

To: City Executive Board

Date: 1 April 2009

Item No:

Report of: Head of Service, City Development

Title of Report: Oxford City Council Cultural Strategy (2009-2012)

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To obtain approval of the revised Cultural Strategy and Delivery Plan for 2009-2012

Key decision? No

Executive lead member: Cllr Mary Clarkson

Report Approved by:

Executive Director of City Regeneration: Mel Barrett

Finance: Christopher Kaye

Legal: Jeremy Thomas

Environmental Health: John Copley

Policy Framework: Corporate Plan 2008 – 2011

Recommendation(s):

1. To recommend to Council that the revised Cultural Strategy be adopted.

1. This report sets out the need to adopt a Cultural Strategy, how the original Draft Cultural Strategy was developed, the process of consultation that has taken place and how it has since been modified. A copy of the revised Draft Cultural Strategy is at Annex 1. A copy of the Delivery Plan is at Annex 2. Comments and recommendations made by Full Council at its meeting in March are set out under Alterations to Cultural Strategy in point 8.
2. The Council's cultural strategy has been defined as encompassing:
 - The performing and visual arts
 - Landscape, architecture & buildings

- Museums, archives and local identity
 - Fashion, media, design, film, writing & publishing
 - Tourism & heritage
3. Cultural policies play a significant part in the Council's wider policy framework relating to the transformational perspective built into the Corporate Policy. Four priority corporate themes in particular are addressed by the Cultural Strategy:
- Physical regeneration
 - Community cohesion and diversity
 - Creative skills and employment
 - Tackling social deprivation and reducing crime

The Audit Commission Inspection
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4. In November 2006 Officers started preparation for an Audit Commission Inspection on the delivery of cultural services in the City. As a part of this preparation a number of workshops were held with officers, councillors and stakeholders. A desk top review of all the relevant policies, procedures and financial information was also carried out.

The inspection took place in November 2007. The Report is largely positive and whilst it set out some weaknesses it also identified good prospects for the future, given the Council's awareness of these weaknesses and vision for improvement. The Audit Commission found that 'Oxford City Council provides fair cultural services which have promising prospects for improvement'. The report identified several aspects of the service that were good.

- a) Cultural services make a major contribution to improving social inclusion in the city. The Council is committed to the services, which it appreciates clearly support local and national priorities for social inclusion and quality of life.
 - b) Many services are delivered in partnership, delivering effective outcomes in community cohesion, particularly through the art, grants and activities provided through the community centres. The range of cultural activity available is often centred in deprived areas, and the service works hard to reach marginalised groups.
 - c) The services have made progress to achieve many of their objectives, and have made a significant contribution to meeting council priorities, particularly towards quality of life and economic vitality.
 - d) The outdoor environment is well maintained, as is the built heritage of the area.
5. The Report also found areas where cultural services were below standard; in particular the City's swimming pools and leisure centres

were found to be offering poor value for money. As a result the Council has initiated a full-scale review of Leisure Services with a view to the establishment of a management partnership with an external body. This new Cultural Strategy therefore excludes Sport & Leisure facilities, which will be the subject of a different strategic assessment following the decision on partnering.

6. The Council is currently preparing a new Leisure & Sports Development Strategy, directed primarily at increasing participation and encouraging community engagement with sporting activity. This will stand alongside the Cultural Strategy and the two services will work closely together to increase access to cultural opportunities in the city, particularly concentrating on the potential offered by the 2012 Olympics.
7. Key recommendations from the Audit Commission were:
 - a) To improve the value for money of the leisure centres
 - b) To progress the cultural vision for the city as a whole
 - c) To ensure the right building blocks are in place to improve cultural services, including increasing value for money and delivering the West End vision.
8. In terms of prospects for improvement the Commission report states:
 - a) on balance the council has good prospects of improvement overall. It has a greater sense of clarity and ambition, improved focus on better value for money, improving performance management systems and providing good leadership. The Council is progressing with its review of strategies, however service planning for cultural services is still in progress.

