

## TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
Date: 6 November 2024  
Report of: Director of Cultural Transformation

### Report Title

Cultural Strategy Activation

### Summary

The Cultural Strategy was adopted by Trafford Council in July 2023. The Director of Cultural Transformation arrived in post in December 2023, in order to lead the Strategy's activation, for which this report provides an update and forward priorities.

### Recommendation(s)

To note progress in respect of activation of the Cultural Strategy.

### Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

Name: Maria Bota  
Extension: n/a

Background Papers:  
A Cultural Strategy for Trafford 2023-2028

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Trafford's Cultural Strategy was developed over 2022/2023, drawing on extensive research as well as consultation and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, led by experts in the field, CT Consults.
- 1.2 The vision of the Cultural Strategy is – "We will make Trafford a place powered by cultural and creative expression that comes from everyone, and which will enrich lives and life chances."
- 1.3 The strategy detailed the positive impact the approach would have for residents across the borough and how it would help to stimulate the borough's economy. The strategy looked to build upon the area's rich heritage in sport and the arts.
- 1.4 The Cultural Strategy was adopted by Trafford Council in July 2023.
- 1.5 The Director of Cultural Transformation arrived in post in December 2023, in order to lead the Strategy's activation.
- 1.6 In July 2024, the Council launched its new Corporate Plan, which includes the new priority of Culture, Heritage and Sport for all.

## **2. Strategic Aims of the Cultural Strategy**

There are 3 strategic aims that are based on Leadership, Talent and Communities:

- 2.1 Trafford will develop a distinctive and inclusive approach to cultural leadership, based on a shared set of priorities with key partners.
- 2.2 Trafford will become a creative factory – GM's 'talent belt' – driving opportunities for embryonic, emerging and established cultural talent, with clear pathways for skills, talent and career development.
- 2.3 Trafford will champion and nurture connected cultural communities from the grassroots up, by supporting more hyperlocal and community-led activity.

This note provides an update against the objectives set for each of the above aims.

## **3. Leadership**

3.1 The new Cultural Transformation Hub is established and delivering. The Hub is a strategic panel for cultural development, chaired by Trafford Council, with a clearly defined set of roles and responsibilities to drive the vision for the Cultural Strategy. The Hub is chaired by Cllr Hynes, and the Vice-Chair is Sara Saleh. Membership includes Cllr Taylor, Cllr Welton and Cllr Ennis, officers from Place, Communications, Public Health, Net Zero, Children's Services, Growth and Leisure, and external partners Imperial War Museum North, Groundwork, Lancashire Cricket Club and Bruntwood. The Hub has a rolling programme to explore Culture working together with Heritage, Sport, Visitor Economy, Children and Young People, Public Health and Wellbeing, Climate and Nature, and Place. Future plans will include a focus on developing a Year of Culture programme. As a result of the initial discussion around Heritage and Culture, Trafford will be developing a heritage framework for the Borough over the next twelve months.

1.1 Many organisations are creating and presenting cultural programmes across Trafford, but there is currently no single place where these are promoted, and so the majority of events are not reaching a wide audience. A business case has been approved to build an online Trafford listings platform – a channel to promote the offer, but also build sector engagement and partnership. Called Trafford Is.. the platform will support visitors as well as residents. The web platform will help to activate the connectivity of the 'hub & spokes' model digitally – to build a comprehensive Trafford-wide online events listings platform with digital channels and services to showcase and promote the offer, build sector and partner engagement and encourage audience/community discovery, participation and exchange around the Borough. These need to be in place in advance of a Year of Culture and will take a year to deliver and embed.

1.2 Trafford Council has registered its interest in applying to Greater Manchester's Town of Culture programme (for 2026, 2027 or 2028 in order of preference) as a means of providing impetus to the activation of the cultural strategy.

1.3 The Director of Cultural Transformation (3.5 days a week) and a Culture Support officer (2 days a week) are activating the 'hub and spoke' model and working to bring together Trafford Council's assets in support of the strategy (including Waterside Arts, Music Service, Libraries, Leisure Trust, and other departments).

1.4 Significant time has been spent shaping the future of Waterside Arts and potential operating models and funding streams. This has led to the creation of a Waterside Arts Steering Board, meeting from October 2024, to oversee operations, development and progress towards a successful Arts Council England National Portfolio Bid for 2027 onwards.

- Led by Simon Davis, a Libraries Vision and Action Plan has been developed with the Cultural Strategy and the Finance and Change Programme as key focuses. This work has identified six priority areas for Trafford Libraries: Excellent core offer; Expand partnership working; Create volunteering opportunities; Deliver against Green Libraries Manifesto; Align with Trafford's Cultural Strategy activation; and Maximise space and commercial opportunities. The first major action was a service redesign to support the future ambitions which will be implemented from November 2024.
- 1.5 The Music Service is aligning its activity with the activation of the cultural strategy.
  - 1.6 The Director of Cultural Transformation is engaging with Council officers and partners to build confidence and opportunities for working together with cultural activities.

