

SOMERSET CULTURAL STRATEGY, REVIEW, REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Purpose of the review

During October 2009 South Somerset District Council's Scrutiny Committee were asked to undertake a review of the Somerset Cultural Strategy (SCS). The reason for this review was to establish if South Somerset District Council should endorse the Somerset Cultural Strategy. Scrutiny Committee agreed to set up a task and finish group to carry out this work.

Conclusions

The task and finish group concluded that the concept **Somerset Cultural Strategy (SCS)** was a brilliant idea in terms of having a living working document which can be accessed by all and could prove to be a great tool to attract investment from private companies and organisations. The strategy appears to be interesting and easy to read although it is clear that it is still in its infancy and needs further development effectively aid stakeholders who are involved in influencing or delivering cultural activity within Somerset to achieve the vision.

The task and finish group appreciate the strategy is still evolving, however recommend to South Somerset District Council to propose the following to the Somerset Cultural Partnership prior to agreeing to endorse the strategy:

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SCRUTINY AND DISTRICT EXECUTIVE

- There should be a clear "golden thread" between regional cultural strategies (People Places and Spaces, and Just Connect) and the Somerset Cultural Strategy. The themes in the SCS should be developed to further demonstrate the link between the SCS and the regional strategies, please see example in Appendix One.
- A visible link between the SCS themes and the Action Plan should be developed, for example SSDC Corporate Plan and Our Targets insert. This clearly shows a "golden thread" between what you want to achieve and how you go about achieving it, please see example in Appendix One
- The Action Plans, Actions and Outcomes need to be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-limited), please see example in Appendix Two.
- Actions should be measured routinely to monitor progress. The Cultural Partnership Board should consider using a traffic light system or similar to easily identify performance exceptions and can therefore take appropriate action to ensure the targets will be achieved.
- Responsibility should be given to individuals of the authorities and key partners to contribute strategic information that is consistent with the Strategy and Action Plan, this will ensure contributors across the partners take ownership for maintaining the strategy and ensuring it's content is relevant, accurate and up to date.
- The website needs to be clear in who its target audience is.
- Terms of reference need to be written or developed to govern the work of the SCS and draw the line of responsibility between SCS and Into Somerset and other tourism related websites, links to these could be provided.
- Contributors to the site need clear guidance on what information should be displayed where and how.

- Recommend that SCS look at District and Borough Councils across Somerset to suggest or give examples of alternative themes that will fit with People Places Spaces and Just Connect.
- Pictures and Photographs should only be used within the online strategy to further illustrate the content of the document or be symbolic to assist site navigation.
- Consider the option of having the site available in text only format to assist those with poorer Internet connection speeds and text only documents on A4 size paper to aid printing and reduce costs.
- Alter the last modified date to this page last updated and this should be located at the top of the page.
- Map the cultural provision across the county to identify potential areas of cultural deprivation to ensure that there are '*no barriers to participation in cultural activities for dispersed rural residents and communities*'¹

Process the task and finish group took to conduct the review

Firstly the task and finish group had to carry out a SWOT analysis to identify the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of the Somerset Cultural Strategy. The following questions were then asked:

- How would the SCS impact on South Somerset's Cultural Strategy and current working practices?
- Would the SCS alter current service deliver and in terms of future plans and vision?
- How the SCS would benefit the community of South Somerset?
- What performance measures are in place for Culture in South Somerset?

Gathering Information and who and how we should Consult

There were a number of documents that needed studying to carry out this review these included the paper copy of SCS and relevant appendices. The SCS website (Yet to be Launched). People Places, Spaces (PPS) and Just Connect (JC), regional cultural strategies. The task and finish group also consulted key officers including Rob Jones the Cultural and Creative Economy Manager at Somerset County Council and Steve Joel Assistant Director for Health and Well-being at SSDC.

Programme of review meetings

The review group met on no less than ten occasions commencing on 28th October 2009 the final meeting took place on 30th July 2010

Brief report of the task and finish meetings

From the start the task and finish group invited key officers from County and District to attend the meeting held on the 28th October. At this meeting the Policy and Development Manager at Somerset County Council gave historic evidence on how the SCS had evolved since 2002. A decision was made in July 2009 to convert the printed strategy into an online version, the benefits being that an online version is more sustainable, costs less and can be updated quickly. The review group then had a presentation of the online version of the SCS. The Policy and Development Manager answered a number questions from the task and finish group and from the SSDC Assistant Director for Health and Well-being.

¹ A Better place to be: Culture and the South West of England Aim Four.

The second meeting held on 1st December 2009 was to agree the remit of the task and finish group, and specific elements the review needs to include. At this point it became clear that we needed to establish how the SCS fits with local and regional strategy, People Places Spaces.

