SANDWELL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

CULTURAL PROSPECTUS 2020

WAFER HADLEY

CULTURAL INSIGHT

This Cultural Prospectus sets out the strategic approach and intention for cultural activity in Sandwell Borough, and how this can contribute to the Vision 2030 of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC).

It draws on a research and consultation period carried out in 2019, involving consultees from a wide range of disciplines across the Borough and beyond. It presents three overarching cultural goals, to allow a frame of reference for cultural programmes in Sandwell. Under each goal described in this document, we have also presented a brief summary of associated findings and priorities.



Our definition of culture has been broad, embracing all those activities that SMBC currently supports including visual arts, theatre, participatory arts, heritage, parks, libraries – to name just a few. As partnerships and activity develops in the Borough, we would expect the way we define culture to broaden year on year, reflecting increasingly broad audience involvement, and increasingly innovative cultural sector response.

Findings and recommended priorities are based on Wafer Hadley's analysis of the data and insight gained through the research and consultation process¹. This Cultural Prospectus marks the end of a first phase of work on Cultural Strategy at SMBC. A draft was shared with the sector and stakeholders in a final round of consultation, and in this form is now ready to act as a foundation for future action planning.

¹ For ease of reading we have not annotated our findings for sources in the body of the text, but an appendix sets out the detail of the evidence base.

OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIC GOALS & PRIORITIES

CL	JLTURAL GOAL 1	A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE AND VISIT
	ey contribution to Vision 30:	Ambition 8: Create environments in the six towns where people choose to live
Als	so contributing to:	Ambition 7: Major new housing along transport routes and employment sites Ambition 9: Hosting industries of the future Ambition 10: National reputation for getting things done
'ri	iorities:	1A. Emphasise community focus as the central concern of the cultural sector1B. Use culture as a tool in place-making1C. Use culture to boost external attractiveness

CULTURAL GOAL 2	IMPROVED LIFE CHANCES FOR CHILDREN &
	YOUNG PEOPLE
Key contribution to Vision 2030:	Ambition 1: Raising aspirations and resilience
Also contributing to:	Ambition 3: Young people to have skills for the future Ambition 4: Raising the quality of schools
Priorities:	 2A. Provide more cultural participation opportunities for children & young people 2B. Support the development of strategic capacity in work with children & young people

3	CULTURAL GOAL 3	BETTER HEALTH AND WELLBEING
	Key contribution to Vision 2030:	Ambition 2: Healthier for longer and safer
	Priorities:	3A. Establish the cultural sector as an essential partner in social prescribing3B. Develop culture's role in health and wellbeing strategy

CULTURAL GOAL 1: A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE AND VISIT

KEY FINDINGS FROM RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION

1.1. Commitment to community

For many years, Sandwell has led the way on community engagement in culture. Its commitment to working at the grassroots, producing cultural activity that reflects local need, is visible in every strand of culture we have examined in our consultation. It would be hard to find another local authority area where the work of arts and heritage organisations, from the largest to the smallest, is so focussed on local community impact.

1.2. Building on significant assets

This focus on community impact has fostered a small and quality cultural infrastructure. Principal assets include Sandwell's museums, its libraries, its professional arts organisations, cultural practitioners, youth service, voluntary organisations, green spaces and organisations which use culture, heritage and creativity as part of their work.

The commitment across the cultural sector to improving life in Sandwell is very clear. This is a significant asset for the Borough to build on and use to the full. It makes sense to take care of these assets and to help them to grow stronger by developing strategic capacity (see 1.12.)

1.3. Inward and outward-facing cultural activity

Across Sandwell's six towns, culture is regularly used as a tool to work closely with communities. This established way of working contributes to a better quality of life, more cohesive communities across the Borough, and positive health and wellbeing outcomes.

Cultural activity can also be used to build the attractiveness of the Borough. It can make it more likely that businesses will locate in Sandwell, that new residents will live here, and that external investment will continue to come into the Borough. It can help build the night-time economy and make it more likely that new talent is retained.

1.4. Sandwell currently has some of the lowest levels of cultural engagement in England

According to the most recent Active Lives survey, Sandwell is ranked 324 out of 325 local authorities in England for cultural engagement, including all participation in creative, artistic, craft, theatrical or music activity. While consultees in Sandwell feel this measure misunderstands the full scope of cultural engagement, it is nevertheless a constant measure across England.

