will be the responsibility of Somerset Council to achieve, but this Strategy is not the sole responsibility of the Council. Instead it will be 'co-owned' and 'co-delivered' by cultural leaders of Somerset and partners with the Council as facilitator.

A Delivery Plan has been drafted and is proposed to support the delivery of the strategy. This is a 'living' document and subject to updates and changes.

This ten year strategy reflects the many voices and perspectives of those in the cultural sector in Somerset.

Recommendations

The Executive committee are asked to agree and adopt the Cultural Strategy. Executive are also asked to delegate authority to the Service Director for Culture, in consultation with the Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture, to make any minor amendments prior to publishing on the Council's website (Culture page).

Reasons for Proposals

The Cultural Strategy was developed in 2022/23 as part of the vesting process of the new authority, with funding and support from Arts Council England.

Further detail is within the main report and supporting information.

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Main report and supporting information



Background and purpose of report

1. The Cultural Strategy was developed in 2022/23 as part of the vesting process of the new authority.
2. In 2023/24 re-drafting was undertaken to align the strategy with the vision and priorities of the new authority.
3. The revised strategy recognises that culture is already delivered by external creative leaders, some of which are internationally known. It further recognises that the role of Somerset Council is to support and facilitate.
4. The role of the Cultural Services team was to take this approach as a way forward for the Council supported by other directorates that are already delivering on cultural outcomes for the authority (which include, but are not limited to: Children; Adults; Public Health; Climate and Place; Economy, Employment & Planning).
5. **Purpose:**
 - Voice community priorities
 - Rationalise council strategies
 - Embed culture in strategic plans
 - Promote cultural identity
 - Raise awareness - culture as preventative service
 - Raise awareness - role of culture within the business and visitor economy
 - Realise Somerset's potential as a cultural destination.

6. **Approach and methodology (including consultations undertaken)**

The Council worked across the five former councils (Somerset County Council, South Somerset District Council, Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council and Somerset West and Taunton Council) with consultants 'Fifth Sector' to develop a baseline report and draft cultural strategy, as set out below:

2022 - Research undertaken (prior to creation of Somerset Council):

- Desk-based research to establish scale and significance of the cultural and creative economy (practitioners, businesses, audiences)
- Cultural Leads Survey - identify demand and patterns
- Residents' survey - understand how people respond to the current offer, how it could be shaped to better meet the needs (1494 residents completed this survey)
- Engagement (workshops and interviews) with artists, producers, and a wide range of cultural stakeholders. (125 individuals, representing 55 Cultural organisations)
- World Café consultation to assure and validate findings.

2023 - draft strategy and baseline report was provided

2023 – Director of Cultural Services with new team re-drafted the strategy to be more reflective of new priorities and how we would work in a more ‘co-design, co-develop’ approach with the creative leads that already exists.

7. Next steps:

- Review options and agree governance and leadership structure for the implementation of the Cultural Strategy
- Work with partners to ‘co-develop, co-own, and co-deliver’ the Cultural Strategy Delivery plan.

Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan

8. The strategy is founded on the Council’s overall vision for the county – to ‘build a fairer, greener, resilient, more flourishing Somerset that cares for the most vulnerable and listens to you’

9. Clear links from the Council Plan to this Cultural Strategy are:

- **A Greener, more sustainable Somerset**

- “Our invaluable diverse landscapes (e.g. Exmoor National Park, National Landscapes, precious woodlands, the Somerset Levels and Moors, and the West Somerset Coast) should be celebrated and accessible to everyone”.
- “Somerset is home to a range of nationally and regionally significant historic buildings and artefacts. These will be treated sensitively to preserve and celebrate our cultural heritage for present and future generations”.

- **A healthy and caring Somerset**

- “We will do what we can to make sure we have an environment that supports healthier lifestyles including access to leisure facilities, open spaces, cultural experiences and social opportunities, so that our residents’ mental and physical health will thrive”.

- **A fairer, ambitious Somerset**

- A priority for this Council is to do whatever we can to reduce the inequalities that cause these disparities, so that everyone in Somerset can live their lives as they choose.
- Providing opportunities for all, we envision a place where everyone can access, enjoy, and participate in cultural and creative activities. We strive for a vibrant culture inclusive, relevant, and accessible for all, regardless of age, background, or ability. A key part of this work will be to listen and respond to the changing needs of our communities, understanding what they want and evaluating how we can meet their expectations – culture is continuously changing.

- **A flourishing and resilient Somerset**

- Promote Somerset at a regional, national, and international level.

- “Unlock opportunities for tourism and culture. We already offer so much - from Glastonbury Festival, the largest greenfield music and performing arts festival in the world and Bridgwater Carnival’s spectacular procession to the tranquillity of the Exmoor Dark Skies festival. Promoting Somerset as a destination on the national and global stage will support the existing economy, enable regeneration, and encourage development of new, creative attractions”.

Other options considered

10.No alternative options were considered. The project to develop a cultural strategy was underway prior to vesting of Somerset Council, with funding and support from Arts Council England.