Other key points included how will funding be secured and distributed, to ensure equitable access to cultural facilities across Somerset. This led to further questions on how the SCS is governed and monitored.

With the third meeting it became apparent that the work the task and finish group were undertaking was going to be more extensive and complex due mainly to the content of the SCS and its relationship with other relevant strategies.

On 12th February we met with Steve Joel to discuss a number of issues we had identified regarding how the Somerset Cultural Strategy connects with South Somerset policies and strategies. We also asked what the funding implications were if the strategy was endorsed. During this meeting it was identified that in terms of links with a regional strategy there is no “golden thread” and it was unclear where themes in the SCS had come from. Following this meeting further questions were raised as to who was responsible for driving the strategy forward and ensuring targets are agreed and achieved.

The task and finish group met again with Rob Jones to ask a number of specific questions and discussed preliminary recommendations. The members agreed to review the five Action Plans (Living Sustainability , Community Growth , Economic Wellbeing , Enjoying and Achieving and Being Healthy) within the Strategy to evaluate the Actions and Outcomes in preparation for the next meeting.

After reviewing the five Action Plans members of the task and finish group met to discuss their findings. The following conclusions were identified as areas that needed improvement prior to SSDC endorsing the Somerset Cultural Strategy:

- A clear “golden thread” needs to be established in the SCS between other documents such as People Places and Spaces and Just Connect .
- The themes should show how they are linked to regional level of strategic themes.
- The Actions should be specific and relevant to how partners will achieve the Outcome.
- Wording of the Outcomes and Actions did not appear to be clearly linked to each other or the Cultural Partnerships ambitions / terms of reference.
- A definitive measure should be introduced to identify if the outcome has been achieved or show progress is being made. This could be done by using statistics or if a project is on track with the project plan. This could be further clarified by using the traffic light system or similar for monitoring.

Cllr Carol Goodall also agreed to review one themed area of the Action Plan (Being Healthy) and give specific feed back as to how it could be improved in terms of presentation and content.

Other observations the task and finish group made while conducting the review were as follows:

- On the web page ‘Our Main Cultural Themes’ the third paragraph was not necessary, and perhaps a link to the Action Plan would be more appropriate.
- On the web page ‘Our Main Cultural Themes’ under the Somerset Vision the first paragraph and fourth paragraph under the Main Cultural Themes appear to contradict themselves.

- As SCS is a strategy it shouldn't be detailing specific events, hyperlinks to an event listing would be more appropriate.
- Terms of reference need to be written or developed to govern the work of the SCS and draw the line of responsibility between SCS and Into Somerset and other tourism related websites, links to these could be provided.
- Ideally there should be a plan to map out the Cultural facilities across Somerset with transport links, and also method of identifying areas of deprivation in terms of Culture.
- The map on the website that is set up to show the different Local Authorities across Somerset is not working correctly as this detail is not displayed until after the picture type map is hidden.
- The Cultural Strategy and appendix available in the Strategy Library are not current, if these are not going to be updated, warning text should appear to explain that they are not current documents and the website itself is the current version.

CONTRIBUTORS

Officers

Rob Jones - Cultural and Creative Economy Manager, Somerset County Council

Steve Joel - Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing)

Adam Burgan - Arts and Entertainment Manager

Jo Gale - Scrutiny Manager

Portfolio Holders

Cllr. Sylvia Seal - Leisure and Culture

Members

Cllr. Dave Bulmer – Review Chair

Cllr. Carol Goodall

Cllr. Anna Groskop

Cllr Linda Vjeh - South Somerset District Council

Cllr Andy Kendall - South Somerset District Council

Cllr Ruth Kendall - South Somerset District Council

Cllr Sue Steele - South Somerset District Council

Appendix

One - Golden thread Action Plan

Two - SMART Action Plan

Somerset Cultural Strategy

This is supposed to be a cultural strategy for the future, a document that will set out in clear unambiguous terms how culture in this county, in both its material and value dimensions, will be expanded and enhanced. However, at present it seems to be addressing issues that form the main stay of a community strategy rather than cultural strategy. There appears to be no 'golden thread' linking the regional cultural documentation to the sub- regional documents.

In September 2008 **People, Places and Spaces** A Cultural Infrastructure Development Strategy for the South West of England was published. It was a document that sought to bring together local authorities, agencies and a range of other partners to work together to enhance, expand, and develop the cultural infrastructure at a regional and sub-regional level

Its vision is:

'to ensure that South West England is the region of choice for vibrant cultural activity, where engaged individuals build creative communities, where culture is seen as a core component of all regional development and a vital contributor to the quality of life of everyone in the region.'

The four themes are:

Icons of the South West - these are instantly recognisable projects of world class quality, design, and distinctiveness. They put the region 'on the map' and make a statement about ambition and impact

Our History and Heritage - these are projects that tell the stories of the South West: its places and events and how people have lived, worked and celebrated in the past.

