

# Allerdale Borough Council

Executive – 23 November 2022

## Cultural Strategy for West Cumbria

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<b>Portfolio holder</b>	Councillor Fitzgerald Councillor Markley
<b>Report from</b>	R Stamper – Senior Specialist; Sport, Art and Leisure
<b>Wards affected</b>	All wards
<b>Is this a key decision</b>	Yes

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### **1.0 The reason for the decision**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval of the Cultural Strategy for West Cumbria (2022 – 2027).

### **2.0 Recommendations**

2.1 It is recommended that Members agree to approve the Cultural Strategy for West Cumbria as attached at Appendix 1.

### **3.0 Background and Introduction**

- 3.1 As we emerge from the impact of a global pandemic and try to cope with an emerging cost of living crisis, what is clear is that the effect on the cultural sector is significant. For many organisations, artists and facilities the future is still uncertain, and the struggle to adapt, remain viable and sustainable will be around for months to come, with many already having left the industry. At the other end of the spectrum, people are embracing and engaging in arts, culture, heritage across a breadth of artistic, environmental, historic platforms.
- 3.2 Allerdale and Copeland Borough Councils recognise the importance of heritage, arts and culture, the creative sector, its role in the economy and place-shaping, improving health and well being, skills development and community resilience, even more so in a time when the rebuilding of a path back to normality is a key focus. Both local authorities share a number of synergies; their geography, their communities and both have bold plans to ensure West Cumbria is a great place to live, and to visit through embracing the rich heritage as well as being ambitious when it comes to investing in the future. Which is why a joint approach is appropriate.

- 3.3 It has been a number of years since either authority, or the wider cultural sector in West Cumbria has had any strategic direction. Yet developing a functional and relevant strategic framework which considers the needs and aspirations of cultural, public, private and Third Sector stakeholders, that supports and enriches the sector's offer through collaboration, innovation and advocacy that enables arts and cultural activity to thrive can help to meet many of the local authorities priorities as well as that of its partners.
- 3.4 So the timing of the strategy, is key. West Cumbria has one of the lowest rates of engagement in cultural activity and Copeland is a priority area for the Arts Council over the next 3 years, LGR and the opportunities that brings, is just around the corner and there is more prominence being given to the role of culture in achieving the levelling up agenda.  
On top of this, being able to connect it to the relatively new 10 year Arts Council strategy, Lets Create, gives confidence that the strategy is focusing where it is needed to improve our communities, and visitors' association and experience with the arts and creative opportunities.
- 3.5 The Councils, along with two key cultural organisations have worked together with a creative consultant to develop a cultural strategy for West Cumbria. The document has been informed through wide ranging consultation and data gathering and will support the aspirations of both local authorities and that of the wider cultural sector.

## **4.0 Content**

- 4.1 Both Allerdale and Copeland Councils have recognised the important role culture, in all its forms, plays in delivering the priorities within each of their respective Councils.

Culture is in everybody, it is personal, it is our heritage and our future, it's our hobby and our livelihood, it helps shape and express who we are.

For local authorities, culture can bring and keep communities together. A vibrant cultural sector can contribute to welcoming, distinctive and attractive places to live, work and visit. It can be used to regenerate and revitalise areas and communities, drive economic and tourism activity, improve health and wellbeing, particularly important on the back of the pandemic and incite the possibility of a better quality of life.

There has not been a strategic approach as to how a cultural sector should be developed to meet the needs of the area, for a number of years.

- 4.2 The time is right to deliver a strategy for West Cumbria.

- Local Government Reorganisation opens up the scope for improved working amongst the local authorities and the cultural sector as a whole, Carlisle has created a cultural framework and this has been considered as part of this work so that going forward the two can be considered together.

