

CULTURE, ARTS & HERITAGE EXECUTIVE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 19 FEBRUARY 2024 - 4.00 PM



PRESENT: Councillor E Sennitt Clough (Chair), Councillor Miss S Hoy (Vice-Chairman), Councillor S Count, Councillor L Foice-Beard, Councillor P Hicks, Councillor Dr H Nawaz and Councillor M Purser

APOLOGIES:

Officers in attendance: Carol Pilson (Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer), Phil Hughes (Head of Leisure Services/SRO March Future High Street Project), Jaime-Lea Taylor (Creativity and Cultural Development Officer) and Helen Moore (Member Services and Governance Officer)

CAH8/23 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 3 October 2023 were confirmed and signed.

CAH9/23 CREATIVITY & CULTURE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER UPDATE

UK: Shared Prosperity Funded 'Amplifying Art & Culture Project'

Jamie-Lea Taylor updated members as follows:

- After receiving support from external partner colleagues who at that time were part of what is now the Fenland Culture Partnership (FCP), Fenland District Council (FDC) were successful in achieving £120,000 for this project that has now been in delivery since the summer of 2023 and thanks to the significant part-funding from this project, the Creativity & Culture Development Officer role has had its extension confirmed, until September 2025, which will total 4 years of the role, all of which has been significantly externally funded.
- There is a capital spend amount within the project of £15,000 total that is split across the years 2023/24 and 2024/25 with proposals being worked up with members of the FCP which will involve Councillor Seaton as Portfolio Holder and Councillor Sennitt Clough as Chairman of this committee as they are both involved with the FCP.
- There is a remaining commission budget of which the FCP has plans to prepare a brief of media work to document, celebrate, showcase, promote and raise the profile and awareness of culture, art and heritage in Fenland associated with the Fenland Cultural Strategy, which will help the Council to meet the corporate objective whilst also being a really powerful tool for the Council and the sector in promoting the area.
- The first round of the Fenland Culture Fund (FCF) was entirely externally funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) and supported by Arts Culture England (ACE). It opened for applications on 9 October 2023, and closed six weeks later on 20 November.
- There has been a Culture Arts Section Scheme within the Council associated with the FCS, it was successful with 42 applications totalling more than £70,000 worth of projects and activity. Due to the high number of quality applications, the FCF budget was increased for round one using additional SPF project budget by more than £10,000, so were really pleased to be able to notify 19 of those that were awarded, and they had a combined value

of £34,000.

- There was a great press release and strong promotional support throughout by the in-house Communications Team when this was launched in October 2023 to raise the profile of the range of activity that was funded to take place right across the district, with the news story including three examples, but also the full list of everyone awarded.
- Some things have begun taking place already, for example, Life & Soul of the Straw Bear Photographic Exhibition in Whittlesey by a local photographer, others are lined up throughout the coming weeks and months, just this weekend there was the International Food Festival which was part funded by the FCF in Wisbech, so it will be great to see a real spread of activity both location wise but a range of types of activity too with it making a big difference to have these positive stories to share and promote culture and heritage in Fenland.
- In the next round some funding will be available via ACE (£25,000) but the date has not yet been agreed when it will launch with FDC suggesting in the Summer and agreeing with both ACE as funder and the FCP.
- There have been some learnings to take from this round and the Council expect that the level of interest will only grow thanks to those that engaged this time, several people are already asking when it will open again.

