



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Title	Culture Strategy Progress Briefing
Date of meeting	23 January 2024
Report of	Executive Director of Strategy and Resources (S151 Officer)
Wards	All
Status	Public
Urgent	No
Appendices	Appendix 1 – Culture Strategy Briefing Paper
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Summary

This report provides a concise overview of the current trajectory of our cultural strategy and provides members with a clear understanding of our progress in developing this strategy. Additionally, it will provide a summary of the key elements that will comprise the final document.

We are still in the process of developing this strategy and we go to Cabinet on April 16th 2024 to submit our final version.

Recommendations

1. That the Committee consider the contents of this report and the Culture Strategy Briefing Paper attached (Annex 1).
2. That the Committee make recommendations for the portfolio holder and lead officer to consider when developing the final strategic document.
3. That the Committee consider making any further recommendations to Cabinet.

1. Reasons for the Recommendations

Background

1.1 The Council are in the process of developing a comprehensive five-year cultural strategy, aimed at the celebration, support and enrichment of Barnet's cultural landscape and creative economy. Our goal is to enhance the cultural experiences available to our residents.

1.2 Additional background information on the Culture Strategy is accessible in Appendix 1.

1.3 The themes and priorities of the strategy have been developed and identified through our Culture Strategy External Steering Group, our consultation and engagement programme, and our Audience Agency research.

1.4 One of the components contributing to the formulation of this strategy is the research conducted by the Audience Agency. They were tasked with producing a foundational dataset of information and insights concerning culture and creativity within the borough. This has been scoped from the perspective of cultural organisations within Barnet. Looking at the challenges they face and their interactions with residents.

The Culture Strategy External Steering Group Workshop

1.5 We conducted two distinct workshops in collaboration with our external steering group. For these sessions, the group identified four overarching priorities they deemed crucial to address in the strategy. These were:

- 1- Capacity building in the cultural sector
- 2- Placemaking and Cultural Infrastructure
- 3- Culture as a connector (focus on our communities and identity)
- 4- Barnet as a cultural destination (the aspects that make Barnet unique)

1.6 The group subsequently undertook the task of highlighting all the significant issues that the borough is confronting in relation to these overarching priorities. This undertaking was of great significance due to the composition of our external steering group, comprising of cultural experts deeply rooted in Barnet's local community. They possess knowledge of the cultural challenges prevailing within the borough.

Hemingway Design Consultation and Engagement Programme

1.7 Hemingway Design conducted a consultation and engagement programme to provide valuable input for both the cultural strategy and our London Borough of Culture bid. At the core of this engagement was a survey designed to understand the community's perspective on culture in Barnet. Additionally, a series of workshops were conducted to ensure comprehensive representation from across the borough.

1.8 It was conducted in two strands:

- 1- Adults survey

This survey was responded to by 694 people.

2- Schools survey

This survey was responded to by 732 people.

1.9 Meaning overall our surveys reached 1,426 people. This is without taking into account the individual workshops held that also contributed to the strategy.

1.10 This engagement was instrumental in establishing an evidence base that either corroborated, questioned or supplemented the findings of the external steering group and previous research. Upon a comprehensive review of this engagement, it not only affirmed the insights derived from our prior research but also enriched our evidence base by highlighting aspects that had been overlooked in other research methods. One such notable aspect was the importance of fostering participation, and the importance of Barnet's "place brand".

Key recommended culture strategy priorities

1.11 The priorities outlined below will serve as the focal points for the Culture Strategy. While the essence of each priority will remain consistent, the wording of individual priorities may undergo changes as we progress through the process.

1.12 The priorities and objectives below will form the basis of our Culture Strategy:

1- Building Capacity and Participation in the Cultural Sector (title to be renamed)

This priority aims to enhance the cultural landscape in the borough by supporting institutions that host cultural activities and fostering increased participation. Survey results indicate an interest (89%) in engaging more in cultural activities, with only 7% feeling they have sufficient opportunities. The need for support was also emphasised by our Audience Agency Research with nearly 50% of organisations surveyed by AA wanting more support with fundraising, advocacy, and organisational development. The external steering group also felt that this was a key issue within the borough.

