

# Southend-on-Sea City Council

## Report of Executive Director for Adults and Communities

To

Cabinet

On 26 July 2022

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

Agenda  
Item No.

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### UK City of Culture bid 2029

Relevant Scrutiny Committee(s) Place  
Executive Councillor: Councillor Mulroney  
Part 1

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#### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet on the potential opportunities, risks and likely resources required for Southend should it be decided to prepare a bid for the 2029 UK City of Culture competition.

#### 2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That Cabinet agrees to initial research and engagement with the Southend resident community to assess the level of support for a bid to become the 2029 UK City of Culture with a further report back to Cabinet on the outcome of the engagement.

#### 3 Background

3.1 In November 2020 the Council adopted its culture vision strategy setting out its ambitions for the Borough (now City) in relation to culture. Recognising all the benefits that culture brings to a place such as wellbeing, social and economic value and a means to reach communities and subjects in a creative way, the vision engaged with hundreds of residents to develop a truly co-produced base.

3.2 In June 2021 the Council also approved its Culture led Regeneration of the High Street policy.

3.3 In March 2022, Southend was made a city and through its creation and the legacy of Sir David Amess, Culture has been at the heart of commemorations throughout the inaugural City year. A committee comprising council, commercial and cultural members along with both MPs has overseen the city year celebrations which have demonstrated the uniting value of culture in all its forms. This group is of a consistent view that as an onward aspiration for our new city, Southend should work towards becoming the UK City of Culture for 2029.

3.4 The City of Culture initiative has made a lasting and significant change to previous winners (Derry 2013, Hull 2017) . A report by Hull University in March 2018 found Hull's status as the UK City of Culture attracted more than five million people, £220 million of investment and 800 new jobs. The impact of the city of culture was felt far beyond the obvious arts and creative sector and demonstrated a renewed confidence to Hull and improved economic and social value (report on link) [University of Hull reveals UK City of Culture 2017 evaluation | University of Hull](#) .

3.5 Since 2009 there have been 71 expressions of interest in the UK City of Culture programme. 44 places have submitted full bids; 17 cities and regions have been shortlisted and 4 awarded the UK City of Culture title. The majority of the shortlisted and title cities and regions are younger, more diverse, and have higher levels of multiple deprivation than the UK average.

3.6 The value of the competition is on an upward spiral and the most recent City of Culture, Coventry in 2021 is still receiving national media coverage. The benefits from the positive impact of success are increasingly measurable far beyond an economic perspective and demonstrated through regeneration, social change, and civic pride.

3.7 In May 2022 Bradford was announced as the winner of the 2025 competition and now begins three years of preparations to fulfil its bid ambitions. Bradford allocated £1.4M over 3 years to develop its winning bid. This level of commitment and resource adds further evidence of the increased value that winning the competition brings.

3.8 However, against these levels of return on successful bids and the rewards that winning the competition can bring, we also need to analyse the unsuccessful bidders and what, if any, uplift just making the bid made to their economic and cultural wellbeing.

3.9 Southend's MPs arranged a fact finding initial meeting for the Council with the Department for Culture. It was established that all bids to date have had very different perspectives and focused on addressing the individual circumstances set out by the bidding city. The relevant council in all cases would need to take a civic lead in such bids, but the wider community's involvement is essential too. This would need to be demonstrated in both participation, funding and in-kind support. The bidding process itself provides a galvanising opportunity for the community to be part of the developing bid and even if not successful, brings significant benefits (see paras 3.4 and 3.6 above)

3.10 The expectation is that a similar process will take place as it did for the 2025 competition with an initial light touch expression of interest. This would be followed by long listing then to short listing of around 6 cities where a worked-up plan and visit by the competition panel would take place. Financial support to deliver the full bid for shortlisted cities may be offered again with £40k. Early preparation work involving the community now would strengthen the later stages in the process.

