



ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
6 MARCH 2023

NATIONAL PORTFOLIO STATUS FOR LEICESTERSHIRE'S LIBRARIES
AND HERITAGE PROVISION

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES

Purpose of the report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Committee on the Department's successful application to Arts Council England (ACE) for funding through the National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) programme for Libraries and Heritage provision.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The NPO programme will support delivery of the aims and ambitions of the County Council's Strategic Plan. It is most strongly aligned with the Great Communities outcome, in particular sub-outcomes:
 - 5.1 Diversity is celebrated and people feel welcome and included;
 - 5.2 People participate in service design and delivery;
 - 5.3 Cultural and historic heritage is enjoyed and conserved;
 - 5.5 People support each other through volunteering.
3. There is also activity that will support the 'Clean and Green' and 'Improved Opportunities' outcomes.

Background

4. ACE is the national development agency for creativity and culture and the lead for Libraries and Museums. In 2022, the Department's Libraries and Heritage Service submitted an application to become an NPO in the new round commencing from 1 April 2023.
5. NPOs are leaders in their field and ACE was looking to bring together a new cohort of brilliant creative and cultural organisations that put the public at the heart of their work and are committed to working collaboratively, with each other and within communities. They will play a central role in helping ACE deliver its strategy "Let's Create" across England.
6. Leicestershire's bid champions the importance of Libraries, Museums, Heritage, Collections and Learning, in improving the lives of local people and has been titled

'Culture Leicestershire' to reflect the support for cultural activity across the County's Libraries, Museums and Heritage sites.

7. On 4 November 2022, ACE verified that the bid had been successful and confirmed an offer of £261,000 per annum for three years, a total investment in Leicestershire's cultural offer of just over £780,000. Since then the Libraries and Heritage Service has entered a period of negotiation with ACE to refine proposals and provide the necessary details in advance of ACE issuing a funding agreement in March 2023. Work on the new NPO programme will cover the period 1 April 2023 until 31 March 2026.
8. The Council's Library and Heritage Service delivers access to culture through collections, stories and expertise across a network of venues and in targeted programmes of activities within communities. This includes presenting history, challenging thinking, inspiring creativity, firing enthusiasm, celebrating and commemorating, and allowing people to explore and shape their local, national and international connections both present day and from the past.
9. In 2020, the Service changed its delivery model to embed co-production and co-creation with communities and partners in the structure. Since then robust evidence has been gathered that demonstrates the positive impact of this approach and has led to a variety of successful, creative, cultural community engagement projects being developed and led by the Service. More information about these projects can be accessed via the website - www.cultureleicestershire.co.uk/
10. There are four key strands of activity in the programme, which build on the Service's strong track record of providing quality services that place people and communities at the heart of provision. The funding and recognition that NPO offers will allow the commitment to be realised and to reach new audiences, to provide everyone in Leicestershire the opportunity to benefit from access to Culture.
11. The following paragraphs provide a summary of each of the four strands. The learning from year 1 of the programme will shape and influence the direction and detail of the following years.

Strand 1: Culture Leicestershire

12. The aim is to develop a Cultural Strategy, which re-imagines cultural commitment post-COVID and ensures the cultural offer is aligned with the needs of residents and visitors. It will help embed the Library and Heritage Service within the wider Leicestershire cultural context and shape ambition in respect of the Council's cultural provision. The Strategy will be developed in partnership with communities, other cultural providers (including relevant NPOs), and local higher and further education providers. The Strategy will embed an approach to community engagement and of co-creativity.
13. As a result of the NPO award and the Library and Heritage Service and Creative Leicestershire have developed a partnership with the University of Nottingham which is interested in the approach. The University has secured research funding to undertake foundation work that will support the development of a Cultural Strategy. This will also help underpin the development of a data strategy.

Strand 2: Community Curators

14. The Community Curators will enable community voices to be heard in co-curated cultural projects in Charnwood, Harborough and Melton Museums and at least two Independent Community Museums. As well as featuring across the Library and Heritage Service venues, they will be showcased via the Culture Leicestershire digital platform. These projects will benefit all visitors, but in particular those who do not currently engage with, or see themselves reflected in, the Council's heritage services. The projects will be facilitated by commissioned creative practitioners and the creative outcomes might include exhibitions (physical and digital), film, performance, collections development, gallery interventions, trails and enhanced interpretation of long-term museum displays.

Strand 3: Creative Expression in Libraries

15. The aim is to unlock the network of the Council's libraries by commissioning specific creative activities that will help develop audiences, further develop Libraries as vibrant cultural hubs and enable creative practitioners to use Libraries for their own activities, including rehearsal, workshop and practice space. Artists in Residence will be appointed to lead on creating new activities for communities across the Council's libraries and the community managed library network, with a focus on Children and Families and Early Years. These commissioned performances will be the catalyst for longer-term activity programmes driven by local communities and independent creative practitioners who wish to use the Council's venues for their own performances.

