



Cultural Services Strategy 2024-2028

Lancashire County Council



Foreword

Cultural Services is an important part of Lancashire County Council and plays a vital role in the communities we serve. It achieves significant impact by 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 in 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 have been some considerable successes delivering benefit where it is most needed and bringing in 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, 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.

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Cabinet Member for Community and Cultural Services

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Our Mission

The people of Lancashire will lead happier, healthier, and enriched lives through culture, supporting our county to be a vibrant place to live and ensuring that innovation and creativity are at the heart of everything we do.

Who we are and what we do

Lancashire County Council Cultural Services is comprised of a comprehensive network of libraries across the county, prison library service, mobile libraries, home library service, museum service, conservation and collections, archives and local history, music service, heritage learning, outdoor education, cultural development, school library service, information development, resources, and support teams. Together we support, develop, deliver, and enable a wide range of positive cultural opportunities.

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, access to 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 and events.

Our Cultural Development Team support the cultural sector through advice and information sharing, 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 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, provide 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 2.8 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.

Our Lancashire Outdoor Education sites support wellbeing, personal development and confidence. Each year, around 6500 participants and 280 schools visit our centres as part of their year, engaging in an outdoor experience supporting young people's education across Lancashire.

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 developed for pre-school children 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.

Our Music and Drama Service is based at Lostock Hall Library and has a wide variety of performance sets which can be browsed at the library and hired by registered music or drama societies to support musicians and performers across the county.

The Library Service strives to meet the needs of all members of the community, some of whom do not speak English and some who prefer to read books in their first language. A wide variety of books in non-English languages are held by Lancashire Libraries across the County and include titles in Gujarati, Urdu, Polish, Ukrainian, Farsi, Pashto, Arabic and Dari.

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 and Key Stage 2 Fantastic Book Awards 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 2023/24, 19,034 pupils were engaged in reading and learning activities delivered by this service.

Lancashire Music Service provides support to over 60,000 pupils each 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. The 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. Launched in 2022, Lancashire Choir of the Year aims to encourage and showcase singing in Lancashire. The competition is open to any Lancashire based choir 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 in partnership with UCLAN attended by the shortlisted authors and around 300 young people.

Our museums and archives contribute to the local cultural tourism economy attracting visitors to and across Lancashire. In 2023/4 just under 120,000 people enjoyed our historical collections through visits to museums, Lancashire Archives and our library local history spaces. We work with communities across the county to make sure the county's records and collections reflect them all. 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 external funding secured by the Lancashire Archives, 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. In 2023 a new permanent exhibition 'Gillows of Lancaster: A Global Story' opened at Judges' Lodgings funded by the Art Fund and Regional Furniture Society. This explores the story of famous cabinetmaker Gillows of Lancaster and London, and the people involved. Our library local history collections give residents a way to explore their heritage on the doorstep, alongside millions of digitised Lancashire collections available online and accessible anywhere.

Lancashire County Council and the Lancashire Museum Service are 50 years old in 2024. To celebrate we will be exploring the history of Lancashire, its people, places and traditions through 50 objects in our collections. Covering 9000 years of history and spanning the geography of the county, we will tell the story of Lancashire's origins including its settlers and invaders, our industries, our military heritage, our food and our famous seaside.

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.

Culture Hacks, a volunteering opportunity for young people aged 11 to 24, offers the chance for them 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.

Our Objectives

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

1. **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 such as literacy.
 - 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.
2. **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.
3. **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 improve their confidence.
- We will be environmentally responsible and innovative in our approach towards achieving net zero for carbon and support nature recovery.

4. 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.

5. 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?

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 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. We will collaborate with colleagues across the county council, district councils and unitary authorities to ensure that service and local knowledge inform our plans and service delivery.

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 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.

We will ensure our services are inclusive and accessible to all residents of Lancashire and reflect the diversity and vibrancy of all our communities. Cultural Services will ensure that an inclusive offer is at the heart of our service planning and delivery.

Outdoor education centres will 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.

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, environment and countryside, 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 to achieve the most positive outcomes for the people of Lancashire.

Bibliography

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