The reasons for this are not immediately clear, but it is likely to relate to the quantity and availability of cultural provision. Other local authorities with similar levels of deprivation have higher cultural engagement scores, but these are often in areas where culture has been a theme in regeneration or community development (such as Blackpool, Knowsley, Hull, Middlesborough, Stoke-on-Trent or Hastings, for example).

Two positive directions can come from this analysis. Firstly, it can be used as an argument for a scaling-up of cultural participation. Secondly, it can be used to support and lever external investment.

1.5. Facilitated cultural participation is a central strength of the offer

Sandwell excels at grassroots-focused participatory cultural experience. Examples include: work by museums, parks and libraries, work by the music service, work by the three ACE-funded organisations in the Borough (Multistory, Black Country Touring and Creative Black Country), and work by individual artists and artist collectives such as Laundry and Infamous Arts. Cultural participation is used as a tool for social benefit by voluntary and third sector organisations working with Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), and by specialist teams in the Youth Service, and Creative Academies Network. There are many other examples.

It would be beneficial to share this good practice and identify Sandwell with this particular approach to cultural experience.

1.6. Making the most of events

Highly-facilitated participatory work with communities typically takes a long time to deliver and involves limited numbers of people. To balance this work, Sandwell also delivers events, often in its parks, green space and other outdoor spaces. Research shows that custom-built events already drive attendance in Sandwell's museums.

Events can be high-profile, inclusive, and good value. A strategic plan for events provision over five years would be beneficial, including plans for legacy activity post Commonwealth Games in 2022. This should include identification of senior managers at the Council responsible for strategic oversight.

1.7. Places to go, stages to use

Cultural practitioners in Sandwell have made a virtue of using non-arts spaces for communityfocused arts work. This can often help reach non-traditional arts audiences, and several cultural organisations have become expert at using these spaces effectively. In spite of this, there is felt to be a lack of options for spaces in which to perform. The younger talent that Sandwell wants to encourage has few ready-made platforms to use for public performance. In addition, today's consumer wants choice, and variety. Small venues that meet the needs of different audiences, more non-arts spaces, more choice, and more variety could increase cultural opportunity, and contribute to the night time economy.

1.8. External talent as well as internal talent

No creative talent works well without external stimulus. While supporting local talent and local practitioners is a priority, it is also important to invigorate cultural provision with external talent. External cultural talent can accelerate the growing diversity and variety of provision within the Borough, giving Sandwell's audiences a big horizon, as well as putting Sandwell's creative community in touch with an open system.

1.9. Protecting Sandwell's built heritage

Sandwell's industrial heritage is a central part of its character, and there is already a commitment in the Borough to treasuring these assets. Several of these are derelict, and there is an underlying risk that these buildings could be lost.

Preserving and re-using these buildings, as part of culture-focused regeneration schemes, is a priority. Regeneration will be best served by culture working over the long term, in partnership with funders and larger partners, to deploy activity at strategic points over a number of years. Culture can also form part of the vision and delivery programme of these key sites.

1.10. 'Heart and Soul' – what can Sandwell offer the UK in and around the Commonwealth Games?

It is clear how Sandwell benefits culturally from its proximity to Birmingham. There is less clarity about what Sandwell can offer its neighbours, and yet there is an underlying confidence in the strength of the cultural experience across the six towns. The warmth of Sandwell's people, and the pronounced sense of place at a local level is often noted.

Sandwell's ability to be the 'heart and soul' of the Black Country, particularly in the lead up and legacy period of the Commonwealth Games, could see it make gains in differentiation and awareness among visitors.

1.11. Using culture to attract external investment

Understanding what makes Sandwell attractive to external partners and investors is a key part of planning. It is important for Sandwell to be an active partner in the sub-regional development

agenda, and in particular in opportunities around sub-regional cultural events such as the Commonwealth Games, and Coventry 2021.

A large body of evidence nationally affirms the power of culture to shape sense of place and enhance bids for place-making. The government's Industrial Strategy links culture to economic growth, and there is scope to reflect this in local and regional strategy, leading to further partnerships outside the Borough. One example of this is the role of culture in achieving inclusive growth, described in the Neighbourhoods Directorate Business Plan 2019-22.

1.12. Developing strategic capacity

Within Sandwell's cultural sector there is little spare capacity, and all organisations and practitioners are locked into a short or medium-term funding plan which tends to favour swift delivery and project working. Most new initiatives are project funded.