The following objectives have been formulated from all of the engagement and research conducted and have been approved by our external steering group:

- Enhance council processes and information accessibility for individuals and organisations looking to host a community or art event.
- Assist our cultural organisations with building funding opportunities and increase support for the institutions where cultural activities take place.
- Work alongside our partners to increase network building in the cultural sector.
- Create a long-term group with Barnet Council representatives and external stakeholders to help guide the future of culture in Barnet.

- Partner with the cultural and creative sector to provide more chances for people to enjoy cultural activities in the borough, including attending events and participating in them.
- Collaborate with the cultural and creative sector to establish additional career pathways and support skill development in Barnet's cultural sector.
- Promote unconventional approaches and innovative arts and cultural practices that go beyond traditional creative fields.
- Work with cultural partners to explore options for making cultural activities accessible to all, irrespective of individual financial circumstances.

2- Developing Placemaking and Cultural Infrastructure (title to be renamed)

This priority aims to create new spaces for cultural activities, providing quality venues for creatives to perform and practice in. Additionally, it seeks to use creativity to shape the surrounding landscape. The idea of integrating creative placemaking into both Barnet's town centres and greenspaces was emphasised by the external steering group and echoed in our survey responses. With our external steering group firmly emphasising the need for new spaces for cultural activities to take place, it was felt that there is a shortage in Barnet, and this is holding back individuals from engaging with culture in Barnet.

The following objectives have been formulated from the engagement and research conducted, and have been approved by our external steering group:

- Facilitate the creation and promotion of high-quality public art to enhance the public realm.
- Continue to promote the development of creative placemaking projects in our town centres to enhance their vibrancy.
- Work to explore opportunities for establishing new spaces dedicated to cultural activities.
- Collaborate with stakeholders to identify alternative venues for creative activities, allowing artists to showcase their work in spaces not traditionally utilised for such purposes.
- Work with partners to ensure current cultural venues are utilised to the maximum of their potential.
- Strategically enhance the use of green spaces in the borough to support creative, community and leisure activities.
- Work towards ensuring our cultural venues are accessible to all.

3- Mobilising The Potential of Culture as a Connector (Title to be renamed)

This priority covers multiple facets. Firstly, it aims to cultivate connections among our diverse communities. Utilising events and building networks to unify different cultures, faiths, and beliefs. Thus, fostering sustained social cohesion. Despite advancements in this area, ongoing efforts are required to ensure Barnet is recognised as an inclusive borough that celebrates diversity (52% of respondents agreed that we currently are seen as inclusive).

The second aspect of this priority looks to ensure cultural activities are available in all parts of the borough. With the aim of establishing a unified cultural landscape in Barnet. Our research highlights disparities, revealing variations in cultural provisions across different areas of Barnet.

The following objectives have been formulated from all of the engagement and research conducted, and have been approved by our external steering group:

- Improve the equitable distribution of cultural activities and events throughout the borough.
- Continue to promote initiatives that encourage individuals to participate in volunteering opportunities.
- Enhance awareness of cultural festivals and events celebrating our diverse communities in the borough, with the goal of increasing participation.
- Utilise cultural events, such as music, dance and food-based gatherings, as a means to bring together diverse cultures.
- Hold more intergenerational events and activities that connect people from different ages.
- Promote increased utilisation of libraries for events, allowing them to be used as neutral spaces that bring together diverse cultures.
- Work with partners to increase the number of individuals participating in interfaith/interculture based work and networks that help facilitate community cohesion.
- Ensure our cultural activities are tailored to resonate with what Barnet residents from a variety of backgrounds want to take part in.

4- Accelerating Barnet's Identity as a Cultural Destination (title to be renamed)

This priority seeks to position Barnet as a cultural hub by improving the promotion of our cultural assets and activities in the borough. According to our adult survey, 54% of respondents expressed a lack of sufficient information about things to do in Barnet. Additionally, 45% of respondents indicated they did not know a lot about Barnet's history. Addressing this information gap is a key part of this priority. While this priority also seeks to establish Barnet's brand association with a diverse cultural offering.

