



## **REPORT of CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

---

**to  
COUNCIL  
26 MARCH 2026**

### **CULTURE AND HERITAGE UPDATE**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To update Members on the progress of the Culture and Heritage activities being undertaken.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (i) That Members approve the extension to the Culture and Heritage Strategy development to June 2026;
- (ii) That Members approve the budget allocated for the Special Event Performance Funding to be utilised for a performance in 2027;
- (iii) That Members approve for officers to develop the Council's Town of Culture 2028 competition expression for interest;
- (iv) That subject to approval of recommendation (iii), that Members delegate the development and submission of the Culture and Heritage Strategy to the Senior Leadership Team in consultation with the Leader of the Council by the deadline of 31 March 2026.

#### **3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES**

##### **3.1 Culture and Heritage Strategy Development**

3.1.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2025-2028 priority 'investing in our district' states the Council's commitment to develop a Culture and Heritage Strategy (the Strategy). Following a robust procurement process, Cultural Engine were selected as the consultants to support the development and delivery of the Strategy. Since the appointment, extensive work has been carried out, with stakeholders and a continuing focus on outreach and engagement across the District.

3.1.2 The Culture and Heritage Strategy is focused on several themes including;

- Arts and cultural development,
- Heritage, including collaboration, interpretation and space,
- Public health, in particular the opportunities for creative health approaches,
- Planning, environment and nature recovery and conservation
- Libraries
- Pubs and hospitality,

- Festivals and events,
- Maritime and waterways,
- Archaeology,
- Town and Parish Councils.

3.1.3 To enhance the stakeholder and resident engagement, officers are proposing to extend the Strategy's engagement and development timeline. This will allow for improved quality, depth and reliability of data collection, ensuring that outcomes are evidenced and aligned with both local priorities. The extension allows for the Strategy to be presented and considered by the Strategy and Resources Committee in June 2026.

3.1.4 With the announcement of the Town of Culture competition (detailed in 3.3 of this report), the consultants will also be assisting with the application and submission of the Expression Of Interest (EOI) from the Council. This will directly benefit the development of the strategy which needs to consider the potential for being shortlisted. Work on the Town of Culture EOI is additional, but will feed into the Culture and Heritage Strategy, particularly on action planning and identifying themes, events and programming. This will be completed at no additional cost to the consultant's current remit.

3.1.5 In addition to the core Culture and Heritage Strategy development, there has also been significant work on developing a concept that can bring together the key issues of culture, heritage, environment and tourism. This is developing into a 'Regenerative Tourism Strategy' that was presented and discussed at the launch of the Saltmarsh Coast Community Interest Company event on 19 March 2026.

### 3.2 **Special Event Performance Funding**

3.2.1 At the Strategy and Resources Committee on 20 November 2025, Members resolved that £45,000 be allocated to allow detailed event planning and secure the headline act for a Special Event Performance in 2026.

3.2.2 Since this resolution, officers met with the agent of the proposed artist to explore the potential for a performance to take place in 2026.

3.2.3 Due to other long-term performance schedules, the artist cannot commit to 2026, and proposed that the performance be moved to June 2027, again to take place on the Sunday after the annual Soutasia event. This proposal will require the Council to commit the funding for this date and sign contracts imminently to secure the artist and assure the Council the event is contractually secured.

3.2.4 If agreed, the event will positively support the Town of Culture EOI, and the role of festivals and events drive in local cultural engagement, supporting tourism and economic development.

### 3.3 **Town of Culture 2028 Competition**

3.3.1 On 14 January 2026, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) launched the first UK Town of Culture competition, modelled on the UK City of Culture, to spotlight the contribution towns of all sizes make to the national cultural landscape. The competition aims to strengthen local pride, widen participation in culture, and deliver long term social and cultural benefits.

- 3.3.2 The provided guidance is clear and was backed up by an online session with DCMS on the 21 January 2026, it is crucial to present a compelling local story which uses the catalytic effect of culture to bring people together, reflecting a sense of place, pride and its contribution to the national story. Essentially, what is unique about the town's story (history, culture, environment etc), and how this will be of interest and relevant to the national story. Maldon can demonstrate this through the Battle of Maldon, but also many other elements and themes that can be explored.
- 3.3.3 It is proposed that Maldon District Council supports a UK Town of Culture bid for Maldon Town, with EOI open now and closing on the 31 March 2026.
- 3.3.4 Officers are working with the appointed Culture and Heritage Strategy consultants to develop a compelling narrative, and other parts of the Expression of Interest, alongside work on the Culture and Heritage Strategy, particularly focused at this stage on the story of place. The engagement and consultation undertaken through the Culture and Heritage Strategy development will support this, and there will be further engagement with partners over the next couple of months. Officers are also looking at the extent of the geography for the bid, for example whether to cover the Maldon Town ward boundary, or further into places such as Heybridge and Burnham-on-Crouch.
- 3.3.5 A briefing for All Members will be held on 19 March 2026, which provided the reasoning for choosing the specific locality, and the intention to deliver in a 'hub and spoke' method to ensure delivery is throughout the District. This would be modelled on the successful delivery from Bradford UK City of Culture 2025 to ensure the benefits are felt throughout the District and all residents are able to positively take part.
- 3.3.6 Should the Council progress through the EOI and be announced as a shortlisted place, it would be awarded a grant of £60,000 to support with developing and strengthening a full application. Full application guidance will be published in Spring 2026, including expectations for data submission. Applicants will have up to five months to complete the full application.
- 3.3.7 **APPENDIX 1** of this report, details the key dates and significant benefits for the District, should it apply for the Expression of Interest, and progress through the competition.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 The Council's Culture and Heritage programme continues to make strong progress. Extending the Strategy's engagement and development to June 2026 will enable a more evidence-led document shaped by wider engagement. Securing the Special Event Performance for 2027 and advancing the Town of Culture 2028 Expression of Interest will further strengthen the district's cultural offer and support economic and community benefits.