Most of the resource is dedicated to delivery, and there is very little capacity for strategic development. This will tend to keep organisations small and reactive. There will be little capacity for partnership building, fundraising or innovation. In this context, anything that promotes long-term confidence among existing and new cultural providers would be beneficial – such as brokering new partnerships, supporting fundraising, refining business planning, or trying new ways of working.

CULTURAL GOAL 1: A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE AND VISIT

PRIORITIES

1A. Emphasise community	1A.1. Encourage cultural activity that is based on grassroots
focus as the central	development
concern of the cultural	1A.2. Support and protect the cultural assets that embody this
sector	grassroots-based approach
	1A.3. Strengthen strategic capacity in the sector, focusing on
	planning, evaluation and fundraising
	1A.4. Encourage long term planning in the sector, supported by
	improved communication and new partnerships outside the
	cultural sector
	1A.5. Encourage partnership working within the cultural sector
	1A.6. Evaluate and disseminate Sandwell's existing best practice
	and assert the Borough's leading role
1B. Use culture as a tool in	1B.1. Create a Borough-wide strategic approach to events and
place-making	events management
	1B.2. Encourage the development of more small venues and
	cultural spaces
	1B.3. Work with regeneration partners and BIDs on town centre
	improvement and night time economy
	1B.4. Support the regeneration of built heritage assets
1C. Use culture to boost	1C.1. Encourage cultural activity geared to inclusive growth and
external attractiveness	to stimulating inward investment
	1C.2. Capitalise on the Commonwealth Games opportunity and
	plan for legacy
	1C.3. Make culture integral to the development of Sandwell's
	brand, establishing it as the heart and soul of the Black Country

CULTURAL GOAL 2: IMPROVED LIFE CHANCES FOR CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

KEY FINDINGS FROM RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION

2.1. Children and young people in Sandwell face multiple challenges²

26% of Sandwell children live in households that are workless or economically inactive. The comparative average in the UK is 11%. Historically, there has been a narrower pathway to higher education than in other parts of the country: only 21% residents of Sandwell have a qualification at NVQ4 (Higher Education certificate or above) compared to 37% of the UK population.

As a result of these and other factors associated with disadvantage, the most vulnerable children and young people present to youth services with a variety of needs, including emotional health and wellbeing issues.

2.2. Participation in culture offers unique development opportunities for young people

Culture provides avenues for engaging children and young people on their own terms, while also offering them room to grow. While many participants may feel an initial sense of removal or disconnection from this kind of activity, with the right kind of facilitation there is also a readiness to engage in creative activity and try something new.

The unique advantage of cultural participation is that it deals with expression. By providing children and young people with new ways to express themselves, it helps them recognise their own strengths, the opportunities around them, and gives them a voice.

2.3. Long-term approaches are needed for high quality work with vulnerable young people

However, building trust is vital, and often accounts for 50% of the time spent on a typical project. The majority of children and young people targeted for this work will be a long way from engaging fully with their own creativity and developing the skills they may need to enhance their life choices. This is why for the most disadvantaged young people, long-term work, embedded in community and reflecting the target audiences' needs, is vital. Personal, tailored programmes for vulnerable children and young people may benefit from years of development and may even aspire to maintain contact with individuals and their communities for lifetimes.

Work with children and young people outside school is already facilitated by several established networks and organisations in Sandwell, including the majority of the cultural organisations and practitioners interviewed during this consultation.

² For the purposes of this document, we define children and young people as being aged 0 - 24

2.4. Creativity and culture in schools is an important part of the picture

In recent years creativity and arts-based work in schools has declined. However, there may now be an opportunity for a change in tone related to the planned refresh of the Ofsted inspection framework with its renewed emphasis on 'quality of education'. While it is still unclear what the impact of this will be, it is fair to say that schools will respond to what is valued externally by their principal stakeholders or funders.

SMBC is one of these external stakeholders and can make a clear statement about what is valued. The planned Shireland Academy/CBSO Academy is one example of championing cultural education. The Cultural Education Partnership which is currently being established in the Borough is another.

2.5. Work with families is a high-volume route to engagement with children and young people

Cultural provision and participation for families is a highly-effective way to reach large numbers of children and young people in a rolling progamme of engagement. Family provision, often selfguided or lightly facilitated, is an important part of delivering cultural participation for young people.

The research shows that Sandwell's museums are attractive to families, as are its parks and libraries. Events in outdoor and heritage locations have also seen success with this target audience.

