

Note on Surrey Cultural Forum, Tuesday 24 June for Surrey Lieutenancy website

On Tuesday 24 January, 120 people gathered at the Eastwood Leisure Centre in Sheerwater, Surrey to discuss the future of Arts and Culture in Surrey. Initiated by the Surrey Lieutenancy in 2020, an advisory group, Surrey Cultural Partnership has been established with over 20 members, to explore three areas of importance to the arts and culture community of Surrey. These three areas are -

- to articulate an arts and culture strategy for the County,
- To develop the means to attract new investment into culture for Surrey
- to improve the connections in the sector

These priority areas were defined in a consultation webinar hosted by the Lieutenancy in June 2021 with over 100 participants.

The aim of the Surrey Cultural Forum, held in January, was to progress the work on the first priority – the strategy. The scene was set by guest speakers: the Chair of the Arts Council of England South East Committee, Professor Roni Brown; Richard Bellamy, Head of Engagement, London and South East, National Lottery Heritage Fund; Charlotte [Hall](#), Chairman of Arts Partnership Surrey, and Denise Turner Stewart, Deputy Leader of Surrey County Council and Cabinet Member for communities and community safety. Participants were invited to break into facilitated groups to answer two questions:

What might the Arts and Culture of Surrey look like in 5 years' time? and How do we get there?

The emerging themes from this lively event was the need for Surrey's identity to be strengthened and for arts and culture to play a key part. With the lack of a city in Surrey, we should play to our strengths of local towns and villages. Farnham being the world's first craft town, craft is a part of Surrey's DNA. Surrey is playing a major part in the creative industries with the presence of Shepperton Studios and Guildford as gaming centre for the UK. There was a strong wish to give young people an opportunity to gain skills to engage with the creative industries in Surrey. As the cradle of the Arts & Crafts movement, Surrey enjoys a rich heritage of design, buildings and making. Participants reiterated Surrey's strength in providing disability arts and the role of arts for health and well being. The tradition of amateur arts in Surrey is strong and encourages participation which plays strongly into the Arts Council of England's strategy of Let's Create. There is a vibrant culture of volunteering. In contrast, Surrey was acknowledged as suffering from some areas of deep deprivation. Schools are dropping arts activities and access to arts is limited. Young people must be a focus of the future strategy.

Discussions on the way forward touched on the need for leadership, better joined up communications, supporting the idea of cultural hubs/festivals throughout the County, and collecting improved data on the impact of the arts on well-being, crime and the economy. It was proposed that the strategy should look at developing employment in the cultural industries, increasing investment in arts and culture through developing wider philanthropy and giving evidence of the positive economic impact of the arts and culture, and reaping the benefit from the inspiration of Surrey's rich natural landscape.

From this helpful output from the Surrey Cultural Forum, Surrey Cultural Partnership will be developing the proposed strategy, consulting with further groups and presenting the final strategy for adoption by key stakeholders in autumn 2023. The Forum demonstrated the benefit of the Lieutenancy providing a regular platform for connecting and networking. Feedback suggested that a face to face to meeting was worth countless emails! The Lieutenancy Arts & Culture Focus Group will continue to provide advice and support to the project through regular updates and review of progress.