

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE</b>
<b>Relevant Officer:</b>	Sharon Davis, Scrutiny Manager
<b>Relevant Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Kath Benson, Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, Aspiration and Community Assets
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	8 November 2021

## ARTS AND CULTURE SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL

**1.0 Purpose of the report:**

1.1 To consider the recommendations of the Arts and Culture Scrutiny Review Panel.

**2.0 Recommendation(s):**

2.1 That on the information gathered from the cultural sector in Blackpool and discussions with key national partners such as the Arts Council, the Scrutiny Review Panel recommend that a new Blackpool Cultural Partnership with the key task of producing a Blackpool Cultural Plan, be established.

**3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):**

3.1 That a Blackpool Cultural Partnership is established to support the sectors recovery from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, set out a vision, and advocate for the development and investment in the sector. The Council’s role will be to support the setting up of the Partnership but it will be independent to the Council and have an independent chair from the cultural sector in Blackpool.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council’s approved budget? Yes

**4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:**

4.1 Blackpool could continue without a Partnership, however this has not been recommended as a Cultural Partnership and Plan would set out clear priorities to local, regional and national key stakeholders and support strategic bids for funding that align to the vision and plan aiding the cultural sector’s recovery and development.

## **5.0 Council priority:**

5.1 The relevant Council priority is both:

- The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool
- Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience.

## **6.0 Background information**

6.1 On 22 September 2021, Members of the Tourism, Economy and Communities (TEC) Scrutiny Committee held a Review Panel meeting to consider the impact of Covid-19 on the arts and Culture sector in Blackpool.

6.2 Councillor Fred Jackson chaired the meeting with the following Members in attendance:

6.3 Councillor Paul Galley

Councillor Gerard Walsh

Councillor Paul Wilshaw

6.4 Mr Peter Legg, Head of Economic and Cultural Services, and Ms Carolyn Primett, Head of Arts, were also in attendance.

6.5 The meeting was introduced by Mr Legg by outlining the challenges faced by the Arts and Culture sector in Blackpool. He noted that the last report received by TEC had been in April 2021, at which time the sector had been subject to a number of covid-19 restrictions. These however had mostly been lifted since this time allowing cultural venues to re-open fully to the public. Despite this significant challenges remained, in relation to audience and participants behaviour in engaging with cultural activities, income from ticket sales, staffing of venues and availability of skilled freelancers in the town.

6.6 The impact of the Covid-19 had been felt across the arts and culture sector venues such as the Grand Theatre and Winter Gardens down to grassroots organisations and individual artists. It was also explained that although the short-term impact had been recognised, the medium and longer term consequences needed more time to be understood both nationally and locally.

6.7 Mr Legg also reported that a second round of Cultural Recovery Fund grants had been made, details of which had been provided as part of the meeting's agenda. In total £2.3m had been received through the Cultural Recovery Funds by cultural organization in Blackpool.

6.8 A third round of grants from the fund was underway at the time of the meeting with a number of Blackpool's cultural organisations making applications.

- 6.9 In addition Blackpool Council's Business Recovery Fund had received 182 applications from "cultural businesses" for these 73 had met the fund's criteria with £300k being paid out.
- 6.10 Ms Carolyn Primett, informed the review panel that through the Blackpool High Street Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) programme cultural mapping research had been undertaken in March 2021. Commissioned by Blackpool Council, it was undertaken by Blackpool based cultural organisations Aunty Social with support from Abingdon Studios. The survey found there is a wealth of creative talent currently working in Blackpool, from amateur enthusiasts and community groups to professional artists and creative businesses. Ninety nine creatives from Blackpool and the Fylde Coast completed the survey that asked about their experiences, needs and hopes surrounding their creative practice. Respondents included students, hobbyists, cultural organisations and professional artists.
- 6.11 The survey had highlighted the broad range of cultural and artistic groups and individuals as well as highlighting a desire among them to promote local talent and ideas.
- 6.12 In order to help facilitate this the Council, through the HAZ programme, has undertaken a project to open a Creative Hub on Topping Street to provide a space for creative businesses to deliver creative activities for the community, sell their work through a retail offer and to provide signposting to creative groups and individuals seeking support for their work. A tender for a local creative organisation to run the space had been issued and Aunty Social a local community interest company has been appointed to run the space independently.
- 6.13 The Council, through HAZ and Quality Corridors investment in properties on Edward Street was looking at the establishment of Live-Work spaces for artists in the Town Centre.
- 6.14 Attendance at theatres and established larger venues in Blackpool was discussed, with the Panel querying attendance figures, noting that attendance at Blackpool Football Club's matches had been good. In response it was explained that predicting attendance at theatres and other venues was complicated by changes in ticket purchasing behaviour. Since the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions the purchase of tickets had often taken place closer to the time of performances. This was believed to be the result of patrons waiting to see if Covid-19 would impact on a performance taking place. The programme offer was also limited in terms of the kinds of touring shows available (mainly shows with small number of cast involved keeping it more manageable) coming out of recovery and things were not likely to get back to normal for sometime.
- 6.15 Ms Primett also reported that Arts Council England has recently announced that Blackpool will be one of 15 priority places in the North where they want to develop new opportunities for investment, as part of the publication of its three-year Delivery Plan for 2021 - 2024. This Plan sets out a detailed roadmap to implement the vision of their strategy *Let's Create: by 2030* England will be a country in which the creativity of each individual is valued and given the chance to flourish, and where everyone has access to a remarkable range of high-quality

