

**STOCKPORT TOWN OF CULTURE: DELIVERY UPDATE**

Report of the Director of Development & Regeneration

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This report provides an interim update to Scrutiny on the delivery of the Stockport Town of Culture programme prior to full evaluation being carried out.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 Stockport was announced as Greater Manchester Town of Culture for 2023/24 in May 2023, following in the footsteps of Bury (2020&2021) and Stalybridge (2022).
- 2.2 Delivery of the programme started immediately in June 2023, alongside a period of engagement to find out the community's and cultural sector's aspirations for the initiative.
- 2.3 Delivery of the programme was made possible through funding from Greater Manchester Combined Authority, the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), and a subsequent grant from Arts Council England.

**3. Principles Underlying Programme Delivery**

- 3.1 Our engagement with the cultural sector and wider stakeholders has helped to inform a set of principles to underpin the programme development and delivery:
- To take as a broad a definition of culture as possible – any activities which encourage people to be active and creative.
  - To focus on activities which have the Borough of Stockport at their heart – celebrating our heritage, landscape, people and stories.
  - To empower organisations and community groups working in Stockport to deliver activities themselves.
  - To have a reach right throughout the Borough.
  - To be inclusive of all our diverse communities.

## 4. Delivery & Achievements To Date

4.1 To encourage wide participation and a broad range of activities, four strands were developed:

- Stockport MAKES – celebrating creativity and making in all its forms in Stockport and giving people an opportunity to showcase their creativity and try and something new;
- Stockport MOVES - celebrating and promoting the opportunities that Stockport's unique environment presents to move about and be active;
- Stockport SOUNDS - celebrating and promoting music and spoken word being made in Stockport, creating new opportunities for developing and showcasing talent and our dynamic music heritage;
- Stockport TASTES - celebrating and promoting food and drink in Stockport.

4.2 Three different funding streams were launched in July 2023 so organisations of all types could put forward ideas for projects to be funded.

- Town of Culture Community Fund – a pot providing grants up to £500 for community groups to put on new activities in their neighbourhoods.
- Town of Culture Creative Commissions – grants of up to £5,000 to encourage cultural and creative organisations to develop new work or provide new creative opportunities for people in Stockport.
- Town of Culture Strategic Projects - grants of over £5,000 to enable organisations to develop projects on a larger scale which have a reach beyond the Town of Culture period.

4.3 The funding streams were promoted widely through the Council's networks and there were high levels of applications for each of these. Panels, representing the Council and partners, were convened to make decisions with a view to ensuring a distribution of projects across the Borough, covering a range of activities and art forms, and making sure the Council's communities of interest were included. To date the following number of projects have been supported:

- 52 Town of Culture Community Fund projects
- 26 Creative Commissions
- 16 Town of Culture strategic projects

Full details of all projects supported and their outcomes will be supplied as part of the full evaluation of the Town of Culture programme.

4.4 To provide a more universal offer for residents and visitors, the Town of Culture programme supported a number of major events in Stockport Town Centre which helped achieve record levels of footfall. These have included:

- Krazy Races (May)
- Underbanks Secret Street Party (June)
- Stockport Moves (July)
- Stockport Town of Culture Spectacular (November)

A full analysis of the impact of Town of Culture on annual footfall in the Town Centre will be provided as part of the full evaluation of the programme, but we know that the Spectacular alone gave Stockport its busiest Sunday in 4 years, despite the pouring rain, and increased footfall in the town centre 73% on a normal Sunday - 30% of whom were new visitors to Stockport.

4.5 As a result of our engagement phase and to link with other cultural initiatives happening in the Borough, we also initiated a number of targeted projects which had specific aims:

- **Stockport Sounds:** Because of Stockport's music legacy, its range of new and upcoming music venues, the potential of many new spaces to host music and performance and the current issues facing grassroots music venues, we wanted to provide support to our local music scene to help it grow and develop. With Town of Culture funding, we have supported 3 sell out gigs (so far), bringing acts which venues would otherwise be unable to host, and programmed music and music-themed events in new spaces including Welkin Mill, St Mary's Church and the War Memorial Art Gallery.
- **Digifest:** As the recipient of a DCMS/Arts Council Cultural Development Fund award to develop the Stockport Creative Campus focusing on digital arts, we know this is an important future growth area for the Borough. Previous Digifests have had high levels of engagement and positive feedback and Town of Culture funding has enabled us to bring back this event which is currently taking place. (February 2024)
- **Libraries:** Our libraries are cultural hubs which reach right into communities and provide opportunities for residents to be active and creative on their doorstep. Town of Culture funding has enabled libraries to deliver an enhanced programme of activities for our communities.

4.6 Appendix 1 provides a flavour of some of the activities delivered as part of the programme so far.

## 5. Current & Planned Delivery

5.1 We are currently in the second phase of delivery of our Town of Culture programme, which is being supported by Arts Council England. This phase aims to provide some of the activities mentioned by residents during engagement which have so far not been delivered by the programme, and providing a showcase of Stockport's culture and creativity at the end of our time as Greater Manchester Town of Culture.

5.2 Working with South City Studios and Company Chameleon, we are staging a series of free dance and music workshops. These will provide opportunities for residents to be active and creative in new ways.

5.3 On the weekend of 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> March, we will be staging the Stockport Town of Culture weekender in venues across Stockport town centre. This will include:

- Extensive animation of the new park at Stockport Interchange
- Theatre and dance performances across the town centre
- Childrens' cultural and creative activities at Stockport Central Library
- Music programmed across venues throughout the weekend
- Exhibition of Stockport artists at the War Memorial Art Gallery
- Free entrance to Stockport's town centre museums, including the newly reopened and refurbished Hatworks
- Open art studios
- Walks and trails

## **6. Town of Culture Legacy & Future Opportunities**

6.1 We want Town of Culture to be a turning point for Stockport's cultural ambition which provides a strong foundation for future growth. In particular, our future work will focus on:

- Building on successful initiatives piloted through Town of Culture and seeking to make them part of our ongoing cultural provision.
- Refreshing Stockport's cultural strategy with our cultural partners.
- Supporting the growth of creative networks throughout the Borough.
- Providing advice and support to help creative and cultural organisations to thrive and grow in Stockport.
- Building on our track record of attracting external funding for culture.
- Development of Stockroom as a cultural and creative hub for Stockport, building on Town of Culture successes and relationships developed.

## **7. Risks**

7.1 As this report is a progress update, there are no significant risks arising from it.

## **8. Legal Considerations**

8.1 The report raises no new legal considerations.

## **9. Human Resources Impact**

9.1 There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

## **10. Equalities Impact Assessment**

10.1 The reach of the Town of Culture programme into Stockport's communities of interest will be analysed as part of the full evaluation of Town of Culture post March 2024.

## **11. Environmental Impact**

11.1 The role Town of Culture has played in increasing awareness of the Climate Emergency amongst our communities will be assessed as part of the full evaluation post March 2024.

## **12. Recommendations**

12.1 The Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the update on Town of Culture delivery and provide comment to inform the final evaluation and plans for legacy and future cultural growth in the Borough.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

There are none

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