## **2. Talent**

- 2.1 The Creative Cluster programme (detailed below within the Communities part of this report) is identifying current creative and cultural activities, alongside opportunities and interest captured through community gatherings.
- 2.2 A new Creative and Cultural Leadership Group is a strategic panel which brings a range of leading cultural organisations, large and small, together, chaired by Trafford Council, with clearly identified terms of reference. The group is exploring opportunities for collaboration, co-ordination, capability and capacity-building. Early meetings have identified opportunities to swap skills and training, and to volunteering and the music offer across Trafford. The members of this group will also participate in the Creative Cluster conversations within their respective geographic areas. Through one-to-one conversations with many cultural organisations, it is clear that the majority are operating with very limited, if any, reserves and, like many organisations at this time, have challenges in relation to their ongoing sustainability.
- 2.3 The fledgling Trafford Cultural Education Partnership (TCEP) led by Gorse Hill Studios and co-chaired by the Music Service has relaunched and is collaborating with Children's Services to establish current levels of engagement amongst children and young people in creative and cultural activities. The core TCEP group is enhanced by membership from Children's Services, Public Health and Trafford College. In time, they could work to establish clear pathways for young people in Trafford to access creative and cultural activities (for skills, talent and career development, enterprise or simply life-enrichment) within and outside of the formal education environment.
- 2.4 Third sector and community networks, such as voluntary and amateur activity, are intrinsic to the Creative Cluster programme, which will identify development needs and opportunities, and explore ways of supporting. For example, skills and training, getting involved and learning, communications, funding, creative exchange, and social exchange.
- 2.5 The new Trafford Creatives is offering a chance for all creatives in the Borough to register for free, participate in regular gatherings together, receive news of funding and development opportunities, and share their needs to thrive in Trafford. In time, individuals within this group could mentor local talent.

## **3. Communities**

- 3.1 Trafford has been divided up into ten Creative Clusters, and an extensive programme of engagement is underway, which will identify existing creative and cultural activity, alongside opportunities for organisations, individuals and the Council to work effectively together to enable more residents to live creative and cultural lives. This will strengthen hyperlocal cultural

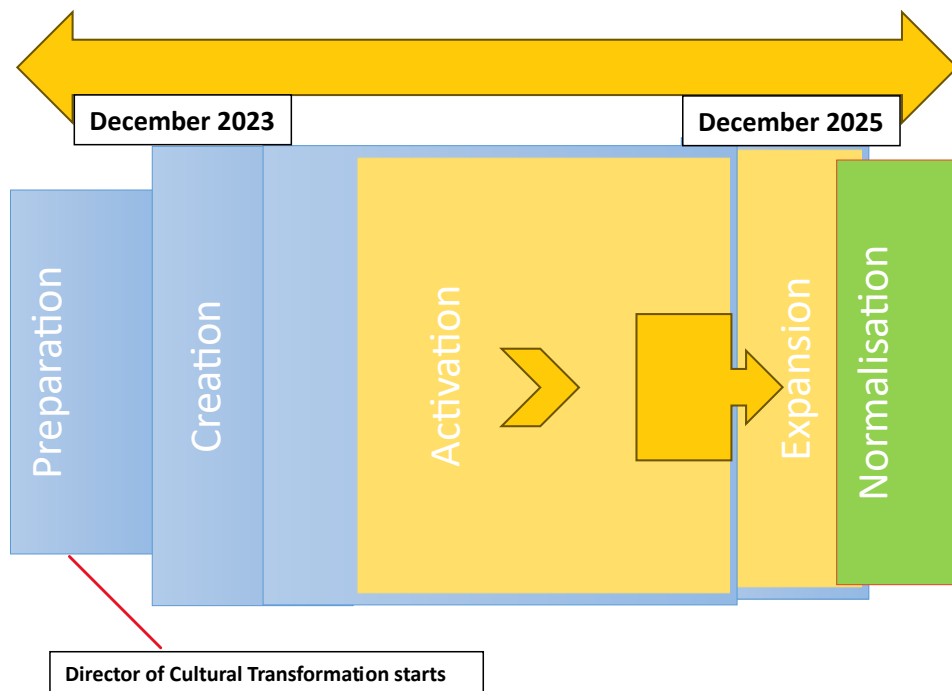
programming, and roll-out across the borough, including helping to generate ideas for a Year of Culture. It has proved an attractive proposition for Arts Council England, which has given some investment towards this exploratory programme of work.

3.2 Trafford Leisure and Trafford Libraries are inviting cultural community groups to explore accessing facilities in an affordable and timely manner.

3.3 The Creative and Cultural Leadership Group and the Creative Cluster programme are enabling officers to develop a stronger picture of cultural activity and investment.

