

# CHELMSFORD CULTURAL STRATEGY

a 10 year vision...

March 2023



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a 10 year vision...

# Executive Summary

## Context

This is the first district-wide Cultural Strategy for Chelmsford. It seeks to put Chelmsford on the map and embed robust cultural leadership, resourcing and activity. It is a Strategy for everyone focused both on the value of culture in itself, and the contribution culture can make to people and places.

## Scope

This 10-year Strategy takes a broad definition of culture and the creative economy and recognises our rich heritage. It covers the wider district of Chelmsford including its parishes, the town of South Woodham Ferrers and the city centre.

## Inputs

Extensive prior consultation and research pointed towards three priorities: a thematic focus for the Strategy; a clearly mapped route for the revitalisation of cultural places and spaces and an emphasis on the need to turn talk into action. Further findings from seldom-heard voices beyond the city centre, showed the importance of celebrating culture in different localities, of appreciating Chelmsford's landscapes, and of valuing volunteering. Meanwhile stakeholders emphasise connectedness, joined up marketing across the district, Ignite as the creative voice of Chelmsford, and partnership working as key to realising the ambition.



## Vision

Chelmsford is celebrated as a culturally ambitious place that connects our innovative heritage of science and engineering with a vibrant future of wellbeing, environment and creativity, transforming our peoples' lives.

## Themes

Three strategic themes have emerged:

1.



### Environment - Built and Natural

Buildings, greenspaces and waterways will be at the heart of a dynamic cultural scene, showcasing artistic practice and building capacity for creative practitioners. Distinctive urban and rural assets will recognise heritage and innovation, and inspire sustainable practices.

2.



### Health and Wellbeing

There will be a measurable improvement in the mental and physical health of the people, and their wellbeing, as a consequence of cultural experience. This will be visible across the community, from the elderly to children and young people, and excluded groups.

3.



### Festivals and Events

A coherent and inspiring programme of high-quality festivals and celebrations embracing all ages and cultural interests. Global artists alongside grassroots creativity will embrace professionals, amateurs and volunteers, with adaptable delivery connecting the district.



## Our principles

Underpinning the three strategic themes are seven principles that influence the design and delivery of all activity. These principles will come to life through the way in which the Strategy is implemented now and as cultural activity evolves over the next 10 years.

**Equity, diversity and inclusion** are important to the people of Chelmsford. Opportunities and activities arising from this Strategy are respectful, fair, and welcoming to everyone.

**Transdisciplinary** work excites the creative community and those from other areas, paving the way for fresh thinking and action. Arts, science, education, engineering, health and business are integrated to facilitate different perspectives, approaches and solve challenges.

**Sustainability** matters for Chelmsford, with its natural landscapes and growth ambitions. Delivery of the Strategy respects and connects with landscaped and wild spaces and protects the natural world through training and developing the creative sector to be exemplary in ecological sustainability.

**Young people** are Chelmsford's future. They are a vital audience for the Strategy and can be a force in its implementation. The Strategy embeds opportunities for young people to co-create, co-produce and co-deliver to develop their creative awareness and skills.

**Strength-based** mindsets encourage building on what is existing and good first before seeking to plug gaps. Action flowing from the Cultural Strategy uses the district's existing expertise and assets as drivers for work.

**Innovation** is Chelmsford's heritage and is central to its future. The Cultural Strategy encourages bold ideas and new ways of doing things by creating the space to try things out.

**Collaboration and knowledge sharing** underpin the way the cultural sector operates at its best, with Ignite an exemplar. Working together across sectors, within and beyond Chelmsford, fosters excellence in cultural and creative activity.



### Bringing the Strategy to life:

1. Each theme to be further developed with a detailed roadmap to chart specific resourcing, targets and implementation plan supported by district-wide engagement.
2. Culture Chelmsford - the independent trust tasked with leading on culture - to be sustainably resourced to enable its leadership role.
3. Culture Chelmsford to establish a Cultural Compact, formalising partnerships to realise this Strategy across culture, health, education, business, volunteering and property development.

## 2. Background to the Cultural Strategy

Following the publication of a Strategy in 2018 and a dedicated Action Plan, Chelmsford City Council established an independent Cultural Development Trust (now known as Culture Chelmsford), appointed Marc De'ath as Chelmsford City Culture Services Manager at the end of 2019 and set about working with its communities to launch a Cultural Forum (Ignite Chelmsford) as well as and facilitating the creation of a Shared Cultural Vision 'Towards 2040'.