Key considerations for the Council

Scrutiny comments / recommendations:

11. Communities Scrutiny 13 June 2024:

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Welcome the focus on facilitation given the financial context.
- What role or contribution are LCNs making to the evolution of the strategy? *We need a model for how we talk to people in our communities – LCNs may be a part of that. We have attended other cultural forums. It’s important for there to be a focus on creative outcomes and opportunities rather than talking about potholes etc. This needs to be explored in the implementation plan.*
- For the Taunton LCN, the young people working group has drawn in people doing creative work with young people in Taunton, so this could be drawn in.
- The strategy is very well written.
- It would be good to look at more than the existing cultural hubs and connecting organisations, especially in the west of the county where organisations may feel cut off.
- There needs to be investment, a small grants budget used strategically could make a big difference.
- How do town and parish councils come together in Somerset Council? E.g. Taunton Town Council has its own strategy and working groups, how does it connect in? *It’s a 10 year strategy. We will be facilitators of the interconnected working across all areas of Somerset, though there is a possibility for that to change in the future. Implementation plan is open to develop and there is an opportunity to work with LCNs etc. to shape that. Leadership model is going to be really key.*
- For Minehead Town Council a cultural strategy would be a long way off but something to aim for.
- How do we link it to a visitor economy? *We are having meetings with Visit Somerset and discussing with colleagues in Planning and Economic*

Development. There is no funding at the moment but we are working with partners.

Consultation and feedback

12. The consultation process adopted during the development of the strategy is set out above in section 6. Key strategic partners / stakeholders (external and internal to the Council) have continued to engage and support the final drafting of the strategy, and a 'Sustainable Culture Working Group' was set up early in 2024. Key partners / stakeholder involved are: Arts Council England; Heritage England; National Lottery Heritage Fund, South West Heritage Trust.

Financial and Risk Implications

13. No financial implications have been identified in relation to the adoption of this strategy. The draft delivery plan that accompanies the cultural strategy and this report does reference 'capital projects for cultural outcomes' and 'a flagship cultural hub for Somerset' – these projects are subject to external capital funding being achieved (Government and other potential funding partners), and will not proceed without this.

14. This report does not relate to any risks identified in the Corporate Risk Register, however without Somerset and the Council clearly articulating its priorities and ambitions for a vibrant creative and culturally rich environment for the county, there is a risk that activity and resources are not targeted to where they are most needed. This will result in a reduced / lost opportunity to seek or secure external support and funding and the achievement of the outcomes and benefits described in this strategy may be less likely to be possible in the future.

Current Risk Score:

Likelihood	3	Impact	4	Risk Score	12
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Projected risk score if recommended actions are agreed and delivered:

Likelihood	2	Impact	4	Risk Score	8
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Legal and Procurement Implications

15. No legal implications have been identified.

HR / Workforce Implications

16. No HR / workforce implications have been identified

Equalities Implications

17. Culture benefits society, and all communities and residents of Somerset. This can be in different formats and different stories. Culture is not the same for everyone. The Cultural Strategy describes the following key benefits: “improve social mobility” and “address health inequalities. The ‘Culture for all’ strategic priority in particular aims to “foster a culture of diversity” with a focus on inclusivity and engagement for all, but specifically a number of the protected groups identified in the Equality Impact Assessment.

The Equalities Impact Assessment is to follow.

Community Safety Implications

18. No Community Safety implications have been identified.

Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

19. Although there are no direct Climate Change and Sustainability implications from this report, the Cultural Strategy recognises the impact of climate change on Somerset’s landscape and historic environment. The associated delivery plan will identify actions that contribute to the Council’s Climate Strategy.

Health and Safety Implications

20. No Health & Safety implications have been identified.

Health and Wellbeing Implications

21. As described within the Cultural Strategy (in the ‘power of culture’ section), culture has a significant positive impact on health and wellbeing, and implementing the strategy is expected to address health inequalities.

Social Value

22. As described within the Cultural Strategy (in the ‘power of culture’ section), improving social mobility is identified as a key benefit of culture.

Background Papers

23. A baseline report was produced by consultants following the initial research phase of the project, and can be made available on request.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Cultural Strategy

- Appendix 2 – Draft Cultural Strategy Delivery Plan

**Report assurance checklist ahead of report publication
(for Audit, Executive, Full Council and Scrutiny Committees)**

	Officer Name	Date Completed
Legal & Governance Implications	David Clark	24 July 2024
Finance & Procurement	Nicola Hix	25 July 2024
Workforce (*)	Dawn Bettridge	18 July 2024
Asset Management (*)	Oliver Woodhams	25 July 2024
Executive Director	Executive Director, Community Services - Chris Hall	17 June 2024
Executive Lead Member	Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts - Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture.	17 June 2024
Consulted:	Councillor Name	
Local Division Members	N/A (all Members)	
Opposition Spokesperson(s)	Cllr Andy Dingwall - Opposition Spokesperson for Communities, Housing and Culture	13 June 2024
Relevant Scrutiny Chair(s)	Cllr Gwil Wren - Communities Scrutiny Chair	13 June 2024