Strand 4: Culture to You

16. This pilot project will focus on Oadby and Wigston, offering a range of cultural assets for individuals and groups with different access challenges to choose from and use in the places where they live, work and play. People who are unable to use services because they are restricted in their opportunities to leave their own homes or places of care/wellbeing will be offered a cultural menu, including Art, Museum Objects, Library Books, Memory Boxes and Digital Resources. These resources will be made available as loans for people to have in their homes, care environments, specialist centres and places of work, as means of improving their health and wellbeing and reducing isolation. Volunteers will be recruited to support the delivery of these resource and engagement with participants, similar to and extending the Home Library Service model.
17. It was decided to focus the pilot on Oadby and Wigston as it has been identified as one of 109 "Levelling up for Culture Places" across the country by ACE and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and is the only such area in Leicestershire.
18. Alongside the activities outlined above, ACE's four investment principles (IPs) will be embedded:
- Ambition and Quality;
 - Environmental Responsibility;
 - Dynamism;
 - Inclusivity and Relevance throughout all activities.

19. The following paragraphs detail the ambitions under each of the IPs over the three year period:

Ambition and Quality

20. The aim is to be a responsive, reflective and dynamic culture service with community co-creation embedded. The measure of success will be physical and digital spaces where people engage with collections, resources and services and shape their future development, accessibility and interpretation.

Environmental Responsibility

21. The County Council intends to be a net zero council by 2030. The Library and Heritage Service will embed the Environment and the Net Zero Strategies and Plans in an operating model and ensure that staff, Creative Practitioners, participants and volunteers are enabled to make their contribution.

Dynamism

22. A data strategy will be developed across all Library and Museum services to enable the identifying of information on current and potential visitors. Once baseline information has been collected, there will be a proactive response to that data to continue to improve services.

Inclusivity and Relevance

23. The intention is to confidently embed the practice of community collaboration, co-design and delivery in what is produced, presented and collected. By the end of the programme positive steps will have been made to address gaps in representation and there will be a clear plan for how to continue that work and ensure sustainability going forward.

Governance

24. *Culture Leicestershire* is based on strong community engagement and consultation, in line with the County Council's Consultation and Engagement Principles. To support this approach, a clear governance structure has been designed to ensure the voices of those intended to benefit from the programme are heard alongside those that will be delivering it, as follows:
- *NPO Programme Delivery Board* - responsible for the creative direction and development of the programme. It will facilitate creative dialogue and constructive challenge. The Board will meet on a quarterly basis and make decisions in relation to the programme delivery. Membership will include the Cabinet Lead Member for Adults and Communities, representatives from the County Council's Officers' Oversight Group, representatives from the Community Connectors Network and key cultural partners including other relevant NPOs.
 - *County Council's Officers' Oversight Group* - to be responsible for the management of the investment. It will include officers from the Department, as well as corporate colleagues from Finance, HR, and Children and Family Services. It will meet on a quarterly basis, aligned to the reporting schedule and monitor progress against the NPO outcomes and milestones.

- *Community Connectors Network* - made up of local people and representatives from organisations and groups who are connected to specific communities. They will provide support to represent and reflect the people the Council aims to serve more widely.
- *Cultural Youth Forum* - to support the voice of young people in particular and ensure activities meet their needs and ambitions.

25. Feedback from ACE on the proposals for the management and governance of the programme said: *“There are clear and detailed plans included in the application that given confidence they (Leicestershire County Council) will be able to achieve this effectively.”*

Resource Implications

26. The NPO is a three year programme with a total investment of just over £780,000, which equates to £261,999 of per annum for financial years 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26, to be used for the purposes described in the application. It is expected there will be an opportunity to apply for continuation funding for a further three years.
27. Three new posts will be created to support the delivery of the programme, with all costs covered by the funding. Posts will be advertised internally and externally. There will also be increased capacity for the existing role of Audience Development Manager, which will lead on the management of the NPO programme, with the additional cost to be covered by the funding.
28. The remaining resource, which represents the bulk of the funding, will be used to develop and commission new activity across Libraries, Museums and Heritage sites, develop data strategy, including a more digital presence.
29. The Director of Corporate Resources and Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the content of this report.

Timetable for Decisions

30. The funding agreement needs to be signed and accepted by the County Council by 31 March 2023.
31. The programme will officially commence from 1 April 2023 and is due to conclude 31 March 2026. Subject to changes in the future funding priorities for ACE, the Council would be able to apply for a further round of NPO funding before the end of the current programme.
32. The governance structure described in paragraph 24 will be established from 1 April 2023 to ensure reporting requirements to ACE and maximise the effectiveness of this investment.

Conclusions

33. Securing ACE investment as part of the Council's Libraries and Heritage provision over the next three years is a significant achievement and means the Authority can continue to build on its strong track record of working with communities to deliver quality services that are valued by all.

34. The Library and Heritage Service is passionate about Leicestershire's cultural provision and committed to ensuring that everyone in Leicestershire, in particular those who are currently excluded or underrepresented, has the opportunity to engage with great art and cultural activity. The NPO programme will enable this ambition to be realised.
35. It is proposed that the Committee will receive an update on the achievements of the NPO programme at the end of the first year of delivery.

Background Papers

Leicestershire County Council Strategic Plan 2022–2026 -

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/about-the-council/council-plans/the-strategic-plan>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

36. None.

Equality Implications

37. The Libraries and Heritage service are available to everyone in the community and there are no equality implications arising from this report.

Human Rights Implications

38. The Libraries and Heritage service are available to everyone in the community and there are no human rights implications arising from this report.

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