- The Arts Council are prioritising Copeland over the next 3 years in recognition that investment and engagement in the creative sector is too low. On the back of current projects and emerging initiatives there is now an opening for the Arts Council to increase investment and engagement and the Cultural Strategy will help direct and realise this opportunity.
- Arts Council have funded a West Cumbria Creative People and Places (CPP) programme for the next three years with over £850,000 but the CPP is a longer term action research scheme, with a vision being developed for the next 10 years.
- People, communities, organisations are coming back from the pandemic with new ways of working and collaboration and innovation in the way they engage or deliver arts and culture. Ensuring the sector survives has been, and still is crucial and a way to approach it is needed.
- Levelling up, Towns Deals, Future High Streets, Shared Prosperity and other large scale regeneration and economic development funded schemes look set to be around for a while. These will undoubtedly have creative and cultural opportunities embedded within them, whether through health and wellbeing, tourism or skills development, due to the role it can play in achieving the many wider objectives. The importance of a strong cultural offer is demonstrated in the number of cultural projects included in the range of current funded programmes. Having projects and plans ready to go driven by an evidence based approach will give weight to applications and business plans.

So there was a sense of urgency to be able to seize this window of opportunity and develop a strategic view and ensure a collective, connected approach and create a strategy which is innovative, collaborative and sustainable.

- 4.3 Over recent months Allerdale and Copeland councils, with our cultural partners have been working alongside experienced cultural consultants Creative Tourist to develop a new Cultural Strategy for West Cumbria – 2022 – 2027.

Key aims for this strategy were to protect and enhance access to and investment in arts and cultural activity to:

- Improve the health and wellbeing of all communities in Copeland and Allerdale by promoting engagement in, attendance at and access to cultural activity
- Support communities to rebuild and reshape from the impact of Covid through investment in the arts
- Support the growth of the tourist, experience, creative and cultural economy
- Enhance the appeal and reputation of Allerdale and Copeland as great places to live, work, visit and create

- 4.4 Robust desk top research and consultation with over 60 creative individuals and sector stakeholders was undertaken in December, January and February through 1 – 1's and focus groups and wider open invite feedback sessions were delivered as

part of tourism business breakfasts and the Cumbria Arts and Cultural Network, reaching over 100 people representing a range of organisations.

Feedback from these sessions were then interrogated, analysed and themed in terms of the combined core ambitions, shared values and priorities.

Two preview sessions were undertaken in July 2022, presenting the themes and priorities reflecting the evidence gathered earlier in the year along with the strategic interventions to key stakeholders and partners.

Final recommendations and actions have been included to establish the right conditions for success.

The strategy also starts to highlight interventions on which could be used to base the start of an action plan, setting a momentum for the level of activity needed. These will be developed and refined in the next stage.

Details of these can be found in appendix 1.

#### 4.5 ***The Strategy***

The Cultural Strategy for West Cumbria (2022 – 2027) is built on the shared ambition for long-term generational change, and the central role that culture must play in the future success of West Cumbria. The Strategy recognises the value of investing in culture as a vital element of producing systemic transformation in key outcomes areas – such as mental health wellbeing and skills. The strategy sets out the stall for a socially engaged approach.

*The strategy sets out the following core ambitions:*

1. Support the growth of the cultural sector, market, infrastructure and talent base, with a long-term focus on delivering transformative change and impact.
2. Place culture at the core of social, education, health, environmental and economic goals in West Cumbria.
3. Ensure that the cultural needs of existing and new communities are met.
4. Ensure that building more resilient communities and a more resilient cultural sector become powerful mutually reinforcing goals.
5. Work with our cultural partners to ensure everybody in West Cumbria can actively develop and express their creativity.
6. Surface, support and strengthen the greatest possible diversity of voices

- 4.6 The strategy has been created with partners, and is not intended to be a standalone, local authority strategy, but a one which has had cross sector buy in, and been lead by those with a stake in building on, and sustaining a thriving cultural sector and will need a joint approach to delivery to achieve success. Having a cultural strategy in place as well as strategic partnerships with combined

authorities and other cultural institutions, increases the likelihood of securing larger amounts of funding. Councils who work in this way are seen as demonstrating a strategic commitment to culture and the role it can play for improving quality of life for our communities.