cultural experiences. It is therefore timely for Blackpool to have a Cultural Partnership and a Cultural Plan to make the most of the new opportunities that will come from this new relationship with ACE.

- 6.16 The review panel noted the importance of a partnership consulting and having buy-in from Blackpool's locally based artistic community, to ensure that the vision was inclusive and outlined the needs of local creatives and grass roots cultural organisations in the town.
- 6.17 Without a partnership it was considered that there was a risk that opportunities would be missed for joint collaboration across the sector and that Blackpool's cultural offer would become disjointed. It would also be detrimental to those seeking funding opportunities. A Cultural Plan would also demonstrate the role local artists and groups could play in a strong inclusive cultural offer for the town.
- 6.18 The role of arts and culture can play in the economic development was also discussed. Members expressed the view that work was needed to link up cultural venues. In order to achieve this the Panel was informed that work had been undertaken with the Council's Growth and Prosperity Team to ensure that promotion of artistic and cultural venues was included in the Blackpool Town Deal.
- 6.19 The HAZ survey of local Fylde Coast artists and cultural organisations recorded that 71% of them had not made funding applications. Mr Legg explained that this suggested a lack of awareness among certain groups but also the range of people undertaking creative practice in the town was broad from professional artists to hobbyists. The Creative Hub would assist in helping signpost support artists and local creatives. Ms Primett also stated that professional artists were able to apply for the Self-Employed Support Grant, which had been made available during Covid-19. Although not specifically aimed at artists, as self-employed individuals they could benefit from its funding.
- 6.20 Officers recommended that the Scrutiny Review Panel meet with representative of cultural organisation to discuss their experiences of Covid-19 and how it has impacted the delivery of their offer. The Panel members welcomed this recommendation and asked if it would be possible for site visit to studios and other venues to discuss work with representative and gain the necessary understanding of the challenges they are facing.
- 6.21 The Review Panel agreed the following;
- That representatives from a cross section of cultural organisations and self-employed creatives be invited to meet members of the Scrutiny Panel through an organised series of site visits and meetings where they can discuss with members how Covid-19 has impacted on their ability to deliver their offer to audiences, customers and participants and impact on their sustainability.

- Based on the information gathered from the cultural sector in Blackpool and discussions with key national partners such as the Arts Council, the Scrutiny Review recommends that a new Blackpool Cultural Partnership with the key task of producing a Blackpool Cultural Plan, be established.

6.22 In accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny / Cabinet Member Relations Protocol, the final report has been considered by the Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee on 6 October 2021, which approved the report for consideration by the Executive.

6.23 The Chairman of the Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Fred Jackson, who was also Chair of the review, has been invited to the Executive meeting to make representations on behalf of the Committee.

6.24 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

**7.0 List of Appendices:**

7.1 None.

**8.0 Financial considerations:**

8.1 Details of granting funding for the arts and culture sector in Blackpool are provided at section 6.7 of the report.

**9.0 Legal considerations:**

9.1 None.

**10.0 Risk management considerations:**

10.1 None.

**11.0 Equalities considerations:**

11.1 None.

**12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:**

12.1 There were no sustainability, climate change or environmental considerations raised at the review panel meeting.

**13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:**

13.1 None

**14.0 Background papers:**

14.1 None.

**15.0 Key decision information:**

15.1 Is this a key decision? No

15.2 If so, Forward Plan reference number: N/A

15.3 If a key decision, is the decision required in less than five days? N/A

15.4 If **yes**, please describe the reason for urgency:

**16.0 Call-in information:**

16.1 Are there any grounds for urgency, which would cause this decision to be exempt from the call-in process? No

16.2 If **yes**, please give reason:

**TO BE COMPLETED BY THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE**

**17.0 Scrutiny Committee Chairman (where appropriate):**

Date informed: N/A Date approved: N/A

**18.0 Declarations of interest (if applicable):**

18.1

**19.0 Summary of Discussion:**

19.1

**20.0 Executive decision:**

20.1

**21.0 Date of Decision:**

21.1

**22.0 Reason(s) for decision:**

22.1

**23.0 Date Decision published:**

23.1

**24.0 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:**

24.1

**25.0 Executive Members in attendance:**

25.1

**26.0 Call-in:**

26.1

**27.0 Notes:**

27.1