Alterations to the original Cultural Strategy.

9. The Cultural Strategy is one element of the Council's response to the Audit Commission's recommendations. It will form the framework for ensuring that the vision for cultural actions and the related service delivery plans are implemented and delivered.
10. Council resolved not to adopt a draft Strategy proposed in April 2008 and asked for a clearer Delivery Plan including :
 - SMART objectives
 - Evidence and impact monitoring systems
 - Review of deadlines and timeframes for delivery
11. The Arts Officer and Oxford Inspires have subsequently re-drafted the Cultural Strategy with the following priorities:
 - a) Emphasis on community development, social inclusion and participation

- b) Delivery
- c) Clear strategic and measurable outcomes
- d) Focus on regeneration
- e) Working to the Council's new Corporate Plan and objectives

12. The new draft Strategy forms an appendix to this report and sets out a vision for culture based around people and participation and an Action Plan with measurable actions and objectives.

13. In line with our corporate aspiration to become a world-class city for everyone, the cultural vision set out in the Corporate Strategy is:

“To be recognised internationally as a world class city for culture; a city that others look to for ideas and models of best practice; a city that integrates and encourages creativity and innovation, bringing the unexpected into everyday living and inspiring others by example.”

14. The Strategy focuses on the delivery of a range of cultural activity across the city and proposes that the City Council's Cultural Priorities should be:

- **Profile** – increasing our regional, national & international standing
- **People and Participation** - strengthening local engagement
- **Places and Productivity** - supporting local talent and creative industries
- **Partnership** – increasing investment, working collaboratively

Conclusion

15. Officers, members and stakeholders have put a considerable amount of time and effort into the development of the Cultural Strategy. There has also been extensive consultation on the original Culture Strategy and this new version has been modified as a result of the many comments received.

16. The process of developing the revised Strategy has resulted in continued recognition of the value that all sectors and partners play in the delivery of cultural services and strong support for its adoption.

17. Culture has a core role in delivering a range of other strategic priorities for the council, including social inclusion, improving the local environment, economy and quality of life. This was recognised by the Audit Commission in the feedback received in the draft Inspection Report and is identified within the new Cultural Strategy.

18. Officers believe that the vision and strategic priorities contained within the document has the support of all partners and stakeholders.

Financial Implications

19. The Delivery Plan demonstrates the need for the Council to have an effective leadership role for culture stakeholders and providers to deliver the vision and priorities. The majority of actions are to be implemented through existing resources. However, there are some resource implications for managing the delivery of culture.
- A Lead Officer post (Cultural Development Manager) to implement key elements of the Action Plan has been included within the City Development Service restructure.
 - Council-led strategic direction to enable partners to deliver culture on our behalf.

Legal Implications

20. There are relatively few legal considerations although some may arise when exploring the role of the cultural partners in delivery (contractual agreements.)

Risk Management

21. The Cultural Strategy presents low risk, although its non-adoption will result in the likelihood that some external funding body income to arts partners and the city's providers may be reduced.

Equalities Implications

22. The strategy adheres to the City Council's Equal Opportunities policy.

Climate Change Implications

23. The strategy adheres to the City Council's policy on climate change.

Recommendations

24. To recommend to Council that the Cultural Strategy be adopted

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Background papers: Cultural Inspection Audit Commission Report

Annex 1:



Oxford – A World Class City for Everyone

A Vision for Culture - 2009-2012

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1. Foreword

Supporting statement to be inserted by Mary Clarkson, CEB Member for Culture

Cultural activity across the board from heritage & art to theatre & music is key to:

- Improving our city – pride of place, regeneration, creating a “joined-up” Oxford; building on heritage; cutting edge facilities;*
- Improving People’s Lives – transformation in the widest sense, community cohesion, celebrating diversity; encouraging creativity & skills; power to change lives regardless of class, education or ethnicity; what people turn to in times of stress; the very best art and culture is for everyone.*
- Improving our Economy – increased employment, investment in the city; creative industries, value for money.*

Oxford City Council is transforming; culture has a proven and significant role in helping us do that.

