

# Lancashire County Council

## Draft Cultural Services Strategy 2024-2028

### Foreword

Cultural Services is an important part of Lancashire County Council and plays a vital role in the communities we serve. It achieves a significant impact engaging people and having a positive benefit on their lives.

Working with Lancashire's residents, community organisations, partners, funders, and national bodies, our Cultural Services enable a wide range of life enriching cultural opportunities. With libraries including prisons and mobile libraries, museums and heritage, music centres, archives, outdoor education centres, conservation and collections centre and the school library service, Lancashire's cultural offers reach into all communities.

During the period covered by the last strategy there has been some considerable successes delivering benefit where it is most needed and bringing external funding to enable more opportunities for people across Lancashire to engage in culture and improve their wellbeing. These experiences informed by our communities and our corporate priorities have enabled the County Council to identify the goals for Cultural Services for the next 4 years.

Through this strategy, Lancashire County Council is setting out a vision for how Cultural Services will work with partners to achieve better outcomes for the people of Lancashire. Recognition of the part that creativity and culture can play in supporting local economies, health and wellbeing, and children and young people, has flourished over recent years.

We value the opportunity for people to come together in person in our venues to learn, to enjoy and share experiences with their communities. This social interaction has a significant benefit on health, happiness and wellbeing as well as making stronger communities. We also understand the major contribution that enabling digital access plays in connecting communities.

County Councillor Peter Buckley  
Cabinet Member for Community and Cultural Services

### Our Mission and Vision

#### Mission

The people of Lancashire will lead happier, healthier, and enriched lives through culture, supporting our county to be a vibrant place to live.

#### Vision

To deliver a Cultural Service offer which is embedded and flourishing at the heart of Lancashire communities and community life, and which makes a difference through creativity, reading, information, digital, health, heritage, learning and culture.

#### Who we are and what we do

Lancashire County Council Cultural Services is comprised of libraries including prisons and mobile libraries, museums, conservation and collections, archives, music service, heritage

learning, outdoor education, cultural development, school library service, information development and support teams. Together we offer, support, develop, deliver and enable a wide range of positive cultural opportunities. Every day we have a positive impact on people's lives through the information we provide and the experiences we offer, virtually and face-to-face. We strive to create opportunities for our visitors and users as well as increasing access for those who may not already be engaged in culture. We act as an incubator for talent nurturing core skills of local people and offer volunteering opportunities to local people, supporting them to build new skills for employment.

Lancashire is rich in its heritage and culture. Our collections and venues reflect Lancashire's diversity and uniqueness. Culture plays an important role in the health, happiness, and economy of Lancashire and provides a sense of place. Culture cannot easily be defined within a familiar list, but it has the combined influence of creativity, the arts, physical activity, museums, galleries, libraries, archives and heritage upon all our lives.

Our cultural sector is the network of individuals, community groups, organisations, communities, local authorities and businesses that together preserve, reflect, celebrate and promote who we are in all our rich diversity. Cultural Services is uniquely placed to enable great culture and creativity to flourish – and to ensure that everyone can have access through safe, accessible venues such as libraries.

Culture is part of our local communities and that is demonstrated through the myriad of festivals and events throughout Lancashire. We know that investment in culture not only has economic value, but it also has a wide range of benefits that touch all our lives every day. We can see the difference that culture has on creative learning and children's education as well as lifelong learning as we work in partnership with Lancashire Adult Learning, our colleges, and universities. Everyone should have the chance to experience culture, participate in it, create it and see their lives transformed by it. The County Council embraces the intrinsic, social and economic benefits of culture and will ensure that its services continue to contribute to this.

Lancashire County Council's Cultural Services is focused on improving the quality of life of individuals and communities. The delivery of Cultural Services is an integral element in helping to tackle social isolation, stimulate regeneration and economic development, improve health and life chances. Present-day culture embraces the historic environment of the County. Its buildings, landscapes, and settlements created through cultural and social change, reflect the culture of the County and, in particular, express its distinctiveness.