3.11 The competition will be high as the tangible benefits of culture and this competition are becoming more understood by cities. The process of bidding itself is also shown to demonstrate value for communities to unite and provide focus. (see para 3.6 above)

3.12 A successful bid would attract major investment, media coverage and significant economic outcomes but would need additional resource to facilitate delivery. Other successful cities have allocated multi million-pound investments – though much of this is permanent transformational regeneration in associated public realm projects and cultural assets.

3.13 External funding and in-kind support from interested partners would be needed alongside the council's resources to strengthen the project if progressed to full bid preparation.

3.14 The initial stages will involve engagement with the community to develop ideas and priorities that our residents, creative sector practitioners and partners would like to see achieved.

3.15 The benefits of culture led regeneration are now well documented with LGA report in 2019 (appended) highlighting many aspects from civic pride to health benefits. A bid to the city of culture process whether successful or not is likely to have a positive and long-lasting effect for Southend as a new city and supports the co-production principles set out in our culture vision strategy.

3.16 The impact of cultural regeneration is recognised by central government with the first two Levelling Up fund featuring cultural outcomes as key components for submissions. Progressing towards a City of Culture would enable a cohesive approach to deliver some key milestones towards the regeneration of Southend. However, recent events show that there are other considerations which need to be taken into account in deciding whether or not a bid should be submitted.

3.17 The cost-of-living crisis is deepening and the Council has to seriously consider value for money of a bid submission for the residents of Southend. Increased pressure on public finances is now being experienced and will intensify over the coming months and years coupled with further significant burdens on local authorities.

3.18 The Council should therefore consider the business case in order to be a serious contender for the award and carry out engagement with the community of Southend through an online survey and direct communication with other key stakeholders.

3.19 The Council should also seek the views of cultural practitioners and the business community to gauge the level of support and commitment for a bid and what they and other organisations can contribute in terms of resources and creative approach.

3.20 The Council cannot progress a bid on its own without considerable additional financial and other resources to be a serious contender.

3.21 It should also be noted that if it were decided to bid and the bid was successful this would have a profound effect on the Council's current and future capital investment programme due to the financial and resource input required for both.

#### **4. Other Options**

The council could decide not to pursue a city of culture bid without any evidence gathering of the benefits/disbenefits and community engagement. However,

until such time as the outcome of that engagement is known, the Council is unable to make an informed decision.

## **5. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 5.1 The proposal is to reach out to our community to test their appetite before committing significant public finances to progress a bid.

## **6. Corporate Implications**

- 6.1 Contribution to Council's 2050 vision

**Pride and Joy, Active and Involved, Opportunity and prosperity, Safe and well, connected and smart.**

### **6.2 Financial Implications**

- 6.2.1 There is no direct financial ask at this stage as the proposal is to engage input from the community.

- 6.2.2 Shortlisted cities in previous rounds have been given some financial support (£40k) to develop the full bid.

- 6.2.3 Significant project funding formed part of Bradford's successful bid for 2025, They allocated £1.4M on the bid over the three year period. A successful application would require investment, however major rewards, regeneration, profile and job creation have been evidenced in successful cities.

- 6.2.4 If successful an appraisal and reprioritisation of the Council's current and future capital investment programme will be required.

### **6.3 Legal Implications**

N/A

### **6.5 Property Implications**

N/A at this stage though some of the cultural asset base may need to be a new focus in capital programme if successful.

### **6.6 Consultation**

Co-production of our bid will be essential in these early stages in determining resident's priorities.

### **6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications**

Co-production would include specific work with diverse community groups to ensure inclusion and relevance across all parts of the community

## **6.8 Risk Assessment**

N/A

## **6.9 Value for Money**

There is no direct impact at this stage.

## **6.10 Community Safety Implications**

N/A

## **6.11 Environmental Impact**

Colleagues and partners will be included to ensure that developing plans take account of environmental considerations and our climate emergency.

## **7. Background Papers**

## **8. Appendices**

### **LGA Cultural regeneration 2019**