The Council's 2018 ambition had a priority theme which was dedicated to "Connecting young people to their futures through creativity" stating 'Chelmsford is characterised by high achieving schools and ambitious young people but not everyone has the same opportunities to thrive. The aim is to support opportunities for all young people focused on the development of core skills: creativity, confidence, innovation, communication and entrepreneurialism. These actions will help forge inclusive pathways to employment, enterprise and higher education."

Culture Chelmsford is leading the development of the first district-wide Cultural Strategy for Chelmsford. Chelmsford has changed significantly since receiving city status in 2012 and to date there has not been a published Cultural Strategy that has engendered the collaboration of stakeholders and partners across the district. It is now time to embark on a journey to reframe the next 10 years, defining Chelmsford as a culturally ambitious place and articulating the role that culture can play in driving forward transformational change impacting locally, nationally and internationally.

This Cultural Strategy will be key to galvanising the city with a collective vision and mission. It will strengthen post-pandemic recovery, set the direction for the future to stimulate innovation, collaboration and cultural ambition, transforming the narrative of Chelmsford from Essex commuter town into a place known for its outstanding, inclusive, cohesive cultural offer which is visible to the world.

This Cultural Strategy is informed by strategic documents including:

- Chelmsford's Local Plan 2013–2036.
- The Business Improvement District - Chelmsford For You (BID) plan.
- Anglia Ruskin University (ARU)'s strategy.
- The Local Cultural and Educational Partnership (LCEP) vision.
- Chelmsford Live Well Health and Wellbeing Plan.

This Strategy will help others achieve their own objectives across various areas from growth and housing to health and wellbeing, to education, community and the environment. It also identifies how stakeholders across these various areas - such as ARU, Chelmsford City Council, Chelmsford For You, Dominus Real Estate, Ignite, Notting Hill Genesis, Chelmsford Voluntary Service, Writtle College, Chelmsford College and a wide range of cultural organisations - can in turn contribute to achieving cultural and creative outcomes for everyone in Chelmsford.

This is a living document that will be reviewed and updated annually to reflect changing contexts and priorities.



### 3. Context to creating a collective purpose



Stakeholders including Chelmsford City Council, Chelmsford For You, Chelmsford Voluntary Service and Ignite Chelmsford partners agreed that a culturally ambitious city needed to have a collective purpose, effective partnerships and joined up, inclusive programmes that tangibly changed the lives of people living, working and visiting Chelmsford. The UK City of Culture competition was considered a longer-term future opportunity and parked for the time being. The scoping study steered Chelmsford away from pursuing this route in favour of the development of the first District-wide Cultural Strategy to harness its ambitions, develop a cohesive cultural offer and become more resilient to the economic challenges ahead. In addition, it recommended clearly identified roles for all partner organisations (with the Council, ARU, Civic Society, Chelmsford For You given as examples).

Chelmsford City Council has supported a shared cultural vision 'Towards 2040', undertaken capital programmes at the City Museum and Theatres and invested in Ignite Chelmsford, a collaborative network giving voice to the creative community. Extensive stakeholder and public consultation events have taken place in the city since 2017 and feedback shows that there is an eagerness for a galvanising purpose, a collective narrative, a means of putting Chelmsford on the map and for action to be taken. Culture Chelmsford is now leading the development of a united vision with partners, artists stakeholders, communities and individuals, across Chelmsford, whose voices will be amplified in an inclusive Cultural Strategy for the area.

To be culturally ambitious is an exciting prospect for Chelmsford. It is one of three cities in Essex, alongside Southend and Colchester, that have recently increased their cultural ambitions. With this 10-year Strategy, Chelmsford will contribute towards Essex establishing itself as a cultural destination. We look forward to complementing the county's wider vision through the cultural strategy when it is published.

Chelmsford is entering a new and exciting phase, looking forward to a culturally ambitious 10 years ahead. City status was granted in 2012 and, over the past decade, Chelmsford has invested in its cultural infrastructure, facilitated networks and partnerships, and explored various funding opportunities and initiatives to develop the cultural provision.