Cultural Services also ensures that people who can't access our offers within buildings can still access cultural provision. Our Home Library Service regularly visits over 700 people who benefit from books that are chosen specifically for the interests they have. Our five Mobile Library vans make sure people who do not live close to a public library in Lancashire can still access the service. Based across the county they cover over 700 stops, providing customers with access to a wide variety of stock including books and audio books.

Our digital library service continues to gain new customers, with over 2 million e-downloads in 2023, including eBooks, eAudiobooks, newspapers and magazines using the Borrowbox, Libby and PressReader apps.

There are five prison libraries across Lancashire delivering a library service to the prison community, all with differing numbers of prisoners, security levels and needs. Prison reading groups, Storybook Dads, bedtime stories, Raising Readers, Reading Ahead projects and author visits are just some of the many initiatives provided.

We contribute to people leading happier lives through a wide-ranging programme of cultural events and activities which give people the chance to be creative, express themselves and experience new things. These activities can improve wellbeing and contribute to a better quality of life. We offer a significant number of volunteering opportunities for both adults and young people, giving them the chance to meet new people, gain skills and contribute to their local communities and the Lancashire offer. Culture Hacks, a volunteering opportunity for young people aged 11 to 24, offers the chance to use their skills and ideas to develop projects and gives young people a chance to support regular offers and activities such as children's reading programmes and Lego and coding clubs. We recognise the contribution Culture Hacks make by arranging visits and cultural activities for them to participate in, as well as awards. Young people tell us how valuable this offer is to their confidence, in building friendships, supporting their mental wellbeing, connecting with their community and in contributing to university and employment prospects. We work in partnership with Lancashire Volunteer Partnership to promote, recruit and support Culture Hacks alongside our wider adult volunteering offers.

We support the cultural sector through advice and information working with Arts Lancashire, district councils, leisure trusts, national and local funders and the Lancashire Cultural Network. We provide opportunities and funding to individuals and organisations via Crowdfund Lancashire and the Lancashire Culture & Sport Fund. This funding has enabled projects to tackle social isolation, support those living with dementia and support the mental health and wellbeing of many Lancashire residents.

Cultural Services supports children to have the best start in life in Lancashire. We work with the early years team to promote take up of early years free childcare places through Bookstart packs, universally gifted to new-born children. Through the partnership with BookTrust free reading resources are provided to 0 to 5 year olds linking with libraries, registrars, nurseries, childminders, schools, social care, refugee integration and portage teams to ensure that children and families across Lancashire have access to quality, up-to-date and free reading materials.

Libraries offer a range of regular activities from birth such as Baby Bounce and Rhyme helping build social development, language, and communication skills. The Little Steps programme was developed for pre-school children and encourages children and families to read together, develop speech and language and uses books to introduce children to important topics, such as discovering emotions, making friends and boosting self-esteem.

Lancashire School Library Service offers a complete range of reading and library services to primary, special, academy and independent schools as well as to early years settings. Key Stage 1 Brilliant Book Award (BBA) and the Key Stage 2 Fantastic Book Awards (FBA) promote independent reading and motivate pupils to read widely. The awards enable pupils to meet informally, discuss and share views about reading. Pupils vote for their favourite stories and get the opportunity to meet the winning authors and illustrators at the annual celebration event. In 2022/23, 14,853 pupils were engaged in reading and learning activities delivered by this service.

Lancashire Music Service provides support to over 60,000 pupils a week. Extensive academic research has shown that participating in musical activities can improve cognitive skills as well as improving health and wellbeing. The local music centres, county bands and orchestras provide the opportunity for young people to rehearse and perform in venues across the county. These concerts can range from informal events to large scale concerts with over 450 young people performing. These events help to build confidence for many pupils and give them an outlet for their work and sense of pride in their achievements.

Heritage Learning Lancashire pioneer innovative projects co-created with young people. Initiatives such as Hope Streets enable young people to have a voice in improving how heritage sites work with and for young people; amplify youth voices and change policy across our museum sites. The project led to the creation of new policies around working with young people and enabled the introduction of new recruitment practices for engaging young applicants, resulting in establishing new work placement and apprenticeship roles.