2.6. There is a recognised need for improvement in evaluation and strategic planning

There is a deficit around strategic planning for work with young people, linked to a deficit in strategic capacity. This means that objectives are sometimes unclear, and that linking up separate projects into a stronger movement is difficult. Strategic planning approaches such as Theory of Change could be more widely implemented.

Organisations or service providers with little strategic capacity may begin to work intuitively, to established patterns, with little time for review, objective-setting or partnership building.

2.7. Children and young people that show creative talent should have improved routes for progression

While talent development is a central feature of the work of several organisations in Sandwell, such as the Music Service, the Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations, Sandwell College, and Creative Academies Network, the underlying weaknesses in the Borough's cultural infrastructure and night time economy mean that there are few opportunities for graduates of these programmes.

It is challenging for Sandwell to retain the creative talent it creates over the long term. By working together, partners may be able to identify further talent development opportunities, extending the path that is already being built, such as investigating the scope for creative apprenticeships.

CULTURAL GOAL 2: IMPROVED LIFE CHANCES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

PRIORITIES

2A. Provide more cultural	2A.1. Continue to develop family participation opportunities in
participation	museums, heritage, libraries and parks
opportunities for young	2A.2. Create family participation opportunities through events
people	programme
	2A.3. Encourage the development of spaces for children and
	young peopleto perform and participate
	2A.4. Develop exchange and sharing initiatives between the six
	towns
	2A.5. Support cultural talent development to nurture local stars
	and retain talent.
2B. Support the	2B.1. Promote creativity and culture within existing youth
development of strategic	engagement work
capacity in work with	2B.2. Support partnerships between cultural practitioners and
young people	youth services
	2B.3. Create capacity and skills to produce robust evidence of
	impact, aligned to clear strategic goals
	2B.4. Advocate for positive approaches to creativity and culture in
	schools, and co-ordinate links with the cultural sector

CULTURAL GOAL 3: BETTER HEALTH AND WELLBEING

KEY FINDINGS FROM RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION

3.1. Levels of health deprivation in Sandwell are high

72% of Sandwell's population lives in a neighbourhood that experiences some of the highest health deprivation in England. Life expectancy is 2.5 years lower than the national figure. Physical inactivity is widespread (29% inactive), the highest proportion in the Black Country, and Sandwell has the third lowest percentage of 'active' people in England.

Many of the factors associated with high levels of deprivation in Sandwell are also likely to negatively affect mental health and wellbeing, including low educational attainment, low physical activity, poor social networks and support, and unemployment.

3.2. National evidence shows a link between creative participation and good health

In 2017 the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing presented substantial evidence for arts and culture having a positive impact on health and wellbeing. The group's report, *Creative Health*, recommended that an individual in each local authority should take strategic responsibility for policy on arts, health and wellbeing, and build on these findings.

The Local Government Association contributed to the inquiry and set out ways for local authorities to make use of creative participation, arts and culture in social care, public health, sense of place, and combatting social isolation.

Many local authorities are now pursuing this agenda, exploring social prescribing approaches, and building culture into their public health plans. The cultural sector has also been active in exploring ways forward on this initiative in recent years.

3.3. NHS England is investing in social prescribing, opening the door to partnerships with the cultural sector

Social prescribing is not a new approach, but until now it has not been adopted centrally by the government and the NHS. Resources are now being focussed on this initiative, which is seen as effective and cost-effective.

Over a thousand trained social prescribing link workers will be in place by 2020/21. 900,000 people are to be referred to social prescribing by 2023/24. Social prescribing is a prominent part of the new NHS Long Term Plan, supported by specific published guidance.

This development is supported by a new Social Prescribing Network with dedicated staff in each region. Link workers will be employed through the newly-emerging primary care network within the Sandwell and West Birmingham Clinical Commissioning Group. These new staff and networks are actively looking for new connections, including in the cultural sector.

3.4. Public health policy-makers in Sandwell recognise the link between cultural participation in the community and improved health and wellbeing

Public Health and Social Care policy makers in Sandwell have long been committed to assetbased development in the community, encouraging the use of existing networks and skills in the community for wider benefit. This approach was tested from 2012 in the *Friends and Neighbours* scheme.

The interest in asset-based development and social prescribing includes an openness to using cultural networks and skills to provide opportunities to people at risk of ill-health and social isolation. Community development has become a core concern for public health decision-makers. A community with a healthy cultural life, in all its breadth and richness, is likely to produce healthier people.