2. Introduction & Background

This is Oxford – A World Class City for everyone

Oxford is a world-class city – a place to which people are attracted for work, for study and for entertainment. Oxford welcomes the world – it is one of the UK’s most cosmopolitan cities with people from all around the world living here. We are a city of global cultural interest; home to the world’s first public museum and concert hall, stunning architecture, and an international centre for books and publishing. Culture is a key asset. Our commitment to ensuring that Oxford is a world class city for all our citizens, leads us to place participation in world class cultural events and experiences for all of Oxford’s communities, and for visitors, at the heart of our strategies for the future.

The city’s cultural assets, including the contribution of the two highly successful Universities and the diverse, cosmopolitan nature of Oxford’s resident communities give the city an inherent vibrancy and an exceptional potential for delivering excellence.

Oxford offers its citizens, visitors and students:

- A world-renowned academic heritage
- A city with a strong industrial heritage
- Outstanding art and architecture
- Contemporary, internationally-renowned and well-supported cultural institutions
- Excellent parks, open green spaces and waterways.
- Strong, established, diverse communities representing cultures from across the globe.

Oxford’s selection as a “European Centre of Culture” in the competition for the European Capital of Culture 2008 confirmed the quality of Oxford’s cultural offer. The enduring influence of the artists, writers, performers and thinkers

who are associated with the city in the world's imagination, make it one of the world's best known, and most imagined, cities. Oxford is also a significant centre in the cultural economy of South East England, especially for creative industries and for artists' higher education and training, and was recognised as one of three centres of cultural leadership in the South East.

This new cultural strategy for the City Council reflects the Council's commitment to building on the momentum of the programmes that have been delivered by the joint cultural development agency, Oxford Inspires, including Evolving City, Arts on the Estates and Oxfordshire 2007. It aims to create a 21st century Oxford that balances its heritage with an international programme of vibrant, contemporary cultural activity.

Oxford has obvious outstanding cultural strengths, but the City Council is not complacent about the city's future as a cultural centre of international standing. We recognise that the City Council's direct role in cultural provision will inevitably be restricted, and that our policy framework must be focussed on the development and sustaining of cultural partnerships, working with a wide range of external bodies. We aim to be proactive in identifying programmes and opportunities that serve our communities' needs; in developing contemporary cultural events and festivals that match Oxford's heritage in quality and national recognition; and in creating the appropriate focus for supporting the artists that train here to develop their careers. Culture holds communities together and plays a key role in shaping community relationships, how people feel about their city and how it is seen by the wider world.

Culture is not just about great icons or famous names, or just "a nice thing to have". It has the power to change our way of life, to shape what we pass on to future generations about our city, to contribute substantially to the economy, improve health & well being and enable people to feel better about themselves and where they live.

The recent LGA improvement strategy for culture & sport "A Passion for Excellence"¹ highlights local government as "leaders of place", working with local partners to deliver better outcomes, improving the quality of life for local people and providing them with the services they want and need. This strategy will guide Oxford City Council's work in cultural development, and will be delivered in partnership: culture in Oxford is shaped by the involvement of our two Universities, by county and regional bodies, by local businesses, by cultural organisations and by many individual talents. Partnership and collaboration is essential to reap the full benefit from the cultural opportunities offered by the city and is a key element of this strategy.

Culture for Oxford City Council encompasses:

- The performing and visual arts
- Landscape, architecture & buildings

¹ A Passion for Excellence – An improvement strategy for culture & sport DCMS/LGA, March 2008

- Museums, archives and local identity
- Fashion, media, design, film, writing & publishing
- Tourism & heritage

2.1 Strategic context

2.1.1 International

Tourism is vital to Oxford's economy and the city is in a highly competitive environment as the choice of cultural destinations increases. Oxford has cultural assets and architecture that rank the city amongst the best in the world and one element of this strategy is to link the cultural offer and events more closely with the development of tourism.