Members made comments, asked questions, and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Hoy stated that it was her understanding that this project was for people who were starting up as it seems people who have already applied for grants and are bigger businesses are applying with the 500-word application, so queried who can apply for this funding? Jamie-Lea Taylor responded in terms of eligibility that was set out in the criteria that it had to be a Fenland based artist or organisation or for a project or activity that was going to benefit the Fenland local community, those were the eligibility markers that were looked at but there was the encouragement that some smaller organisations or individuals that need the confidence building but this was not part of the eligibility process for round one. Councillor Hoy responded when looking at round two she feels the eligibility needs to be made more specific about smaller organisations because there have been some organisations that have had significant sums of revenue and then received money from this project when others did not.
- Councillor Count stated he would like to understand more about the funding process and asked is this a fund that the Council process to the Arts Culture through the budget or does FDC do the screening and the Arts Culture fund the applicant. Jamie-Lea Taylor responded the small grant scheme is a good way of helping the Council meet some of the Cultural Strategy aims with the support of the Arts Culture funding with an amount of funding being allocated to FDC and within the SPF there was funding shared out to add to the pot. She added that the Arts Council are the experts when looking at grant applications and the process for allocating grants came through the FDC e-mail address, the application was looked at as a collaboration from FDC, FCP and ACE with a representative from each panel so there was no conflict.
- Councillor Count asked whether round 2 is going to be a similar process with bids then it goes to a panel and is there any screening from this panel first or is anyone on that panel from this Council to help fine tune that process? Jamie-Lea Taylor responded from round one the FCP supported with comments or context if they had any and then there was a scoring process from strongly prefer to fund to strongly not prefer to fund and then that provided the decision-making panel of three people with their scoring to decide if they were a good fit. She stated that the process after was that the decision-making panel produced a list of suggested applicants to award that then went to Phil Hughes and Councillor Seaton as Portfolio Holder for final approval. Jamie-Lea Taylor stated that round two has the possibility to change the process but it is important to involve the Arts Council as a funder and a partner.

- Councillor Sennitt Clough stated she was concerned that a member was not aware that there was a Culture Fund, and she is going to send a follow up email to all members to remind them of the Culture Fund so they can let their residents know about it. She added that Jamie-Lea is stepping down from the judging panel and it is now looking for an elected member as a replacement to join Adrian from the Arts Council and a representative from the Culture Partnership, which Jamie-Lea confirmed to be accurate. **Councillor Sennitt Clough proposed Councillor Hoy to take up the position on the judging panel for round two due to her experience and knowledge as a councillor for several years, which was seconded by Councillor Foice-Beard and agreed by the Panel.**
- Councillor Sennitt Clough stated she has been asked by SU applicants whether there will be any feedback on the applications or help and advice before they submit their applications. Jamie-Lea Taylor responded everyone received an email to state they were not successful in the first round and also within the body of that email it stated that there will be a second round at some point in 2024 and where to look out for the information, how to get back in touch if they wish to apply again and would like to know more plus some other funding opportunities that were relevant at the time, with also the opportunity to arrange a conversation with the relationship manager of the Arts Council. She stated there has been some response and some people have been in contact with the relationship manager on the back of the email sent out.
- Councillor Hick stated when an applicant gets awarded a grant do they have to keep invoices and receipts as proof of spending as an accountability that the funding is being used on the things stated in the application? Jamie-Lea Taylor responded this is normally the case for bigger funds but with this funding it was only a maximum of £2,000 per project and the Arts Councils input on the design on how the fund was going to look like was based on confident building opportunities, a small artist that might just need a little bit of cash to get something off the ground with no barriers in place hence this fund was set up to give people the chance to have the funding and do what they wish with it trusting this would happen.

Fenland Poet Laureate Awards

Jamie-Lea Taylor updated members as follows:

- She thanked members of the committee for completing the shortlisting with the final judging taking place this week and she will be collating all of the feedback and sharing with the two judges tomorrow.
- The competition itself was launched on 4 December 2023 and was open for just over 8 weeks and closed on the 31 January 2024, with there being a steady flow of entries during this time with a large increase in the final days before the deadline which was anticipated.
- There was a very small number of entries that were made ineligible due to not meeting the eligibility criteria in full, but at the end there were a good number of entries which totalled 28 in the adult entries and 35 in the young entries.
- There has already been some learning to take from this experience that will be developed for next year, which includes a more efficient stream-lined application process, looking at the capability to do more online, and a more exciting communications approach is possible next year thanks to having the wealth of poetry from this year to share with permission, as well as photographs from the event.
- The awards ceremony is booked for the evening of Friday 15 March which will be held at the March Town Hall and the invitations that have gone out will result in almost maximum capacity.
- Colleagues in Communications have supported with producing some questionnaires that will also be available to entrants, this will help even more to learn from running the competition and event this year and be able to make any changes needed for the future. Councillor Hoy stated she was very pleased to see so many applicants.