#### 4. Timing of Cultural Strategy programme

4.1 As identified to members in July 2023, for the Cultural Strategy to be successfully adopted, the activity required will need to be iterative and, at times, organic, therefore not all actions are known now. This initial implementation plan set out:



4.2 Between December 2023 and September 2024, the following activity has been delivered:

- i. Consultation and business case development for Trafford Is..
- ii. Strategic Panel established – the Cultural Transformation Hub
- iii. Creative Cluster programme commencing
- iv. Trafford Creatives launch (Sale Waterside lead)
- v. Creative and Cultural Leadership Group established
- vi. Trafford Cultural Education Partnership relaunch (Gorse Hill Studios lead, co-chaired by Trafford Music Service)
- vii. Engagement with stakeholders who contributed to the strategy development to maintain engagement
- viii. Established/maintained relationships with key organisations (Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund, Greater Manchester Combined Authority) to ensure strategic alignment
- ix. Agreed approach to scoping a Heritage Framework for Trafford.

#### 5. Future funding bids

5.1 The activation budget for the Cultural Strategy is committed to the above activity, and does not include funds for commissioning or staging events. Two

areas of work, however, are designed to support future funding bids, to allow for the demonstration of the cultural strategy from 2026 onwards:

5.1.1 Creative Cluster programme – The work will provide content for an Arts Council England Place Partnership bid in 2025, to support a Year of Culture programme, the ideas for which have been generated from the ground up. Note that Arts Council England has invested in the Creative Cluster programme development. A bid will also go to GMCA for the Year of Culture programme.

5.1.2 Heritage Framework for Trafford – The activity will identify ideas and projects for bids in 2025/2026 to the National Lottery Heritage Fund and others, to help to bring together and celebrate Trafford's heritage stories. Note that the National Lottery Heritage Fund has helped to inform Trafford Council's approach to developing the heritage framework.

## **6. Partnerships**

6.1 The effective activation of the Cultural Strategy requires and benefits from collaboration with many areas of Trafford Council's programmes:

- i. Trafford Partnerships – opportunities for engagement in the Creative Cluster, Year of Culture programmes, the TCEP and the Trafford Is.. platform
- ii. Trafford Social Value – identification of benefits in Creative Cluster areas and across the whole Borough
- iii. Visitor Economy – developing Trafford's approach and connecting with the GMCA's new Visitor Economy Strategy
- iv. Creative Health and Well-Being – bringing the benefits of creativity and culture to Trafford's ground up approach to health and wellbeing, and connecting with the GMCA's Creative Health Strategy. Maintaining a focus on the Trafford Moving areas within Creative Cluster conversations.
- v. Skills – working across Trafford and with GM boroughs on the creative skills agenda
- vi. Creative Industries – collaborating with Manchester and Salford Councils in particular, and the GMCA, in growing and supporting the creative industries in Trafford.
- vii. Film and Drama – participating in Creative England's Film in England Regional Hub, and bringing more activity to Trafford.
- viii. Animation – building on the Cosgrove Hall Archive collection, and the presence of the world class animators MacKinnon and Saunders, to build a national focus on animation in Trafford.

## **7. Challenges**

7.1 The activation of the Cultural Strategy is taking place within a challenging context. The potential in Trafford is significant, however, we note that:

- i. The sector is struggling, with time limited for idea generation
- ii. There are no funds to sustain the hub and spoke model
- iii. We are reliant upon tremendous goodwill from the sector in scoping the work together
- iv. Building trust and engagement takes time
- v. Currently, there is no grants programme to support new ideas
- vi. Overall, there is a need for stronger diversity and representation across the sector in Trafford
- vii. We do not currently hold or offer match funds for funding bids
- viii. We have a small team delivering a big programme of work.

## **8. Success at the end of 2025**

8.1 We are working to achieve the following:

- i. Trafford Is.. Delivering increased attendances, profile and benefit
- ii. The Hub and spoke model operational and valued
- iii. The benefits of Culture contributing across the Council's teams
- iv. TCEP collaborations underway
- v. Creative and Cultural Leadership Group collaborations underway
- vi. A small grants programme established, to support the sector
- vii. Museum status secured for Cosgrove Hall Archive
- viii. Development of longer-term plan for creating a Centre of Children's Animation at Sale Waterside and/or artists' studios.
- ix. Year of Culture programme ideas shaped and communities activated
- x. A Heritage Framework established for Trafford
- xi. Major bids to ACE, NLHF and the GMCA to support Year of Culture and Heritage projects
- xii. Trafford Partnership aligned with the cultural programme
- xiii. Strong National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) bids to ACE shaping up from Sale Waterside and other Trafford organisations
- xiv. Substantial bids going into ACE, NHLF and GMCA from Trafford partners, alongside those from Trafford Council, with shared vision.

## **9. Principle next steps**

- i. Kick start Trafford Is...
- ii. Develop and run Creative Cluster programme
- iii. Continue with Cultural Transformation Hub – forthcoming focus on Culture and Visitor Economy, Children and Young People, Health and Wellbeing, Climate and Nature, and Place
- iv. Develop a Heritage Framework for Trafford
- v. Support the TCEP, and the Creative and Cultural Leadership Group
- vi. Support Sale Waterside to develop a strong approach for ACE NPO funding.