## **5. IMPACT ON PRIORITIES AS SET OUT IN THE CORPORATE PLAN 2025 - 2028**

### **5.1 Supporting our communities**

- 5.1.1 The development of the Culture and Heritage Strategy, alongside expanded engagement activities, strengthens opportunities for residents to participate in cultural, creative, and heritage-based initiatives. This work helps build community

pride, enhances wellbeing through cultural and creative health approaches, and ensures local voices shape future cultural provision across the District.

## 5.2 Investing in our District

- 5.2.1 Extending the strategy's development ensures a comprehensive, evidence-led framework for future cultural investment. The Special Event Performance and Town of Culture 2028 bid demonstrate a commitment to securing high-quality cultural activity and programming that enhances the District's profile and long-term cultural regeneration.

## 5.3 Growing our economy

- 5.3.1 Major cultural events, a strengthened year-round cultural programme, and a coherent Culture and Heritage Strategy all provide opportunities to boost visitor numbers, support local businesses, and increase spend in the local economy. The work aligns culture, tourism, hospitality and heritage sectors, helping to create new employment opportunities and increased commercial activity.

## 5.4 Protecting our environment

- 5.4.1 The Culture and Heritage Strategy's focus on environment, nature recovery, and the emerging Regenerative Tourism approach ensures cultural development supports environmental protection and sustainable place-making. By integrating culture with natural heritage (particularly along the Saltmarsh Coast) the work promotes responsible tourism and increased appreciation of the District's unique landscapes.

## 5.5 Delivering good quality services

- 5.5.1 The coordinated approach between officers, consultants, partners, and stakeholders ensures that cultural services are planned strategically, delivered efficiently, and informed by resident and community needs. Developing the Town of Culture Expression of Interest and improving engagement processes demonstrate a commitment to high-quality, evidence-based service delivery.

## 6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – The programme will broaden access to cultural activity and provide more opportunities for residents and visitors to engage with events and heritage, improving satisfaction and community pride. However, extended development timelines and increased demand linked to major events may delay some benefits or place additional pressure on customer-facing services.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – Expanded engagement and improved cultural programming will support inclusive participation and help ensure diverse communities influence future service design. The main risk is that some groups may still be under-represented if engagement does not reach them effectively, and large events will need careful planning to ensure full accessibility.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk (including Fraud implications)** – Clear governance, delegated authority, and structured project management will help minimise delivery and financial risks, while contracted events provide certainty. Remaining risks include reputational impacts if projects underperform, as well

as standard procurement and contracting fraud risks, which require strong controls and monitoring.

- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – Cultural activity has the potential to deliver long-term economic benefits through increased tourism, footfall, and investment, and aligning workstreams maximises value. Financial risks include the commitment of event funding, potential cost escalation, and reliance on securing additional external funding to avoid future budget pressures.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – The work strengthens organisational capacity through cross-department collaboration and consultant support, helping officers deliver more strategically. However, delivery of the Strategy, EOI, and event planning in parallel may place short-term pressure on officer time and require careful workload management. Should the Council be successful in its EOI, additional resource may be required to develop the full application, however, this will be supported via the award bid development grant of £60,000 to shortlisted places.
- (vi) **Impact on Devolution / Local Government Reorganisation** - A strong cultural narrative and evidence base will support the District's positioning in any future regional or governance discussions. The main risk is that any changes arising from reorganisation may require adjustments to delivery structures, governance arrangements or long-term cultural planning. A new authority would be expected to deliver the programme.

Background Papers:

[Strategy and Resources Committee 20 November 2025 – Special Event Performance Funding 2026](#)

[UK Town of Culture 2028 Expression of Interest: Guidance for bidders](#)

**APPENDIX 1** [Benefits of supporting a Town of Culture Expression of Interest](#)

Enquiries to: Leanda Cable, Head of Economic Development