Integrated Care System Funded 'Express Yourself' Project

Jamie-Lea Taylor updated members as follows:

- Following a successful collaborative writing bid last year that achieved £50,000 funding through the Tackling Prevention strand of the Integrated Care System, FCP and the Local Culture Education partnership (called Fenland Young Creatives), the project has been in development for some time and in the last month has moved into delivery, with it being to support children and young people's social emotional and mental health through arts and cultural activity based on the NHS 5 ways to wellbeing model.
- 20Twenty Productions have been engaged to support with administrating this project thanks to their subject expertise, they are a Fenland based Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation and are ideally placed to administer this project because they work with many young people and schools already and have done so for a long time, they understand some of the challenges young people are facing today.
- 20Twenty Productions have recruited 9 artists that responded to the call-out which was published over the festive break, they held a training session on Saturday 3 February which included information on the 5 ways to wellbeing idea itself, guidance on boundaries and working with children and young people, whilst also working together plus with special needs and a counsellor attended too, which was an element of the project she was particularly interested in because it was brilliant to be able to offer some training and support back to delivery partners and build on the artist development which should be a priority for the Cultural Strategy to be continually developing the creative workforce.
- The artists did a short workshop with 20Twenty Productions Arts Ambassadors to see what their delivery was like, with children aged between 8 to 15 years old and 85 children are already signed up. One workshop was a theatre maker; the feedback was good that the children really enjoyed it and another was a newly qualified architect who ran a session on sculpture about paper planes and had good conversations.
- The artistic skills did not matter so much for this as the emphasis was far more about getting the young people moving, active and engaging creatively, feedback has been good so far.
- The sessions have just started and will be running over the next half term, and there will be further updates at the next meeting.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Sennitt Clough asked with this project are the schools involved or have young people been reached outside of schools without any school involvement? Jamie-Lea Taylor responded that this project has been administered by another project and they have been working with schools directly and also other organisations, such as The Foyer in Wisbech who had an interest in being part of this project with the ambition of going through an arts award programme, more details will be available at the next meeting.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough stated that she had received quite a few emails from Whittlesey residents about opportunities for young people and would like an update after the meeting on who is involved with the project within the Whittlesey area.
- Councillor Count stated he found the information to be very interesting and can see how the link between culture and mental health can help young people. He believes Cambridgeshire has a massive underfunding on mental health and would like to see the new Health Watch Project support FDC with what they are doing through culture and arts to be able to reach out to younger people.
- Councillor Nawaz stated mental health has become quite an endemic problem particularly since Covid-19 and with no physical manifestations so some people are reluctant to come forward to even admit to having mental health issues because of the stigma that is still attached and with the help of culture, arts and creativity this can focus their mental energies in a more healthy way which would assist in the recovery process as well as in a preventative manner but health inequalities in the Fenland District area are shockingly much worse than anywhere else in Cambridgeshire which also includes physical health too and he feels hopeful this project can help in a small way.

