Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Executive Director (Adults and Communities)
To

Cabinet

3 November 2020

Report prepared by: Scott Dolling, Director of Culture and Tourism

Culture Vision

Relevant Scrutiny Committee(s) Place
Cabinet Member: Councillor Kevin Robinson
Part 1 (Public Agenda Item)

1.   Purpose of Report

To update Cabinet on progress with community engagement towards developing our Culture Vision meeting 2050 objectives and shaping the cultural offer in Southend.

2.   Recommendations

2.1   That Cabinet agree the following recommendations

2.2 Members note the engagement with our residents and local practitioners on the cultural offer. Information is appended and a short film can be seen on www.southendculture.co.uk

2.2) Members note the key themes identified through engagement so far and that the Culture Vision is further coproduced in partnership with the Southend creative sector, residents and businesses.

3.   Background

3.1   Culture can play a significant role in regeneration, skills and our changing town centres. There is also increasing evidence of the role that culture plays in our health and wellbeing. This tangible link has been developed in Southend with joint outcomes embedded into the cultural management team closely aligning with public health outcomes.

3.2 Successful transformation of cities like Hull and Derry following their Capital of Culture status provide examples of how place-making and civic pride are boosted through a cultural focus.

3.3 Culture is a key sector for regeneration providing opportunities for the region to be redefined. Southend as part of ASELA is involved with various projects to maximise economic growth opportunities through a cultural led agenda. The Thames Estuary Production Corridor and Thames Estuary Growth Board identify the sector's economic benefits and Southend is well positioned to benefit from inward investment and enterprise opportunities.

3.4 In Southend, a project is underway to increase involvement in the shape and priorities for our cultural offer Between January and April 2020, 749 people responded to a communications platform considering our current status and future priorities for the cultural offer in Southend. Further face to face events also took place at a variety of venues.

3.5 Questions were composed and agreed with cultural sector colleagues and the engagement programme was promoted across many different forums including social media and face to face sessions. Invited groups were approached along with some bespoke sessions addressing inclusivity and accessibility.

3.6 Several key themes have emerged which have been assessed independently by research specialists BMG which will help inform the collective vision and associated action plan for the Council and local cultural organisations to respond to.

3.7 The ability to engage in this process via a series of events and an interactive website has totally accorded with the service co-design principles of our 2050 Active and Involved outcomes.

3.8 Previous strategies have been written documents, the aim with this vision will be to provide a more dynamic and ongoing response. This will address the expectations of residents, those involved in the sector and visitors supported by an action plan, to be developed, focusing on the growing benefits of culture to our community.

3.9 Several key **themes** from the engagement stood out and will inform the vision's objectives and action plan some of these are identified below:

- **The value of outdoor event and festival based activity is strong. This theme, along with heritage sites and places, were the top responses for funding priority.**

- **Lack of awareness is a common theme and improvements to communication and marketing methods were identified.**

- **The importance of community led cultural activity was identified. Libraries were recognised as an important part of this offer with potential for more events and activity.**

- **Residents identify a need for a more accessible and inclusive cultural offer.**

- **The Pier, theatres, museums and festivals are considered the most important to older respondents in the Southend community. Cinema, Adventure Island and music are more valued by younger audiences**

- **Investment priorities for the next 5 years identified Youth, The Pier and Music.**

- **Developing new cultural uses in vacant town centre spaces were referenced widely.**

3.10   Recognition from residents regarding the importance of cultural activity was also clearly demonstrated during the COVID-19 lockdown. Demand for online creative content through various channels significantly increased during this period.   Feedback from residents states that access to participatory cultural and creative activity played a crucial role in supporting their physical and mental wellbeing, greatly helping those who were struggling with major challenges such as loneliness, anxiety, depression and stress. The Council was able to respond to this demand with our museums and galleries increasing online content and our libraries providing online offer as well as click and collect services.

3.11   The Council's culture team led on a Livewell leaflet during the summer that was distributed to every household and provided tools to support home schooling, activities and stimulate creativity. Focal Point Gallery delivered a 'Why don't you' series whilst the museum service's 'design your own museum was a popular feature.

3.12   Arts Council England has very recently published two new pieces of research that also concur with key trends from the Culture Vision engagement around the value of cultural organisations to our high streets.

The first of these publications is a data report which shows that cultural buildings that are located at the heart of our high streets help to support local economies by creating jobs.

Another report commissioned by Arts Council England demonstrates culture's role in revitalising the high streets by promoting social cohesion and supporting local economies up and down the country, the Arts and Place Shaping: Evidence Review indicates that culture supports community cohesion, increases footfall, helps repurpose vacant buildings and creates economic growth.

3.13   Following the recent decision to cancel the town centre based Forum 2 building, several educational and cultural outcomes still need to be delivered. The above Arts Council evidence adds more weight for the need to progress alternative options which has been agreed by Cabinet .

4.   Other Options

Previous cultural strategy work has not reached out in this co-production approach and is not recommended.

5.   Reasons for Recommendations

This trajectory aligns 2050 outcomes with an overarching cultural theme and has been developed with the community and practitioners in the sector.

6.   Corporate Implications

6.1   Contribution to Southend 2050 outcomes across several themes.

P&J 1	There is a tangible sense of pride in the place and local people are actively, and knowledgeably, talking up Southend.
P&J 2	The variety and quality of our outstanding cultural and leisure offer has increased and we have become the regions first choice coastal tourism destination.

S&W 2	Southenders are remaining well enough to enjoy fulfilling lives, throughout their lives.
S&W 4	We are all effective at protecting and improving the quality of life for the most vulnerable in our community

A&I 1	Even more citizens agree that people from different backgrounds are valued and get on well together.
A&I 2	The benefits of community connection are evident as more people come together to help, support and spend time with each other.
A&I 3	Public services are routinely designed, and sometimes delivered, with their users to best meet their needs.
A&I 4	A range of initiatives help communities come together to enhance their neighbourhood and environment.

O&P 2	We have a fast-evolving re-imagined and thriving town centre, with an inviting mix of shops, homes, culture and leisure opportunities

O&P 3	Our children are school and life ready and our workforce is skilled and job ready
O&P 5	Southend is a place that is renowned for its creative industries, where new businesses thrive and where established employers and others invest for the long term

C&S 4	Southend is a leading digital city with world class infrastructure

6.2 Financial Implications

Specific projects will be brought forward through due processes for any funding, there is no specific financial asks related to this paper.

6.3 Legal Implications

N/A

6.4 People Implications

N/A

6.5 Property Implications

6.6 Consultation

A series of events and an online platform were managed to establish a co-produced vision taking themes and priorities form participants. Over 900 respondents provided feedback to develop the vision. The ongoing action plan will be delivered in partnership.
The Business, Culture and Tourism working party saw the emerging themes at their meeting in July 2020 and were supportive of the co-production approach and the themes so far identified.

6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

Specific sessions were facilitated for accessibility and inclusion and included several bespoke workshops and presentations. Each project will have its own Equality assessment. Specific theme around inclusion is within the themes.

6.8 Risk Assessment

N/A

6.9   Value for Money

The research sessions were carried out by SBC staff and partners with no external costs but engaged widely at a series of events and online feedback platform also developed internally.
The feedback will help inform ongoing funding decisions for increased value for money.
The progress involved also contributes towards the action plan within the tourism strategy – Destination Southend

6.10   Community Safety Implications

N/A

6.11   Environmental Impact

7.   Background Papers

8.   Appendices

Research graphs