Approval and endorsement by both local authorities also ensures a corporate direction to allocating and prioritisation of resources, supporting cultural organisations, and developing those large scale regeneration programmes over the next 5 years and beyond.

4.7 The Cultural Strategy is a not a funded plan however, having one in place will put the Council and successor local authority in the best possible position to secure future funding to deliver the recommendations, and work will start on the delivery mechanisms over the coming weeks.

4.8 The recommendation is that Members approve the Cultural Strategy for West Cumbria.

If Members do not endorse the Cultural Strategy for West Cumbria and do not engage in the delivery and development of the action plan, it could result in a lack of a strategic cultural vision for the area, and consequently a lack of funding, which is already problematic against the current challenging funding circumstances.

## 5.1 **Delivery arrangements**

5.1 Once the strategy has been approved work will commence on developing a Task and Finish Group, made up of local authorities and cultural (and non cultural) stakeholders, who can develop an action plan and begin to put in place those recommendations which will ensure the success of the strategy including the creation of a Cultural Catalyst Unit, which will be the engine for delivery for the strategy.

The strategy action plan will be a live document that will be regularly reviewed to ensure the most appropriate interventions are identified and prioritised for future delivery.

## 6.0 **Implications and Impact**

### 6.1 **Contribution to Council Strategy Priorities, Outputs and Outcomes**

Supporting our communities to be healthy, active and engaged through provision of a strategy that will support the development of cultural services.

Thriving towns and villages – giving people reasons to visit our towns, supporting town plans to be innovative in their thinking for adapting to the changing nature of town centres.

### 6.2 **Finance/Resource implications**

There are no direct resource implications arising from the recommendation in this report. However, longer term commitment to providing resource to the delivery of the strategy and development of the action plan through representatives on the (name to be confirmed) Strategy Task and Finish Group will need to be considered.

### **6.3 Legal and governance implications**

There are no implications arising from the recommendation.

### **6.4 Risk analysis**

By endorsing the new Cultural Strategy for West Cumbria, the reputational risk to the Council due to lack of commitment to culture and heritage is significantly reduced.

By supporting the recommendations of the strategy the risk of missed opportunities for partnership working or grant funding is reduced. By not approving the endorsement there is a risk that some of the issues highlighted in the strategy are not improved.

### **6.5 Increasing satisfaction and service**

Improvement to quality of life through improved access to cultural and creative opportunities.

A clear strategic approach which can support cultural and non-creative organisations in improving their own services, whilst also benefitting from a joined up approach and wider successes which in turn will deliver on organisational objectives.

A proactive, streamlined approach for the Council to progress its investment (time and funding) into culture.

### **6.6 Equality impacts**

A full EIA will be completed before the development of the action plan, however, it has been considered. The delivery of the strategy may have potential negative impacts, but overall, we can assume that these will be outweighed by the many positive impacts that the Cultural Strategy offers, including universal, high quality opportunities for people to enjoy, together within and between communities. By creating sustainable, safe, welcoming venues and activities and a vibrant cultural scene, we will support people from all areas and with protected characteristics and use the power that we know culture to have, to break down any perceived barriers.

### **6.7 Health and Safety impacts**

n/a

### **6.8 Health, wellbeing and community safety impacts**

Health and well being improvement through delivery is one of the 5 priorities

### **6.9 Environmental/sustainability impacts**

Green Investment is one of the 5 priorities. Environmental impact will be considered at all stages of the action planning.

## 6.10 Other significant implications

- Helping to ensure that West Cumbria is a great place to grow up, to live, work, visit and create.
- Enable communities to live safely and shape services locally
- To promote sustainable economic growth, and create jobs
- To support older and vulnerable people to live independent and healthy lives

## Appendices attached to this report

Appendix number	Title of appendix
1	Cultural Strategy for West Cumbria

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