Fenland Culture partnership and Sub-Groups

Jamie-Lea Taylor updated members as follows:

- FCP itself is independent and now meets every other month, it has introduced a rolling chair system and is becoming a really useful space for productive discussions, with both Councillor Sennitt Clough as Chairman of this committee and Councillor Seaton as Portfolio Holder being invited and there has been positive feedback from other members of the Partnership to see FDC elected members involvement grow.
- From the December meeting there was a broad suggestion from the FCP around all of Fenland, about investing in more conversations around communications, health and marketing which has always been a priority for the Cultural Strategy, building on these opportunities will put the Culture Partnership in a good position for some funding opportunities.
- From the December meeting the communications and marketing groups have been established with a good membership of 8 people and their first meeting is set up for later in the month. Councillor Foice-Beard has been invited to attend the meeting, with the membership being both from the FCP but also some new people from the district or sector which is encouraging to have some new eyes on things that have been spoken about for quite some time, with an agenda being formulated and a new logo for the FCP to help raise awareness and promotion of activities going forward.
- The health group has had some invitations which is believed to be up to 6 people who are interested but a date has yet to be set.

Members made comments, asked questions, and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Hoy stated she had a meeting last week with Adrian and Claudia from the Arts Council with the potential intention of Wisbech Town Council becoming an MPO but this was not a successful meeting as they do not particularly want local authorities to become involved as MPOs because they feel it should be more about people in the creative sector which was disappointing but they were interested in the Town Councils being more involved with the Partnership Board. Councillor Hoy suggested it would be a good idea to have one member or officer from each town attending the Partnership Board meetings.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough proposed that a representative from each of the four Town Councils be present at the Partnership Board meetings, which was seconded by Councillor Nawaz. Phil Hughes stated that while the committee might wish the Town Councils to be on the Culture Partnership, the District Council does not run the Culture Partnership so he feels it would be a case of taking that to the Partnership and saying it would be a good idea to have representation from each Town Council across Fenland and even representatives from Parishes outside of the towns but feels it is not for this Council to decide here today.
- Councillor Hoy commented that no one has to be a member of the Cultural Partnership and whilst agreeing with the comments made questioned that if the Council does not get involved how are things ever going to change? Carol Pilson stated that the comments made by Phil Hughes were cautionary and she feels the Culture Partnership will probably open their arms up to the idea because with a wider group of people more action can be taken.
- Councillor Count stated he felt it is a good idea to put this request in so everyone is pulling in the right direction, hopefully people can understand what benefits the Council can bring to this partnership for example councillors have a lot of experience with obtaining funding so feels there is a lot that can be brought to the table. He agreed with the Towns but also added that the Parishes do make up one third of the population in this area, so they need to be considered as they know their village's needs. Councillor Count referred to the subcommittees that were formed, one of them being the Heath subcommittee and members were talking earlier about its own Heath Watch being set up and asked if these were two different committees? Phil Hughes responded in terms of the culture and creativity there is the Culture Partnership then there is a Health Subgroup, so it is nothing to do with the Health Watch which is linked to the NHS, with the Creativity and Culture Partnership

focusing on health, mental health, and physical health.

- Councillor Nawaz expressed the view referring to what Councillor Hoy proposed he would be surprised if this suggestion was repelled by the Partnership as this is community led and who better to represent the needs of the residents than the councillors in the towns.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough requested clarification on whether it is open to officer recommendation at the Town Council depending on what is agreed going forward.

Proposed by Councillor Sennitt Clough, seconded by Councillor Nawaz and AGREED that Officers present to the Fenland and Culture Partnership that a representation be included from the 4 market Towns.

Members noted the update.

CAH10/23 LITERARY FESTIVAL

Councillor Sennitt Clough updated members on her suggestion for trialling a Literary Festival in Whittlesey which will take place later this year and depending on how that is received she will approach the Arts Council. She stated that if this proves to be successful the thoughts are to extend the Literary Festival across Fenland and in subsequent years this Festival would serve to put Fenland on the map because Fenland has the capability to be a literary powerhouse, and also to promote the local playwrights, poets and novelists and inspire local creatives with workshops and discussions around all the different literary genres.

Councillor Sennitt Clough stated, if successful, the plan would be to develop a rotating basis across the parishes and towns of Fenland starting at Whittlesey with the name of 'The Whit Lit Festival' to take place later this year.