2012 and Beyond - these are projects that seek to ensure a legacy from the Olympic and Paralympic Games, changing forever the quality of cultural opportunity for people

Image and Reputation - these are projects that show the spirit of imagination, creativity and entrepreneurship that is needed for the South West to operate confidently on a world stage.

Feeding into this document are the following five strategic aims for the region¹:

- To harness the benefits of population growth and manage the implications of population change
- To enhance our economic prosperity and quality of employment opportunity
- To enhance our distinctive environments and the quality and diversity of our cultural life

¹ South West Regional Assembly (2006) *Just Connect: An Integrated Regional Strategy*

- To address deprivation and disadvantage to reduce significant intra-regional inequalities
- To make sure that people are treated fairly and can participate fully in society

In another document published in 2008, **A Better place to be: Culture and the South West of England**, these five strategic aims are addressed from a 'cultural stand point'.

Aim 1: Harnessing the benefits of population growth and managing the implications of population change

The cultural sector can harness the benefits of population growth and manage the implications of population change by:

- Promoting opportunities for community cohesion and engagement
- Enhancing green spaces around where people live such as creating community spaces including playgrounds and parks, facilities for sports and arts, and informal recreation and learning
- Providing employment
- Supporting cultural organisations and activities of distinction, ambition and excitement which enhance the reputation of South West England
- Celebrating regional assets/distinctiveness
- Enhancing regional image
- Attracting creative individuals of quality, imagination and enterprise to live and work in the region

Aim 2: Promoting economic prosperity, quality of employment and employment opportunity

The cultural sector can promote economic prosperity, quality of employment and employment opportunity by:

- Placing culture at the centre of the region's social and economic development
- Ensuring that cultural projects and events are developed with clear and quantifiable economic impacts
- Promoting the region's natural and cultural assets as a tourism driver

- Enhancing the marketing and promotion of the cultural offer
- Celebrating regional image and sense of place
- Advocating the benefits of cultural infrastructure to increase investment
- Promoting and supporting the growth of the creative industries

Aim 3: Ensuring that people are treated fairly and can participate fully in society

The cultural sector can ensure that people are treated fairly and can participate fully in society by:

- Promoting activities which have the capacity to celebrate differences and engage all sections of the community. These include the region's most disadvantaged communities and those facing multiple deprivation who are statistically least likely to engage in cultural activities
- Engaging all ages, including those who are at risk or marginalised, in a variety of productive and socialising activities
- Promoting opportunities for volunteering across a range of activities, at many levels, and in a variety of contexts

Aim 4: Challenging deprivation and disadvantage and reducing inequality

The cultural sector can help meet the challenge of deprivation and disadvantage and reduce inequality by:

- Promoting opportunities for lifelong learning Actively contributing to safer communities and encouraging cohesion
- Addressing the barriers to participation in cultural activities for dispersed rural residents and communities
- Ensuring that there are policies and strategies in place for cultural services which address inequality including race, disability and age

Aim 5: Enhancing our distinctive environments and the quality and diversity of our cultural life

The cultural sector can enhance our distinctive environments and the quality and diversity of our cultural life by:

- Considering carbon reduction targets and adaptation to unavoidable climate change when developing cultural infrastructure
- Lending a sense of identity and place to new and regenerated communities
- Ensuring quality design in urban planning
- Ensuring that cultural projects and events form part of the assessment of needs for planning development briefs

Thus far the golden thread remains intact. It is when the thread reaches **Somerset's Cultural Strategy** that it begins to fray slightly. For it is at this level that the 'cultural themes for Somerset' are introduced. The Somerset document states that *'There are five themes, all of which look at different areas. These themes act to shape the action plan, and give context to the work.'* Of the five themes listed (Living Sustainably; Community Growth; Economic Wellbeing; Enjoying and Achieving; and Being Healthy) only Community Growth clearly relates to the **Better place to be** document, the rest appear to have been lifted straight out the **Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy**. An obvious link to **People Places and Spaces** does not seem to exist.

That is not to say Somerset's Cultural Strategy document does not make reference to the upper tier of cultural strategy documents, it certainly does although the over-arching document People Places and Spaces does not appear to be mentioned.

The golden thread is lost in one or two of the action plans and is not immediately obvious in others. According to the documentation the Action Plan Outcomes *'... list the main areas of focus for cultural activity in Somerset. Updated every year, these are our main reference points for **cultural development and growth** in Somerset'.*

The concern of the review group is that without the 'Golden Thread' linking the strategy and action plan to the regional strategies, the Somerset Cultural partnership may be prevented from:

- Working effectively with other agencies and partners to achieve the vision and outcomes as set out in chapter two document.
- Obtaining funding.