

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Executive Director for Adults and Communities

To
Cabinet

On 8 November 2022

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

Agenda
Item No.

UK City of Culture bid

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

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update Cabinet on the implications of a possible bid for the UK City of Culture competition.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Cabinet recognises the potential benefits of developing a City of Culture bid in the future. However as a fledgling City, which alongside our residents and businesses, is faced with the cost of living crisis, inflation and significant pressures in adult and children's social care, it is considered inappropriate to incur any expenditure in relation to a bid in the 2029 competition.

3 Background

- 3.1 Southend was awarded city status following the murder of Sir David Amess who was a huge advocate for the culture and wellbeing of residents.
- 3.2 The inaugural city year has seen some outstanding cultural activity take place with events and festivals in particular bringing transformational activity to the City.
- 3.3 At the Council's Cabinet meeting of 26 July 2022, we outlined the steps towards making a bid for this competition. With the economic situation as it stood at that time it was considered prudent to ensure that a majority of our residents also shared the ambition and benefits of bidding through a consultation.

- 3.4 Since the summer, the financial situation and cost-of-living crisis has worsened nationally and for local authorities, residents, and businesses alike due to rising energy costs, inflation, interest rates and demand for services. In-year budget monitoring currently forecasts a budget overspend of £12.1m for 2023/24, and a structural budget gap which is rising over the medium term due to all of these factors and requires prudent and effective fiscal management, decisions and planning. The council has introduced a recruitment freeze and multiple savings initiatives to manage the current situation.
- 3.5 From the experience of other cities, it is known that a bid will take around 6 years to prepare from initial conception to award (if successful) and delivery. So now is the optimum window for for that work to start for a bid in 2029.
- 3.6 The bidding process would require significant officer and consultant time, co-partnership with business and other organisations alongside existing commitments. The Council's budget gap created by macro financial pressures requires a pragmatic approach to new initiatives and to be successful in this competitive bid, considerable funds would need to be invested.
- 3.7 Southend Council recognises the potential that this competition could bring to the profile of the area and the economic and social benefits of culture for our community, but there are many unknown financial and social pressures facing the Council, residents and businesses at this time.
- 3.8 Building on Southend's 2019 Cultural Strategy 'Culture Vision', the Council will continue to support the evolving action plan and add the City of Culture competition to our longer term aims. The preparation timeline for the competition would probably suggest 2033 being more realistic for Southend to work towards, when our City status is embedded and our culture vision for Southend is realised and can support an exemplary bid. This would provide a phased and planned approach to delivering a legacy for our city status and a uniting ambition for stakeholders.
- 3.9 Taking all of these issues into account and coupled with the increased pressure for resources in adult and children's care, it is recommended that a bid for the UK City of Culture 2029 is not pursued.

4. Other Options

The Council could decide to continue with a consultation before reaching a decision, however at this time of uncertainty even this expenditure is considered to be inappropriate and the Council should concentrate all of its efforts in assisting and working with our residents and businesses to ameliorate the effects of the current economic situation in anyway it can..

Other parties could take a lead and prepare for the 2029 bid, however advice from Government is that Council resources and commitment are generally required to make the bids successful.

5. Reasons for Recommendations

5.1 Timing and an unpredictable economic future are major factors which militate against such major expenditure as would need to be incurred.

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

The costs associated with a bid would be a substantial seven figure sum which cannot be justified in the current economic climate

6.3 Legal Implications

N/A

6.5 Property Implications

N/A.

6.6 Consultation

It is considered that the current economic situation is such that a bid is impossible to justify and therefore a consultation is not required.

6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

N/A

6.8 Risk Assessment

N/A

6.9 Value for Money

The current and ongoing financial situation indicates that even if a bid were successful in 2029 the cost of its preparation in financial and resource terms could not be justified, even less so if it were unsuccessful.

6.10 Community Safety Implications

N/A

6.11 Environmental Impact

N/A

7. Background Papers

8. Appendices

Cabinet paper July 2022