



University of
Nottingham
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Policy Brief — Pathway to the Development of a Cultural Strategy for Leicestershire County Council (LCC)

Daniel H. Mutibwa, Cat Rogers, Franne Wills, Amanda Hanton, Dr Sophie Frost, Sam Berry and Helen Harris

Brief Context

Amid persistent austerity and a challenging and uncertain political climate, Leicestershire County Council (LCC) and the University of Nottingham (UoN) have teamed up to co-produce a framework for an inclusive and shared vision of creative and cultural engagement with differently situated stakeholders across the county, the East Midlands and beyond. The partnership is developing the framework into a Cultural Strategy to strategically align cultural provision, heritage service delivery, and work in the creative industries. To inform development, consultation exercises with (1) strategic leaders and frontline officers at LCC, (2) volunteers and project participants who are facilitators and end users of LCC's cultural and heritage services, (3) creative practitioners, and (4) selected national local authorities have taken place between March and September 2023. The set of stakeholders (1-3) stand to gain the most from a focused and inclusive Cultural Strategy. Further insight-gathering activities and events are being held during February and March 2024.

Key Provisional Findings

Development of a Cultural Strategy for LCC will:

- (1) link cultural and heritage services to LCC's broader strategic agendas and priorities as outlined in the [Strategic Plan](#) (2022-2026). This will make those services more visible to the public and encourage broader engagement.
- (2) support grant capture to develop and fund more cultural activities underpinned by co-production between LCC, creative practitioners, and diverse local communities.
- (3) aid decision-making at all LCC levels — supporting effective responsiveness and providing a sense of clarity of purpose, including a certain level of protection.
- (4) build new strategic partnerships both within and outside the county council and Leicestershire's cultural ecosystem.
- (5) support creative practice and creative practitioners in ways that enable them to (a) build capacity, (b) connect to networks of other creative people and organisations across the county, and (c) grow their creative entrepreneurial capabilities.
- (6) shift the perception of LCC from that of a service deliverer to that of a genuine collaborator working in close partnership with multisectoral stakeholders to futureproof cultural services during challenging and turbulent times.

Ten-stage Approach to Developing LCC's Cultural Strategy

- (1) Defining — in the clearest of terms — what 'culture' means in the context of LCC's cultural service delivery and how it benefits the diverse range of people county-wide and beyond.
- (2) Establishing a steering group at an early stage to oversee the production and delivery of a Cultural Strategy.
- (3) Deciding whether to (a) commission external consultants with a track record in developing place-based Cultural Strategies to write one or (b) draw on in-house teams — provided that the teams are adequately resourced and UoN is on board to support in continuation of the strategic partnership.
- (4) Mapping and auditing (a) key cultural offerings (b) well-known tangible and intangible heritage assets, and (c) any lesser-known cultural and heritage assets. Audit information can be used to generate an easy-to-use, annotated and 'updateable' map which could be made publicly accessible as a resource to consult on available cultural activities and sites.
- (5) Consulting a wide range of stakeholders to (a) gather local ideas and form new partnerships, (b) engage with local communities that regularly use the existing cultural and heritage offerings, but also try and reach out to those that do not engage for a range of reasons, (c) refine ideas, (d) draw on the knowledge and skills of various stakeholders, and (d) ultimately build consensus about needs and shared priorities.
- (6) Benchmarking LCC's cultural and heritage services periodically against those of comparable local authorities nationally and internationally to understand (1) what distinguishes Leicestershire from other places, (2) whether key strengths remain so over time, and (3) if areas identified as needing improvement demonstrate progress — and if not, why?
- (7) Defining key priorities and themes that build on existing ideas and ambitions, and then crafting those into a clear mission and vision. Care should be taken to ensure that the mission and vision are achievable and manageable.
- (8) Developing an Action Plan that (a) defines planned activities and outputs that have a bearing on the outcomes collaboratively agreed in the mission and vision, and (b) programming defined activities and events through an iterative process.
- (9) Publishing the Cultural Strategy, launching it and rolling it out but keeping in mind that it remains a work-in-progress.
- (10) Reviewing the Cultural Strategy periodically to evaluate whether or not it is delivering against set outcomes. Making adjustments for improvement as and when needed.