We contribute to the Lancashire 2050 strategic framework supporting a sense of pride and belonging in all our communities. Cultural Services offers a series of competitions and awards aimed at bringing people together to celebrate music, art and reading across Lancashire. In 2022 Lancashire Choir of the Year launched as an annual competition aiming to encourage and showcase singing talent in Lancashire. The competition is open to any Lancashire based choir (including Blackpool and Blackburn with Darwen) with 6 shortlisted choirs performing at the live final. Alongside the winning choirs, a people's choice award is made for the choir with the highest number of online votes. Lancashire Artist of the Year invites both amateur and professional artists of all ages to paint or draw their favourite Lancashire places. Lancashire Book of the Year engages young people to read for pleasure. Each year it is delivered in over 20 Lancashire secondary schools, giving young people a voice, developing critical thinking, and encouraging debate. It is one of the most established book awards in the country and one of only a few where young people discuss and decide the best recently published fiction books. We deliver a series of workshops with the student judges before hosting a celebration event at UCLAN each summer, attended by the shortlisted authors and around 300 young people.

Lancashire Archives works with communities across the county to make sure the County's records reflect all communities. The programme Keeping East Lancashire in the Picture will bring together thousands of people in East Lancashire, of different ages and backgrounds, to make the amazing collections of historic photographs in their libraries more accessible, inclusive, and sustainable. Made possible through secured external funding, the project will see schools, community groups and individuals in Burnley, Pendle and Hyndburn invited and encouraged to explore their rich photographic heritage and help make digital versions of 100,000 images in the library collections.

Our museums and archives contribute to the local cultural tourism economy attracting visitors to and across Lancashire. In 2022/3 just under 120,000 people enjoyed our historical collections through visits to museums and the Lancashire Archives.

## **Our Ambition**

Cultural Services within Lancashire County Council and working with our partners will continue to build pride in place, belonging and resilience. To ensure that everyone has a voice and innovation, and creativity are at the heart of everything we do.

## **Our Goals**

The following goals will be embedded within projects, activities, offers and plans in 2024-2028:

- **Create lifelong learning opportunities to enrich lives and to benefit from cultural services.**
  - We will provide a wide range of inspirational opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to learn and equip them with core skills.
  - We will offer experiences which enhance lives and the wellbeing of our communities.

- We will work with partners and communities to create resources and activities which support learning enabling people to live their best lives.
- **Improve the inclusivity of our cultural offers enabling everyone to engage as audience, participant or creative producer.**
  - We will work with community groups, local authorities and other partners and stakeholders to support a wide range of cultural offers.
  - We will enable cultural experiences which add to pride in our communities and contributes to sense of place.
  - We will listen to the views, needs and ideas of our communities, working together to make sure our services are relevant and innovative.
  - We will make sure all people are treated with respect, feel safe and are confident in participating and informing our offers.
- **Empower people to lead healthier and fulfilled lives through access to trusted information, a wide range of activities and positive social interaction.**
  - We will promote and provide access to trusted information, technology, and resources to enable people to best support their own self-care, health and wellbeing.
  - We will offer and support a wide range of activities for people to engage in and benefit their mental and physical wellbeing.
  - We will contribute to the strengthening of community resilience through engaging communities in how our cultural offers are delivered in their area to better reflect their needs.
  - We will continue to develop our volunteering opportunities enabling people to make a positive difference to their community, build their skills and benefit from making friendships and growing confidence.
  - We will be environmentally responsible and innovative in our approach to the climate emergency.
- **Inspire young people through a cultural offer enriching their lives to achieve better outcomes.**
  - We will work with education partners to deliver programmes that link directly to subjects across the National Curriculum including key priority areas such as literacy and numeracy.
  - We will support the development of skills through provision of formal and informal cultural activities.
  - We will provide inspiring creative learning environments outside of the classroom using activities and experiences which enhance young people's learning.
  - We will offer a range of volunteering opportunities for young people, supporting them to build life skills for further education and employment, make friends and build confidence.
  - We will work with young people to develop our offers and embed their views and needs into our planning.
- **Ensure our collections are relevant and accessible contributing to pride of place and a sense of belonging for all our communities.**
  - We will promote and offer useful, important and meaningful collections for all people across Lancashire through exhibitions, activities and archives.
  - We will work with communities to co-create collections which reflect our diverse communities.