The following objectives have been formulated from all of the engagement and research conducted, and have been approved by our external steering group:

- Address information gaps by regularly assessing the effectiveness of communications to ensure residents are well-informed about the various activities and events in Barnet.
- Raise awareness and promote Barnet's history and heritage.
- Collaborate with residents to explore and learn about the history and heritage of Barnet directly from them, aiming to gather new insights and information on Barnet's history.
- Promote heightened acknowledgement of our green spaces, underscoring their role in shaping life in Barnet.
- Strengthen Barnet's "place brand", ensuring that Barnet is a place where residents living in the whole borough can connect to.

- Market Barnet as a place where aspiration can be realised.

5- Supporting Cultural Education & Engagement with Young People (title to be renamed)

This priority has been shaped by insights from our school, college, and upper education survey, as well as input from the external steering group. The findings highlighted key areas for focus. For instance, in response to the question “In the last 12 months, which of these activities have you taken part in or visited inside Barnet?” 8 out of 12 options had 6% or less of young people indicating they had engaged in the activity in Barnet. Conversely, for the same activities outside of Barnet, 11 out of 12 had 6% or above, with 9 out of 12 categories having at least 20% of respondents stating they had participated in the activity outside of Barnet.

While the final strategic document will include more insights from our young persons survey, the ultimate goal is to inspire young people to enhance their engagement with cultural activities in Barnet. We also aim to collaborate with partners to contribute towards unlocking the potential of young individuals.

The following objectives have been formulated from all of the engagement and research conducted, and have been approved by our external steering group:

- Work with our partners such as Barnet and Culture for Youth to diversify the cultural activities being offered at schools.
- In collaboration with our partners, reduce the barriers that prevent schools, colleges, and universities from being able to engage with certain cultural activities.
- With our partners, increase the number of young people taking part in cultural activities in Barnet as opposed to leaving the borough.
- Alongside our cultural and creative sector, increase the number of young people leading cultural and creative sessions for their peers and empower them to get involved in co-producing the sessions.
- Evaluate how we communicate and reach young people, ensuring that we engage with them to understand their views and that our messaging is reaching them effectively.
- Work with our educational partners to ensure creative talent is being retained in the borough.
- Ensure there is linkage with the Barnet’s 2021 – 2024 Education Strategy, and where priorities align, work collaboratively to achieve them.

6- Cultivating Culture to Enrich Society (title to be renamed)

An important consideration in many culture strategies is utilising the influence of culture to bring about broader societal benefits, both for the public and in how Barnet Council functions as an organisation. This theme has been emphasised in both our internal service area workshop and our external steering group, underscoring the importance of using this strategy to generate wider social value for Barnet. This section aims to connect culture with broader aspects outlined in Our Plan for Barnet 2023 – 2026, promoting a coordinated approach within the Council.

- Work with our cultural and voluntary sectors to attain our goal of achieving net zero in Barnet by 2042.
- Increase resident participation from all backgrounds and cultures in the electoral process, combatting residents growing disaffection with democratic institutions.
- Connect with Barnet’s public health bodies, ensuring culture plays a role in contributing to the health and wellbeing of our residents.
- Maximise opportunities for attracting inward investment in the borough by strategically utilising cultural events and activities.
- Coordinate with different Council service areas to implement the principles of the Culture Strategy into their own plans.
- Nurture and grow an internal culture network that unites various Barnet Council service areas, fostering collaboration and idea-sharing to contribute to our cultural plans.
- Incorporate the principles and priorities of this strategy into Barnet Council’s working environment, ensuring staff understand how this strategy impacts their roles and work practices.

2. Alternative Options Considered and Not Recommended

2.1 Alternative options were considered; however, after discussions with our external steering group, comprised of representatives from across Barnet, and incorporating insights from residents, we have chosen to move forward with the specified priorities. While there may be minor adjustments in the future, we expect the final priorities to reflect the overall content of this document.