World Tourism Organisation figures on cultural tourism indicate an annual rate of growth of 15% (pre-recession), and that 45% of European holiday destinations are chosen because of related heritage sites, cultural events and attractions.

2.1.2 National

The DCMS' aim is: "to improve the quality of life for all through cultural and sporting activities, support the pursuit of excellence, and champion the tourism, creative and leisure industries."

Following this remit, the current national priorities for the delivery of culture are:

- Opportunity; encouraging a more widespread enjoyment of culture, media and sport
- Excellence: supporting talent and developing "peak" performers
- Economic impact: optimising the benefits from tourism and the cultural industries for employment and economic development
- Olympics: ensuring that the period leading up to the 2012 Olympics offers the people of the UK new and enriching cultural opportunities

2.1.3 Regional

In Oxford, we work in partnership with Arts Council South East by:

- Supporting the engagement of the Universities with cultural development in terms of training, supporting creative industries and programming large-scale initiatives e.g. arts/science collaborations.
- Developing new financial models and business models for the support of the arts through the public and private sector.
- Using the arts as a transformational experience for individuals and communities through high quality participation and community arts projects as well as large-scale events/programmes.

Tourism South East's regional strategy² highlights the importance of building real partnerships and the achievement of sustainable growth. The focus is on the visitor experience and aims to help deliver SEEDA's five key objectives:

² Tourism ExSEllence 2008-212

- Competitive businesses
- Successful people
- Vibrant Communities
- Effective Infrastructure
- Sustainable use of resources

SEEDA are promoting the South East as a region of festivals and place particular emphasis on supporting the creative industries through the regional Diamonds for Growth initiative.

2.1.4 Local

The City Council will endeavour to ensure that culture is embedded within our partnership plans and priorities, particularly the Oxfordshire Strategic Partnership and the Oxfordshire Partnership. These bring together key organisations from the public, business, community and voluntary sectors to develop and implement a long term collective vision for Oxford and Oxfordshire. Culture supports the delivery of the core local priorities, which are defined as:

The Oxfordshire Sustainable Communities Strategy:

- World class economy
- Environment & Climate Change
- Healthy & Thriving Communities
- Reducing inequalities & Breaking the Cycle of Deprivation

The Oxford City Council Corporate Plan priorities:

- Stronger & more inclusive communities
- More housing, better housing for all
- Improve the environment, economy & quality of life
- Tackle climate change
- Reduce crime
- Improving Value for Money

A vibrant and ambitious creative and cultural community will play an important transformational role in regenerating our city. A key part of the Council's role is to build the capacity of partner organisations to deliver cultural activities within the context of our Regeneration Framework.

2.2 Oxford's Profile

Oxford has a total population of around 148,000 and is a relatively young city, with over half the population aged under 35. It is an urban city within the most rural county in South East England. It is the seventh most visited destination in the UK by international visitors, attracting approximately 8 million visitors a year. It has a long history of cultural innovation including the country's first Botanic Garden, the world's first public museum (the Ashmolean in 1682) and the world's first music room (Holywell). It continues to be at the forefront of trends and ideas, with the first open studios programme in England 1987 and with the unique collaboration of Oxford Inspires, a cultural partnership born out of the European Capital for Culture bid in 2000. Oxford is also home to

many inspirational, dynamic community arts facilities including Pegasus Theatre and Fusion Arts who have direct relationships with minority and excluded communities.

Diversity is at the core of our ambition to become a world-class city for everyone. Our city has a higher than average representation across all ethnic minority groups when compared to the regional and national data, reaching an aggregate figure of around 20%. This is identified in the wealth of multi-cultural activity present in the city including the Cowley Road Carnival, the Oxford Mela and other festivals and cultural events put on by community groups. With our many partners, we strive to present and promote such work to enable cultural understanding and break down barriers in an accessible and thought-provoking manner.

