

PART A

Report to: Cabinet
Date of meeting: 8 October 2018
Report of: Section Head, Culture and Events
Title: Cultural Strategy 2018 -2025

1.0 **Summary**

- 1.1 Watford's previous Cultural Strategy and associated action plan completed in 2017. The strategy achieved a range of positive outcomes for the borough and has helped put Watford on the map as a town with a strong and vibrant cultural offer.
- 1.2 Over the last few months a new Cultural Strategy 2018-2025 has been developed with the support of an experienced external consultancy and our key cultural stakeholders. The aim of the strategy is to set a new vision for culture in the borough and to identify the opportunities that will ensure we build on our cultural strengths and deliver further improvements. The development of the strategy has ensured that the town's cultural partners have been fully engaged throughout and it has, therefore, received their endorsement and support.
- 1.3 The strategy is ambitious for Watford and brings together the elements needed to ensure the strength of our cultural offer from public realm improvements and nurturing creative talent to improved communications and wayfinding and celebrating our heritage.
- 1.4 There are four key priorities identified to deliver the cultural vision and ambitions, ranging from those achievable in the short term to those that will require longer term planning and investment.
- 1.5 Overall, the Cultural Strategy 2018-2025 continues to support Watford as a great place to enjoy a diverse range of cultural activities and experiences, recognising the positive benefits this has on our local communities and on the town's economic prosperity.

2.0
2.1

Risks

Nature of Risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response <i>(Treat, tolerate, terminate, transfer)</i>	Risk Rating (the combination of severity and likelihood)
Lack of funding	Unable to realise some of the projects and deliver on the focus areas.	Partnership and external funding sought wherever possible. Section 106 monies channelled into projects. Council resources allocated through budget setting and approval process. Steering Group set up to assess funding priorities. External funding channels being explored	Treat	9
Partners priorities change	Difficulties in stakeholder engagement and collaboration Impact on delivery	Cultural Leaders Group and town wide partnerships in place to support collaboration	Treat	4
Lack of community engagement	Impact on delivery	Ongoing engagement and close	Treat	4

to deliver some areas of the plan		working with the town's cultural communities and individuals		
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3.0 **Recommendations**

- 3.1 To endorse the Cultural Strategy 2018-2025 (attached at Appendix A), which provides the strategic direction to enhance and improve Watford's cultural offer.
- 3.2 To proceed to implementation and develop a more detailed programme of actions and associated costs and, where appropriate, these to be taken through the council's annual budget setting and approval process.
- 3.3 To establish a delivery group, led by the Elected Mayor of Watford, supported by the Managing Director, to oversee progress against the Cultural Strategy and Action Plan. Regular reports will be provided to the delivery group, Portfolio Holder and Head of Service

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Report approved by: Alan Gough – Head of Community and Environmental Services

4.0. Detailed proposal

The value that culture can bring to any town is widely acknowledged and documented in terms of improving the visitor economy, providing employment opportunities, enhancing general well-being and community cohesion. A vibrant cultural offer undoubtedly adds to making somewhere a great place to live, work, visit and enjoy.

Watford benefits from a rich cultural infrastructure and offer including: award winning parks and open spaces, a varied programme of events and venues to visit, popular festivals and a Premier League football club. It also has a growing reputation as a creative destination. We also have cultural partners that are supportive of the cultural ambitions for the town and want to do more to enhance the image and wider reputation of the town. The council has continued to invest resources in its key cultural partnerships to maximise their impact and to deliver a range of benefits for the town and our communities.

4.1 Watford's previous Cultural Strategy ran to 2017 and, led by Watford's Cultural Leaders Group, delivered a range of achievement, including:

- Community Arts festivals, Watford Live, Watford Fringe, Own the Stage
- BIG events programme including Beach, Screen Sports, Dance,
- Warner Bros studio tour
- Digital Screenings at the Watford Place Theatre in Film, Opera, Ballet, National Theatre
- Imagine Watford
- Co-ordinated Cultural programme of activities and events
- Physical improvements to the Watford Place Theatre, Watford Colosseum
- A range of guides, maps, development of Watford For You website to support Watford as a key destination to enjoy cultural life in our parks, town centre and facilities
- Youth Theatre developed at the Watford Palace
- Development of creative apprenticeships with Warner Bros and West Herts College
- Development of Watford Arts Network
- BBC concert orchestra performing and using Watford as a key base
- Joined up marketing and much more.

4.2 It was clear from the successes achieved by the strategy, that our cultural offer is a key strength for Watford and that it would require renewed strategic input and vision in order to take us to the 'next level'. To this end, the council procured the expertise, skills and knowledge of a specialist cultural consultancy who have worked with us, and the borough's cultural stakeholders, to deliver a new cultural strategy for Watford.

The brief challenged the consultancy to not just build on what Watford had already achieved but to explore the opportunities and challenges that would lay the foundation for a refreshed cultural vision and ambition.

4.3 Following public consultation and stakeholder engagement including with Big Business Connect, Watford and West Herts Chamber of Commerce, Watford Business Improvement District, Watford Cultural Leaders Group, Watford Community Arts Network, a draft Cultural Strategy 2018 -2025 was developed. It identifies four priorities for Watford:

1. Heritage
2. Communication and Connectivity
3. Watford Production House and
4. The Cultural Ladder

4.4 These priorities are woven into a number of key areas for focus, which are detailed in the draft plan – see Appendix A.

4.5 Whilst the Cultural Strategy 2018 - 2025 focuses on the borough's cultural vision and ambitions, it needs to integrate with other key initiatives for the town. These include the Destination Management Plan that is currently being developed, which will deliver town wide branding and a new visitor website along with improved inward investment messaging and support as well as planned public realm improvements and the delivery of a new 10 year vision for the town centre.

4.6 Ensuring that the strategy is integrated into other strategic plans and initiatives and that a focus on delivery is retained throughout the next seven years is critical to its success. It is proposed that a Delivery Group consisting of members from business, cultural partners and the council will help to deliver priorities, monitor progress, and consider and allocate resources where appropriate. This would be chaired by the Elected Mayor.

5.0 **Implications**

5.1 **Financial**

The Shared Director of Finance comments that there is currently no funding agreed for the Cultural Strategy. It is envisaged that the strategy will be funded through a range of sources, including third party contributions. Any funding required from the council will be agreed through the budget setting process.

5.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that there are no legal implications in the report.

5.3 **Equalities/Human Rights**

Having had regard to the council's obligations under s149 of the Equality Act 2010, an EIA has been undertaken and it is also attached.

5.4 **Community Safety/Crime and Disorder**

Improving the public realm, including lighting, way finding and providing cultural activities that enhance the look and feel of identified areas will serve to have a positive effect on the people's perceptions of community safety and crime.

5.5 **Sustainability**

It is envisaged that the council will work with cultural organisations, the Business Improvement District, Big Business Connect in Watford and developers to identify opportunities for collaboration and funding, ensuring future sustainability of the Cultural Strategy. In addition through a new Creative Watford Forum and the Cultural Leaders Group there will be opportunities to share ambition, develop partnership working, share skills knowledge and maximise resources.

Appendices

Appendix A: Draft 02a Watford Cultural Strategy 2018-2025

Appendix B: Watford Cultural Strategy Equality Impact Analysis

Background Papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report

File Reference

None