

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
12 June 2025

DARLINGTON CULTURAL STRATEGY ACTION PLAN FOR 2024/2025

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To update members on progress delivering the priorities in the Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022-2026 and the 2024/25 Action Plan.
2. For members to consider the Action Plan for 2025/26.

Summary

3. In the Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022-2026 (Appendix 1) there is a commitment to submit annual Action Plans for consideration by Scrutiny Members. This report presents a summary of progress for 2024/25 alongside the Action Plan for 2025/26.

Recommendation

4. It is recommended that:
 - (a) Members note the update on progress on the 2024/25 Action Plan
 - (b) Members consider the Action Plan for 2025/26.

Dave Winstanley
Executive Director- Environment, Highways and Community Services

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Background Papers

Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022-2026

Darlington Cultural Strategy Action Plan delivery for 2024 to 2025 and Action Plan for 2024 to 2026.

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Council Plan	Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022-2026 has set out how the Council will deliver its cultural ambitions.
Addressing inequalities	One of the priorities within Darlington’s Cultural Strategy 2022–2026 is for Darlington to have an accessible, diverse and vibrant culture.
Tackling Climate Change	This report has no significant impact on Carbon Impact and Climate Change.
Efficient and effective use of resources	There is no impact on the Council’s efficiency agenda.
Health and Wellbeing	Culture can have a positive impact on Health and Wellbeing
S17 Crime and Disorder	Cultural activities can have a positive impact on crime and disorder by engaging individuals in positive activity.
Wards Affected	Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022-2026 covers all wards in Darlington Borough.
Groups Affected	Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022-2026 is focused on the population of Darlington Borough, and also considers those working in, visiting or considering establishing or relocating business within Darlington Borough.
Budget and Policy Framework	There is no impact on the budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	This report is not a Key Decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an Urgent Decision
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022 – 2026 and associated Action Plan for 2024/25 considers cultural access for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. Cultural services routinely work with colleagues in Children’s Services to support Looked After Children and Care Leavers access to cultural provision through the Holiday Activities and Food programme, the In2 programme and programmes involving the Virtual School.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

- The Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022-2026 was approved in 2022/23 and is attached at **Appendix 1**. The strategy was informed by research, including the previous Darlington focused Arts Enquiry report, development work since that date and discussion with stakeholders including: Arts Council England, Tees Valley Combined Authority and the Creative Darlington Board.

6. The main drivers for Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022-2026 are to focus our cultural vision and assist advocacy and fundraising to take forward cultural priorities within the timespan of the document. The Strategy has subsequently been shared with various parties to support successful applications for activities and commissions in Darlington borough.
7. The strategy uses a definition of Culture as set out by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport which covers the following areas:
 - (a) Arts (including visual arts, literature, music, theatre and dance)
 - (b) Architecture
 - (c) Crafts
 - (d) Creative Industries
 - (e) Design
 - (f) Heritage
 - (g) Historic Environment
 - (h) Museums and Galleries
 - (i) Libraries
 - (j) Archives
 - (k) Film
 - (l) Broadcasting and Media
8. The vision of Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022-2026 is that Darlington will be a place in 2026 and beyond where culture enriches lives, involves people and is central to identity and prosperity.
9. The five priorities which Darlington Cultural Strategy seeks to address between 2022 and 2026 are:
 - (a) To creatively celebrate Darlington's contribution to the birth of the modern passenger railway.
 - (b) For Darlington to have an accessible, diverse and vibrant culture, encouraging economic growth.
 - (c) For Darlington to champion engagement with culture, particularly amongst children and young people.
 - (d) For culture to thrive within Darlington Borough and attract visitors to the Town Centre.
 - (e) For Darlington to have a thriving theatre offer involving people of all ages.
10. Numerous council services and partners contribute to taking the vision and these priorities forward, including Darlington Hippodrome, the Heritage and Culture Fund (Creative Darlington) budget, the Library Service, the Museums Service, Town Centre Partnership and Events Service alongside additional services for adults (e.g. The Community Arts Project) and children (e.g. The Virtual School's longstanding support for cultural engagement involving Care Experienced Children in the borough), as do programmes which the Council contributes (e.g. the S&DR200 Festival).

11. Most of the cultural provision delivered or supported by the Council contributes to council priorities of economic and/or social concerns including place promotion, community cohesion, education and well-being, and the Council frequently works in partnership with different enterprises, groups and organisations to take things forward. Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022-2026 clarifies our priorities and is helpful in identifying opportunities for joint working with other agencies.
12. Within Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022-2026 a commitment was made to present detailed annual Action Plans to Members on an annual basis, and to share annual reports on progress.
13. Attached at **Appendix 2**, is an update on progress on the 2024/25 Action Plan and the Action Plan for 2025 to 2026.
14. Considerable progress was made in 2024/25 in addressing particular priorities.
 - (a) The Hopetown Darlington visitor attraction opened to the public.
 - (b) The Stockton and Darlington Railway Community Grants Fund was launched and funding awarded.
 - (c) The S&DR200 Festival programme was launched.
 - (d) Darlington Library provided an extensive offer and programme of activities throughout the year.
 - (e) A diverse programme of Town Centre events and festivals delivered.
 - (f) Darlington Hippodrome attracted significant audiences for performance and participation in programmes.