3.5. There is an opportunity for cultural providers to enhance existing networks and assets

Asset-based development builds on what the community is already trying to achieve. Sandwell's cultural providers, from its professional companies to its individual practitioners, can play an important role in making arts, heritage and cultural participation central to asset-based activity, improving activities, creatively following a process of interchange with participants, and being more impactful on wellbeing.

The guiding principles will typically be that the work is rooted in local need and enterprise, sustainable and cost-effective. Cultural providers embracing these principles will be well placed to enhance asset-based public health initiatives.

3.6. The public interface including liaison, co-ordination, and delivery, is hugely important in this model

The conditions are very positive for the cultural sector to contribute to community engagement for health and wellbeing. There is a powerful initiating partnership working in this area, involving the NHS and local government. There is also a pressing need for support, from a population with higher than average health and wellbeing issues.

However, joining up demand and supply in a way that reflects community need is a challenge. The development of a hub to co-ordinate activity, and of co-ordinators on the ground, is an important part of delivery, and is a workstream that the cultural sector should be an active part of, through Council officers. Any successful model will need effective delivery partners, and the cultural and voluntary sector can become a key part of this.

3.7. Stimulating demand

Stimulating demand for activity that contributes to health and wellbeing will be an essential task in Sandwell's asset-based development. Singing in a choir may be good for your health – but how do you persuade non-singers to participate? Managers in the cultural sector have considerable expertise in encouraging participation and can contribute to this workstream at a strategic level.

3.8. Evaluation of impact is a key challenge

Providing evidence of impact on health and wellbeing will be of central importance in this work. Quantitative measures will be part of the picture, but a holistic approach is welcomed in this area, and there is a recognition that the most important aspects of development are sometimes those that cannot be represented in numbers. This approach will be reflected in Sandwell's new Joint Health Outcomes Framework.

Qualitative feedback is becoming more established within the evaluation culture of the NHS. There is a willingness on the medical side to consider qualitative evidence as well as statistics. This will help cultural practitioners to be honest about outcomes in what is an experimental and innovative area. For this reason alone, starting this work in containable pilot schemes looks to be the best way forward.

3.9. Balancing against other areas of mission

The NHS is a large and powerful partner for the cultural sector, and social prescribing is a large scale community engagement task. The cultural sector will need to learn how to accommodate this new partnership without erasing its own sense of mission.

There may be a tension here. The cultural sector in the UK is oriented around unique practice, a drive to innovate, and a leaning towards 'one-off' project-funded projects. The NHS is oriented around universality. Clinical Commissioning Groups will be looking for reliable, predictable service providers, and artists may be seen as having other agendas.

It is true that cultural practice thrives on being idiosyncratic and unpredictable. But the sector has also proved itself capable of providing what Public Health needs from its community liaison: evidence-based practice, effective solutions, cost-effectiveness and sustainability. It does seem possible for the cultural sector in Sandwell to continue to grow, exploring its own mission for the interpretation of the world, as well as becoming an expert in facilitating the wellbeing of the community.

CULTURAL GOAL 3: BETTER HEALTH AND WELLBEING

PRIORITIES

3A. Establish the cultural sector as an essential	3A.1. Work with key partners and social prescribing networks to establish potential for development
partner in social prescribing	3A.2. Work with partners on a pilot project that develops successful ways of working in social prescribing
	3A.3. Encourage joint working between community-based cultural practitioners, social prescribing link workers, and other community liaison workers
	3A.4. Evidence the added value culture brings to health and wellbeing outcomes through social prescribing
3B. Develop culture's role in health and wellbeing strategy	3B.1. Embed the cultural sector in cross-departmental working within the Council, and in external partnerships on health and wellbeing.
	3B.2. Represent the cultural sector in the development of health and wellbeing strategy in the Borough, including tailored projects and social prescribing
	3B.3. Improve evaluation, linked to funders' priorities and the Joint Health Outcomes framework
	3B.4. Enable the cultural sector to plan for change, assessing the impact of sustaining health and wellbeing work on other areas of mission

CONSULTEES & OTHER SOURCES

Each consultee has taken part in a depth interview of up to one hour. Consultees are in alphabetical order.

A full research review was undertaken as part of the work, using documents and data supplied by SMBC. We also cite information from a variety of sources drawn from our own desk research.

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INFORMATION & DATA SOURCES

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