3. Post Decision Implementation

3.1 Once we have developed the final strategic document, we will be taking it to Cabinet to seek final approval and sign off.

3.2 Currently It is expected that following the adoption of the strategy the responsibility for the delivery of the strategy will be led by the Culture team, who will work across the council and with host of partners.

3.3 Committee will also be aware that the council has applied for London Borough of Culture for 2027. A decision on that will be in March 2024, we will have a firmer idea on implementation and delivery at that point, as the two are linked and the decision will influence how we implement certain aspects of this strategy.

3.4 We will consider the suggestions that come from Overview and Scrutiny when producing our final strategic document.

4. Corporate Priorities, Performance and Other Considerations

Corporate Plan

Our Plan for Barnet 2023 -2026 - Caring for Our Places.

4.1. This strategy sits under the Culture, Leisure, Arts & Sports portfolio that is led by Councillor Ammar Naqvi.

4.1.2 'The corporate vision underlying Our Plan for Barnet 2023 – 2026 is “Caring for people, our places and the planet”.

4.1.3 The transformation agenda consists of three primary components that will serve as a foundation for the Culture Strategy. In the context of this strategy these are:

1- Destination Barnet

This seeks to make the borough an attractive location for creative industries, and for culturally relevant / significant venues.

2- Discover Barnet

This workstream, showcases existing cultural capital as well as broadcasts the rich heritage of our borough.

3- Barnet Dreams

This is a commitment to ensure that we have the tools, opportunities, and advice services available locally to ensure every resident unlocks their potential.

4.1.4 Another significant element of Our Plan for Barnet is to embrace collaborative development of our strategies and initiatives in conjunction with our local communities. The Community Participation Strategy published in 2022, describes essential principles for accomplishing this goal and plays a substantial role in shaping the development of our Culture Strategy.

4.1.5 We have been committed to actively involving our local community in every stage of the Culture Strategy's development, including its creation and design. Our approach prioritises working in partnership with our residents rather than seeking mere approval of our outputs.

4.1.6 An example of how we empowered the community surrounds the definition of culture. Recognising that culture holds diverse meanings for different individuals, the Council deliberately refrained from providing a specific definition. Instead, we worked alongside our local community and external steering group to shape what culture was defined as.

4.1.7 This strategy has been conceived by the local community, for the local community, embodying the essence of collective empowerment and shared ownership.

Sustainability

4.2 We consulted our colleagues from the sustainability team and have integrated a specific objective into our plan *“Work with our cultural and voluntary sectors to attain our goal of achieving net zero in Barnet by 2042.”*.

Corporate Parenting

4.3 We have a dedicated section addressing young people; however, we foresee no adverse effects, only positive outcomes. A key aspect of the strategy aims to enhance young people's engagement with culture.

Risk Management

4.4 Currently, there are no finalised specific actions for the strategy. The objective is to enrich the cultural landscape in Barnet in collaboration with partners. The strategy itself carries no significant risks; however, projects arising from it may pose associated risks.

Insight

4.5 Insight has been gained through independent research and studying other local authorities approaches to producing Culture Strategies.

4.5.1 We detail the sources of insights that informed the strategy and its priorities in sections 1.3-1.10 of this report. More insights can be found in Appendix 1.

Social Value

4.6 Our external steering group has emphasised the importance of showcasing the social, economic, and wellbeing benefits resulting from investing in culture. The final strategic document will include a dedicated section addressing this focus.

5. Resource Implications (Finance and Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT and Property)

5.1 We have spent around £20,000 so far specifically on the Culture Strategy. This has been for research and also administrative costs, and to support the development of the strategy and the production of the final strategic document.

5.2 We anticipate we will need to invest funds to help implement this strategy. Currently, we don't have specific details on the actions required to achieve the objectives. As we develop the action plan, we will gain a clearer understanding of the resource implications.

5.3 We are awaiting the outcome of our London Borough of Culture Bid, and this will impact various key aspects of how the strategy is executed.

