

9<sup>th</sup> March 2022

<b>Report of</b>	<b>Assistant Director, Communities</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Claire Taylor</b> ☎ 282655
<b>Title</b>	<b>Cultural Strategy</b>		
<b>Wards affected</b>	All Wards		

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This is a covering report introducing a new Cultural Strategy for Colchester, attached as Appendix A. It was commissioned by the Council and its strategic arts partners from specialist consultant Counterculture, and has been developed in consultation with the public, the local cultural sector, related stakeholders, and Arts Council England (ACE). Tom Wilcox, Senior Partner at Counterculture will be attending Cabinet to present a summary of the Strategy and the work undertaken.

## 2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 Cabinet is requested to endorse the Cultural Strategy for Colchester.

## 3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 The cultural offer is an integral part of what makes the Borough of Colchester a great place to live, visit, work and study, and the wider sector is a key driver of the local economy. Through providing and enabling opportunities for residents to engage with culture and to come together be creative, the sector has a positive impact on health, wellbeing, and community cohesion across the Borough of Colchester. The new Strategy recognises all the above and will provide the context to support further development and investment.

## 4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 No alternative actions have been presented to Cabinet

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## **5. Background Information**

- 5.1 The past decade has seen ongoing major investment in the Borough's cultural infrastructure; most recently the £11.8m redevelopment of the Mercury Theatre. During the same period many diverse community led initiatives have demonstrated the depth of engagement and ambition at grassroots level.
- 5.2 An earlier Cultural Strategy was commissioned by the Council from Tom Fleming Associates in 2010/11. By 2019 objectives identified there had been achieved or were no longer relevant, and demand was growing from the Council's arts partners, the wider sector, and key funders such as Arts Council England (ACE) for a new Colchester Cultural Strategy; to build on the momentum and investments of the previous decade and create a context for future cooperation and innovation, to help grow participation and secure ongoing funding.
- 5.3 The project was identified by the Administration as a Strategic Plan priority and following an options appraisal and consultation with stakeholders, the decision made to commission a specialist consultant to deliver a new Strategy to 2030. The work was delayed by the pandemic but following an open tender process in March 2021 Counterculture were appointed to lead the work, reporting to a project team including Colchester's Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs): the Mercury Theatre, Firstsite, Colchester Arts Centre and Colchester Museums.
- 5.4 The brief adopted a broad definition of culture to include not only the arts and the creative sector, but also the links into heritage, the public realm, tourism and events.
- 5.5 The Strategy has been developed after a wide consultation with both the public and stakeholders, in the context of Council strategic planning and that of partners across the Borough, and external funders such as Arts Council England (ACE) and Essex County Council (ECC). Earlier drafts of the document were shared widely with key local stakeholder groups including Creative Colchester, the One Colchester Board and Our Colchester (the Business Improvement District) as well as ACE and ECC, and feedback incorporated into the final document attached here.
- 5.6 The Strategy aims to:
- Recognise the progress and achievements delivered since the last strategy
  - Map the extent and diversity of local cultural activity and assets
  - Present the outcome and analysis of the extensive stakeholder and public consultation
  - Identify priorities in the context of that consultation, the wider challenges and opportunities impacting cultural delivery, and the objectives of major funders and stakeholders.
  - Recommend an action plan against those priorities. It was agreed this should include relevant projects already in train to provide the fullest picture possible to external agencies/funders and others.
  - Provide context and a resource for the sector to demonstrate to funders and others the scope, commitment and ambition for ongoing cultural development and delivery in Colchester.

- 5.7 It should be noted this Strategy does not seek to lay out solely what the Council commits to do, but what could be realistically achieved by a broad coalition of organisations and groups working together, intra and cross sector.

## **6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications**

- 6.1 The Cultural Strategy is an overarching document the aims of which include proactively supporting equality and diversity. Where required, specific Equality Impact Assessments will or do exist for recommended actions included within the Strategy, where they are to be delivered partially or solely by Colchester Borough Council.

## **7. Strategic Plan References**

- 7.1 The report relates directly to Strategic Plan Priority: 'Agree and implement a new Cultural Strategy that supports our cultural assets' under the 'Celebrating Our Heritage and Culture' theme.

<https://www.colchester.gov.uk/strategic-plan/2020-23/?id=&page=celebrating--our--heritage--and--culture>

## **8. Consultation**

- 8.1 The Strategy was initially developed by Counterculture through consultation with stakeholders and the public. During that process 45 stakeholders fed in via one-to-one interview and over 1000 members of the public responded to an online questionnaire. In addition, around 200 people attended an open consultation event at the Mercury Theatre in Sept 2021.
- 8.2 The results of the public consultation are included in the Appendices of the Cultural Strategy attached here.
- 8.3 Drafts of the Strategy were shared with key local stakeholders and funders such as Arts Council England and feedback incorporated where appropriate in the final document attached here.

## **9. Publicity Considerations**

- 9.1 There are no direct publicity considerations associated with this covering report. However, the new Cultural Strategy will be hosted on the Council's website and publicised to maximise the reach and impact of the document.

## **10. Financial implications**

- 10.1 Where applicable the financial implications of recommended actions within the Strategy will form part of the Council's budget setting process.

## **11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications**

- 11.1 The provision of cultural and creative opportunities has huge potential to positively impact on the health and wellbeing of residents and to support community cohesion. The Strategy highlights where this is already happening and provides a context for this to be developed further.

## **12. Health and Safety Implications**

12.1 There are no direct health and safety implications associated with this report.

## **13. Risk Management Implications**

13.1 There are no direct risk management implications associated with this report.

## **14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications**

14.1 The Council's Climate Change Project Officer was consulted by Counterculture during the development of the Strategy. The document recognises the role of the cultural sector to contributing to environmental sustainability through delivery and programming.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Colchester Cultural Strategy**