There is more to Oxford than the traditionally painted image of dreaming spires and academic heritage. We are building on the Oxford brand as a distinctive heritage centre, by offering contemporary cultural activity that compliments and enhances the city's heritage.

3. Purpose of the Strategy

This Cultural Strategy for Oxford City Council provides the framework for shaping the future role of culture in our city and supports our corporate vision to make Oxford a world-class city for everyone.

We aim to:

- create a shared vision for culture across the city, exploring what kind of cultural life we aspire to and the benefits that can be realised, providing a rationale for further investment in the cultural sector
- identify ways in which cultural provision, support to the culture sector and access to cultural opportunities can be improved in Oxford
- demonstrate commitment to a genuinely partnership-based approach to sustaining, developing and improving the cultural life of the city, locally and within the wider international, national and regional arena.

4. The Cultural Vision for Oxford

In line with our corporate aspiration to become a world-class city for everyone, our cultural vision is:

“To be recognised internationally as a world class city for culture; a city that others look to for ideas and models of best practice; a city that integrates and encourages creativity and innovation, bringing the unexpected into everyday living and inspiring others by example.”

4.1 Why does Culture matter to us as a City Council?

In the past three years, with the huge growth of the creative industries³ (now accounting for over 7% of GDP), there has been an explosion of interest in culture's value to society and the economy. The ability of the cultural sector to deliver economic and social benefits and the ability of artists to transfer creative thinking skills is generating a much wider acceptance of the value of the arts. Culture is part of the solution to a range of issues from social inclusion, to skills development, to creating strong communities and increasing prosperity. Education demonstrates that creative learning is effective learning, which motivates children and teachers. The exercise of personal creativity is recognised as beneficial in promoting mental wellbeing by the health sector. Each of these potentially opens up new opportunities for the cultural sector. Culture can and does contribute in our city in addressing and delivering our corporate priorities:

4.1.1. "A World Class City for Everyone"

Creative industries, tourism, heritage all attract people and businesses to an area, supporting the visitor economy and creating thriving communities, establishing world-class cities. Culture is also a determinant of the quality of life available in an area and as such, influences inward investment decisions of companies and public sector organisations, which can further contribute to the economic vitality of a city region:

"Now is the time to recognise the growing success story that is Britain's creative economy and build on it. The creative industries must move from the margins to the mainstream of economic and policy thinking, as we look to create the jobs of the future" ⁴

4.1.2 Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour

Participation in cultural activity can lead to improved confidence, skills development and employability and creative learning has proven benefits in children's attainment as well as in their enthusiasm for learning. Oxford Brookes University is a UK leader in creative education. There are clearly many links between the arts, adult learning and the government's skills agenda. The Creative Partnerships initiative working with schools has been rolled out, leading to even more active participation in arts and cultural activity by children and young people. Formally organised voluntary and amateur arts groups account for almost one fifth of all arts participation in England.⁵ Participation in creative activities leads to enormous benefits for our society, engages "hard-to-reach" excluded groups and promotes community cohesion.

4.1.3 Stronger and more inclusive communities

Cultural activity supports physical and mental health, building strong, active communities. Evidence that the arts supports rehabilitation, increases emotional and mental well-being and aids in promoting the benefits of healthy lifestyles is documented in projects such as intergenerational work with

³ Defined as advertising, architecture, art & antiques, crafts, design, designer fashion, film, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, publishing, software & computer services, TV & radio.

⁴ Creative Britain: New Talents for the New Economy, DCMS/DIUS, 2008

⁵ Our Creative Talent: the voluntary and amateur arts in England, DCMS/ACE June 2008

older/younger people, in occupational therapy across the county and nationally and is recognised by the NHS.

4.1.4 Improving the local environment, economy and quality of life

Culture done well, has the potential to bring people together from all areas of life and increases our sense of local identity and belonging, breaking down barriers and adding to our overall quality of life. A sense of identity, of home, of distinctiveness is vital to healthy cohesive communities and culture can highlight those things that we care about – through public art for example – as well as provide opportunities for people in communities to come together and form bonds through community events and festivals.