Members made comments, asked questions, and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Count stated he would like to understand what the Chairman envisions the Literary Festival to look like and to understand the rotation plans for the other towns and parishes. Councillor Sennitt Clough responded the plan would be to have a day where local novelists, playwrights and poets get invited to read some of their work, plus having some workshops given by the creative novelists and poets to inspire local people, then in the evening holding an event where adults and young people can get a chance to read their work and give them a bit of a showcase, which would all happen over one day. She referred to the question of rotation stating she was open to suggestions and would be happy to hold a debrief after the Whittlesey Festival to see if this is a viable option moving forward and how the expansion would work.
- Councillor Count commented would there be a way in which this idea could be connected to the Summer Reading Challenge.
- Councillor Nawaz stated he is happy to see this happening in Whittlesey and feels this would be a good opportunity to call upon literature work from the past, competitions between individuals, schools, and institutions, and also this idea would lend itself to plays, sketches, school plays and drama competitions. He added that he is in favour of this idea and feels this is good platform for the young people, mental health needs and inspiration for all.
- Councillor Count stated if Wisbech Museum was able to make available the copy of the original manuscript of the Great Expectations, if it is appropriately protected, he feels this would be a good addition to the festival.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough agreed this would also be a nice segue to heritage which is another arm to the committee.
- Councillor Hoy stated Wisbech does have something similar called Wisbech Reads and it might be worth making contact to get some learning from how this works.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough thanked the panel for its input and will now take the idea to the Arts Council.

Members AGREED to the initial proposal for a Literary Festival.

CAH11/23 COMMUNICATIONS

Jamie-Lea Taylor advised members that communications has been part of the theme that has been spoken about a lot this afternoon, it is a corporate priority of the Council to work with Partners to promote Fenland through culture and heritage and it is a key part of the four strands of the Cultural Strategy. She added that it was identified that there is a lot happening within cultural activities, for the people who know about it events are really well supported but there is a perception that there was not a lot happening at all and by having a focused communications campaign that celebrates Fenland through the people involved and their achievement and what they are doing supports Fenland to be a cultural destination and raise the promotion of that.

Jamie-Lea Taylor stated that with the new subgroup that is starting and the support of the FDC Communications Team there is a lot of potential to celebrate what is happening which can only be positive thing.

Members made comments, asked questions, and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Hicks stated he saw on the television that Norfolk Council have got an initiative to promote Norfolk by inviting TV and film crews to actively make TV series and films in the area and asked is this something that could be considered for the Fenland area? Jamie-Lea Taylor stated she would look into this as from a heritage perspective a lot of organisations like museums and National Trust properties find that a lot of revenue is generated from filming locations, and it can be really successful.
- Councillor Nawaz requested clarification on what the Communications subgroup does. Jamie-Lea Taylor replied this group has its first meeting coming up and they will be discussing what they would like to achieve as a new group with the focus on communicating and marketing anything creative, cultural, arts and heritage in Fenland.
- Councillor Purser stated he felt this would help local councillors to talk to residents about the things that are going on, not only through social media but other means too.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough agreed it is finding different ways to reach people especially for those who are not on line, with leaflet drops being one option. Jamie-Lea Taylor stated this is something that is being investigated and the Communications Team are being really supportive with ideas and new ways to share information.

Members noted the information provided.

CAH12/23 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Councillor Hicks asked the question concerning Fenland Culture Fund when the funding is given if the money is not all used does it get rolled over or does the money not used have to be given back? Jamie-Lea Taylor responded with the last fund there was an over subscription in terms of the applications that came in initially, an amount had been set aside and there were loads of interest, so the pot was able to be increased and there was nothing left in that round other than some money which was held back to support the second round which is planned for the Summer.

Councillor Hicks asked for clarity in relation to if the pot has extra money does it roll over? Jamie-Lea Taylor confirmed each funder is different and for some funders if the budget is not spent it will need to be returned but it is a case-by-case funder that has different requirements.