

Information/Discussion Paper

Committee name: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 3 July 2023

Cheltenham's new culture strategy

Accountable member: Cllr Max Wilkinson, Cabinet Member Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing

Accountable officer: Richard Gibson, Head of communities, wellbeing & partnerships

This note contains the information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Committee, but where no decisions from Members are needed.

Why has this come to scrutiny

In April this year, Cabinet endorsed a culture strategy for Cheltenham (**see appendix 1**).

Alongside the strategy, Cabinet also:

- Agreed that the council should work alongside partners on the Cheltenham Culture Board to develop a robust action plan for the next 12 months;
- Noted that whilst the Council will be involved in working with partners to deliver the outcomes in the action plan and is providing support in the form of one-off funding for a co-ordinator, the Cheltenham Culture Board is a distinct entity in itself.

Overview and Scrutiny now wish to understand the final version of the strategy, how it will be implemented and how success will be measured.

Background to the strategy

The commitment to work with partners to develop a Culture Strategy for Cheltenham was part of the Council's 2019/2023 Corporate Plan under the aim of 'Continuing the Revitalisation and Improvement of our vibrant Town Centre and Public Spaces'.

In May 2019, Cabinet gave its approval for the council to work with a shadow Cheltenham Culture Board to develop a cultural strategy and to procure external support for the development of the cultural strategy.

Following a procurement exercise, consultants were appointed and began work in January 2020. A series of workshops and meetings were held from January 2020 up to March 2020. But due to the pandemic, the work was put on hold and was picked up again later that year. Throughout 2021, a number of workshops were held to engage a wide cross-section of cultural organisations in the process.

A new-look culture board had its first meeting in July 2021 and took on the responsibility of shaping the strategy through its representative structures.

The first draft of the culture strategy was endorsed by Cabinet in April 2022. This was then used as the basis for consultation and engagement over the summer utilising the Citizen Space platform.

The Culture Board then carried out further refinement of the strategy over the Autumn, and signed off the final draft at a meeting earlier this year.

Recognising that the strategy belongs to Cheltenham Culture Board, and not the Council, the final strategy was endorsed by Cabinet in April 2023.

The Cheltenham Culture Board

Cheltenham Culture Board was set up to connect the cultural sectors together and to take on the role of producing the cultural strategy for Cheltenham. The terms of reference for the Board are attached as **appendix 2**

Although its first meeting was only in July 2021, the board has made significant headway in building a strong alliance across Cheltenham's cultural and creative communities with a strong commitment to its role to advocate that culture and creativity should be central to the economic and social life of Cheltenham.

The aim of the Culture Board is to set and deliver a cultural strategy for Cheltenham which makes demonstrable progress towards the Board's longer-term vision for the town:

The board is proud that it has developed a representative structure, drawing people together with a diverse range of skills, knowledge and expertise to give their perspective in areas of culture, business, community and academia. The sectors that are represented include:

- Festivals
- Visual arts
- Heritage
- Theatres
- Music and performance
- The voluntary and community sector
- Diversity groups
- Accessibility and inclusivity
- Creative / cyber industries
- Sustainability focused organisations
- Further education / higher education
- Secondary Schools

The board also has individual membership from the Cheltenham Trust, Cheltenham Borough Council and the libraries team at Gloucestershire County Council.

The Cheltenham Culture Strategy (see appendix 1)

In producing the strategy, the board consulted widely with cultural partners and key stakeholders across the town all of which endorsed an assessment of Cheltenham as a place with powerful cultural and heritage assets that need to be celebrated and nurtured.

What also emerged from the consultations was the need for a cultural vision that would shift a gear in our approach to developing and deepening the cultural offer, establishing Cheltenham as a truly innovative creative place and destination, fostering creative expression alongside much greater community engagement.

The board's vision is therefore:

Cheltenham is a vibrant place and cultural destination where the fusion of arts, digital and heritage innovation fosters creative and inclusive communities where everyone has the chance to thrive

To meet this cultural vision the board has agreed six objectives that provide the focus for this strategy and the board’s draft action plan:

- Forge partnerships and collaboration across the heritage, cultural and digital sectors.
- Use culture and creativity to improve the life chances of our young people.
- Promote equity of opportunity to help build inclusive and creative communities.
- Celebrate and nurture our community, grass-roots creative talents and ambitions.
- Drive our visitor economy and wider place brand.
- Use culture, creativity and innovation to contribute to the Cheltenham Zero and work collectively to address the climate emergency.

The Board’s draft action plan (see appendix 3)

The Board’s action plan has taken shape over the past couple of months. For each of the objectives listed above, it sets out:

- The scale of the board’s longer-term commitment (up to 2027);
- A baseline assessment;
- A sense of what the board will do in the next 12 months, broken down into definites and aspirations (where the action might be dependent on fund-raising or securing additional capacity);
- Who will be responsible; and
- Potential measures.

It is noted that the action plan is in draft awaiting final sign-off by the Board at its meeting on 12 July.

What has the Board Achieved to date

The Committee might be interested in a short summary of the benefits that the Board has brought to cultural life in Cheltenham against the six objectives

Objective	Progress
Forge partnerships and collaboration across the heritage, cultural and digital sectors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated supportive relationships between board members and subgroups e.g. volunteers shared between Chelt Festivals and Chelt Comedy Fest, and a free venue provided by the Playhouse for the Poetry Festival. • Board members collaborated towards Arts Council England bid for Holst 2024 celebrations (CBC, Everyman, University, Chelt Festivals). • Facilitated engagement and fed in to Golden Valley social value plans.
Use culture and creativity to improve the life chances of our young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed work experience opportunities for Uni of Glos students generated by Chelt Festivals & the Playhouse. • Formed a Learning and Participation sub-group to coordinate experiences and partipatory opportunities for young people via the Cheltenham Education Partnership.
Promote equity of opportunity to help build inclusive and creative communities.	Development of a doughnut Toolkit (based on doughnut economics model) as a leading cultural accessibility framework and developed working relationships with Creative United, Drake Music, Inclusive Music Consortium.
Celebrate and nurture our community, grass-roots creative talents and ambitions.	Selected as a candidate for UNESCO Cultural Cities Network - Cheltenham has been proposed within the <i>Literature</i> category.

<p>Drive our visitor economy and wider place brand.</p>	<p>Coordinating the planning and delivery of digital delivery platforms to support our visitor strategy via Visit Cheltenham, Chelt Open Studios, Cheltenham BID and Cynam.</p>
<p>Use culture, creativity and innovation to contribute to the Cheltenham Zero and work collectively to address the climate emergency.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sustainability working group is developing a strategy for the culture board to work collectively towards Cheltenham Zero and shared targets. • Organised and hosted Cycle Hub network meeting, developing a culture concept to be incorporated into cycle hub plans.

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