5.4 This strategy goes beyond the council spending money; it involves collaborating with partners to enhance the current cultural landscape. It's not a matter of solely relying on funding to achieve our objectives. Creative thinking and collaborative partnerships play crucial role in addressing some of the challenges outlined in this strategy.

5.5 We will be in a position to give more details on the resource implications of this strategy by the time we take this to cabinet in April.

6. Legal Implications and Constitution References

6.1 The terms of reference of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Sub-Committees (Council Constitution, Part 2B, Terms of Reference of Committees and Sub-Committees includes: "Review and scrutinise the decisions made by, and performance of, the Executive, Portfolio Holders and/or Committees and Council officers both in relation to individual decisions and over longer periods of time;

9.4.1.2 To Review and scrutinise the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/or particular service areas.

9.4.1.3 Require the attendance of and question Members and chief officers about their decisions and performance, or in relation to particular decisions, initiatives or projects;

9.4.1.4 Make recommendations to the Executive and/or appropriate Committee and/or Council arising from the outcome of the scrutiny process;”

6.2 The terms of reference state that “The Overview & Scrutiny Committee has the following powers and duties:

10.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has the following power and duties: 10.1.1 To oversee an agreed work programme that can help secure service improvement through in-depth investigation of performance issues and the development of an effective strategy/policy framework for the council and partners;

10.1.2 To have general oversight of the council’s scrutiny function;

10.1.3 To offer challenge and critical support to the Executive’s policy development function and the long-term strategic direction of the borough;

10.1.4 To anticipate policy changes and determine their potential impact on residents and to recommend changes where these are appropriate;

7. Consultation

7.1 All consultation and engagement activity (The Audience Agency research, External steering group and Hemingway Designs Consultation and Engagement Programme) have already been referenced. The priorities that emerged from these pieces of research are included in this document. Please see Appendix 1 for more information.

8. Equalities and Diversity

8.1 Equality and diversity issues are a mandatory consideration in the decision-making of the council.

8.2 Decision makers should have due regard to the public-sector equality duty in making their decisions. The equalities duties are continuing duties they are not duties to secure a particular outcome. The equalities impact will be revisited on each of the proposals as they are developed. Consideration of the duties should precede the decision. It is important that Council has regard to the statutory grounds in the light of all available material such as consultation responses. The statutory grounds of the public-sector equality duty are found at Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 and are as follows below.

8.3 A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;

b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

8.4 Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

d) Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;

e) Take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;

f) Encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

8.5 The steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities.

8.6 Having due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

- Tackle prejudice, and
- Promote understanding

8.7 Compliance with the duties in this section may involve treating some persons more favourably than others; but that is not to be taken as permitting conduct that would otherwise be prohibited by or under this Act. The relevant protected characteristics are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Marriage and Civil partnership

8.8 The public sector equality duty considerations are key for the development of our strategy, as well as our Corporate Plan.

8.9 The proposed Culture Strategy will positively contribute to the elimination of discrimination and will advance equality within our communities. The policy focuses on creating opportunities for people in the borough, minimising disadvantages suffered by people, tackle prejudice, reduce inequalities and promote understanding amongst our diverse communities.

8.10 We will have the final EqIA completed when we take this strategy to cabinet in April.

8.11 There are no anticipated negative impacts relating to equality and diversity as a result of what will be in the final strategy. Our priorities intend to have positive impacts and bring communities together, promoting social cohesion and education between different cultures and faiths. This is clear in overarching priority three (Mobilising the potential of culture as a connector) which focuses on promoting equalities and inclusion.

8.12 We also have specific objectives such as *“Work with cultural partners to explore options for making cultural activities accessible to all, irrespective of individual financial circumstances.”* And

“Ensure our cultural activities are tailored to resonate with what Barnet residents from a variety of backgrounds, want to take part in.” to ensure individuals from a variety of backgrounds are included in cultural activities.

8.13 We only anticipate positive impacts on equalities and diversity as part of this strategy. We have liaised with colleagues who are working on developing a new EDI policy and who work on the annual equalities report, to ensure we factor in all EDI considerations, when developing our priorities

9. Background Papers