Local pride, distinctive neighbourhoods, green spaces and parks all contribute to a better place to live. Good quality, far-reaching facilities are essential to the city's development and future as a cutting-edge, contemporary city. And ownership by local people is paramount to success.

5. Delivering culture in Oxford; Oxford City Council's Strategic Priorities for Culture:

- **Profile – increasing our regional, national & international standing**
- **People and Participation - strengthening local engagement**
- **Places and Productivity - supporting local talent and creative industries**
- **Partnership – increasing investment and working collaboratively**

5.1. Profile – Increasing our regional, national & international standing

The world is becoming increasingly globalised, and in competition with the rest of Europe and beyond for our place as an international centre of culture, Oxford has to set itself new objectives. This will mean taking bold initiatives with cultural programming to encompass a broader range of creative activity. Our objectives will be to:

- Work with our partners to increase high quality programming in non-traditional spaces.
- Work on developing and promoting large-scale events that draw on international/national audiences.
- Improve the marketing and communications of cultural events in the city by working closely with the tourism sector and events organisers.

5.2. People & Participation – Strengthening local engagement

Oxford offers a wide choice of cultural activity, from world-class venues showing West End work through to innovative arts spaces for young people, community art projects and a vibrant voluntary arts scene. Our objectives will be to:

- Support and nurture models of good practice for community organisations to actively work alongside professional cultural institutions.
- Improve access to cultural events for local communities particularly amongst people who currently feel excluded.
- Encourage and support audience development for cultural events in the city.

5.3. Places & Productivity – Supporting local talent & creative industries

Oxford has strong and inclusive venues to **see** art; where we are lacking is in places for **making/creating**. We lose many talented young artists to other cities and the facilities are not available to bring in more cutting edge and inspirational individuals and companies. Our objectives will be to:

- Commit to encouraging new creative talent and for more creative industries to take up residence in the city.
- Assess the physical infrastructure need for creative workspace and work in partnership to address their needs.
- Encourage artists to create site-specific works that explore and draw inspiration from the diversity of the buildings and landscape.

5.4. Partnership – increasing investment and working collaboratively

Oxford City Council is committed to working in partnership across the sectors, working to create a global vision for Oxford's cultural "offer" in order to bring the city in line with its competitors and for us to meet the vision of a world-class city for everyone. Our objectives will be to:

- Research and develop new funding models for arts and culture in association with our core partners.
- Commit to supporting one overall vision and strategic approach to culture in the city in the future.
- Explore new avenues to attract partners who offer high profile branding and strong interaction with the local community.

6. Moving Forward – Cultural Strategy Action Plan

Our success lies largely in our actions to address these priorities and the Cultural Strategy Action Plan outlines core objectives, measured against SMART outcomes to enable Oxford City Council's cultural aspirations to become a reality. We have incorporated NI11 as an indicator within the City Development Service Transformation Plan to enable us to properly evaluate and document the evidence for increasing participation in cultural activity.

This Cultural Strategy has been written with two intrinsic aims:

- Sustainability: To build capacity and allow our long-standing, established cultural institutions and organisations to grow significantly and aspirationally.

- Enhancement: To encourage and support new talent and creative industry to encourage innovation and the regeneration of Oxford as a contemporary city.

Our core cultural priorities throughout the strategy are aimed at supporting and encouraging people as keen participants in cultural activity at all levels.

The Cultural Strategy Action Plan reflects the City Council's cultural priorities in line with our overall corporate plan and provides an over-arching approach for the delivery of cultural services by Oxford City Council. This framework will be delivered through service strategic plans and Service Level Agreements and will be coordinated by the Cultural Development Manager. A clear monitoring & evaluation structure will be implemented for accurate evidencing of impact against corporate objectives.

Annex 2 ; Cultural Strategy Action Plan 2009-2012 (separate document)