- We will ensure better access to our collections by improving and digital access to collections and collection information.

## **How we will monitor what has been achieved**

We will:

- Create and review annual business plans within the framework of this strategy. These will ensure that we deliver a service which is relevant to the individuals and communities of Lancashire.
- Produce an annual report for Cultural Services sharing the performance of our teams.
- Have key performance indicators both corporate and service-driven which are reviewed annually.
- Continue to benchmark performance against other local authorities.
- Monitor our services by using both data and the experiences of our communities and audiences.
- Measure our performance against our financial budget each year.

Review progress and make any additional actions needed to implement the strategy.

## **What will success look like?**

Through our museum collections and locally rooted projects such as Clarets Collected where the Lancashire Archives is working with football fans at Burnley Library to co-create a Burnley Football Club archive, residents will feel pride in their place and will see the contribution their community makes to achieving the whole county's aspirations.

We will work with customers, families, schools, community groups, Friends organisations and individuals to identify and develop quality cultural and learning opportunities to enhance their lives and potential.

We will support children to learn, achieve, and be happy through the creation of innovative programmes building on the experience of nationally recognised, local programmes such as the Lancashire Storytelling Festival delivered by Heritage Learning Lancashire. The festival encourages literacy and the joy of creativity connecting oral storytelling, literacy, cultural heritage. Our reading programmes for children will continue to be relevant and support the diverse needs of our children and young people.

Cultural Services will help upskill people and support them towards employment. Through job clubs, lifelong learning opportunities, volunteering, placements, apprenticeships and work with partners to offer training we will support people on their journey to find work. We will develop bespoke programmes which support workforce skills in the cultural sector. Initiatives such as the Heritage Skills Programme offering practical sessions over 12 weeks to learn new skills, understand where their own transferable skills lie and increase their confidence, will inform how we support people into jobs.

We will extend our welcome to new communities settling in Lancashire through initiatives which highlight our range of free services supporting people at all stages of their lives. All libraries have the Library of Sanctuary national designation recognising good practice of welcoming people seeking sanctuary and other new arrivals into their community. It aims to foster a culture of welcome and inclusivity.

We will support health, life chances and independence, so residents can live healthy lives and access trusted information when they need it. We will work with a range of partners including Public Health colleagues, Active Lancashire, Arts Lancashire, and NHS professionals to develop quality offers which benefit the people of Lancashire at different times in their lives.

Outdoor education centres will continue to offer all year-round opportunities for schools and groups to benefit from physical activities, team building and creative problem solving and in doing so support their mental as well as physical health. Outdoor Education is well placed to provide alternative provision for children and young people through their curriculum offer.

Libraries will offer a range of activities such as taster and accessible gentle exercise sessions for adults who want to stay physically active. Development of information through Reading Well for Health books and other trusted health information will be available in all libraries or online supporting quality self-care.

Lancashire Archives will continue to develop the local history collections and seek further projects to bring our Lancashire heritage to life. Through the creation of new collections by finding significant existing images from within our communities and by taking new photographs that reflect life now and share both old and new images, online – through Red Rose Collections - and offline, in fun and creative ways that engage even more people.

We will work in partnership and identify and secure external resources to enable the service to develop our offers and our spaces to respond to the needs of our communities.

## **Background papers**

Our strategy is aligned to those of Arts Council England, Libraries Connected and Lancashire 2050 with important linkages across Lancashire County Council's strategies for education, participation, economic development, health and wellbeing as well as our valued colleagues across the independent cultural sector.

In the writing of this strategy, we have also drawn from strategic documents across Lancashire County Council ensuring that we connect and deliver on outcomes for all Lancashire's residents. We align to the strategic visions of key agencies such as Libraries Connected, Arts Council England, The Reading Agency, BookTrust, Historic England, National Archives, National Lottery Heritage Fund and Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board, to achieve the most positive outcomes for the people of Lancashire.

### List of strategies and plans

Lancashire 2050 Strategic Framework

Lancashire Libraries Strategy 2022 – 2025

Lancashire Museums Strategy 2022-2025

Lancashire Archives & Local History Strategy 2022 - 2025

Arts Council England Let's Create 2020-2030