In 2017, Chelmsford City Council established an independent cultural trust as part of a collaborative project with Epping Forest and Broxbourne Councils funded by Arts Council England. The Chelmsford Cultural Development Trust (now Culture Chelmsford) was constituted as an independent charity to promote knowledge, awareness and appreciation of arts and culture in Chelmsford. Since its appointment, Culture Chelmsford has supported projects that have reached new audiences for Chelmsford theatres and made a significant contribution to a LCEP funded by the Royal Opera House Bridge and other local partners so that young people can access creative opportunities.

Culture Chelmsford commissioned a report considering the viability of Chelmsford launching a UK City of Culture bid for 2029. The report focused on the conditions necessary to launch a successful bid to the national competition and the conditions crucial for a thriving cultural economy, with or without a UK City of Culture title.



#### 4. Geography

The Strategy covers the district of Chelmsford, including its parishes, the town of South Woodham Ferrers and the city centre.

There is an acknowledgement that in some areas, the availability of public transport means access to the centre can be restricted. This emphasises the importance of a strong, local, cohesive offer across the district building on existing activity and connecting Chelmsford through a collective story.

The Strategy also recognises a wider geographical opportunity. Close connections with the capital city and linking into the rest of Essex gives Chelmsford a unique selling point as a cultural destination that benefits from good transport across the county and beyond.

#### 5. Who the Strategy is for

This Strategy is for everyone living, working, studying and visiting Chelmsford.

It will inform and integrate with a wide range of policy, plans and activities for Chelmsford's residents and visitors, including economic, health, social care, education, environment, development, regeneration, tourism, transport, safety, jobs, skills, community and volunteering. This Strategy will have influence and impact beyond the cultural and creative sector, and stakeholders and communities across Chelmsford will remain fundamental to its success.

**“We’re delighted to have had the opportunity to work with so many wonderful partners in achieving this ambitious vision for Chelmsford. The district has come together and shown through the support of this strategy that it is ready to take the next leap. We’re delighted to be sharing this journey with everyone to put Chelmsford firmly on the map.”**

**Mark Walmsley, Chair, Culture Chelmsford**





## 6. Definition of Culture

For the people of Chelmsford, 'Culture' is a broad concept. It includes the creative and digital industries, heritage, food, hospitality and sport. It covers activity associated with the artforms and organisations in which culturally-focused funders invest such as collections, combined arts, dance, libraries, literature, museums, music, theatre and the visual arts. This Strategy uses a broad and interdisciplinary definition of Culture.

## 7. Research methodology

Stakeholders, creative practitioners and Chelmsford's residents have contributed their comments and ideas for a Cultural Strategy in a variety of ways between 2017 and 2022. This feedback has been reviewed and has informed the Strategy. Appendix I summarises the findings from a review of the literature; initial mapping of assets and potential partners; and targeted consultations with stakeholders, the cultural sector, and seldom-heard groups. Through these stages of research, initial themes started to emerge which were progressively tested and refined.

“This new district-wide Cultural Strategy will put into action our long-term ambitions for Chelmsford's future and will demonstrate that culture really can transform and improve people's lives. It sets Chelmsford's direction as an innovative, collaborative place that celebrates culture and gives voices to all communities.

The partnerships now being formed will be key to realising these ambitions and I'm delighted to see so many organisations across Chelmsford have already committed to the strategy.”

**Cllr Marie Goldman, Deputy Leader, Chelmsford City Council**



## 8. Vision for Chelmsford

Chelmsford is celebrated as a culturally ambitious place that connects our innovative heritage of science and engineering with a vibrant future of wellbeing, environment and creativity, transforming our peoples' lives.

We believe that by coming together to build on Chelmsford's rich and innovative heritage, we can transform our city by investing in a vision that understands the value of culture to all our lives. Intimate experiences that happen on our doorsteps, corner shops and community spaces will create epic moments sharing Chelmsford's stories of past, present and future with the world. Residents, workers, students and tourists will choose Chelmsford as the place to live, study, work and play in Essex. Our inclusive, vibrant, connected district will be known as a healthier, happier and prosperous place to be.

**“NHG fully support Chelmsford's Cultural Strategy and think that it provides a great direction for Chelmsford in its goal of becoming a city with culture at it's very heart!”**

**George Clarke**  
Head of Commercial Properties, Notting Hill Genesis



## 9. Our creative economy

A flourishing creative economy is at the core of any Cultural Strategy. The combination of creative and commercial activities – the creative economy – not only generates income and jobs, but also promotes the identity and distinctiveness of an area through the activities, infrastructure and people involved. Chelmsford's award of a Purple Flag in 2022 for its evening and night-time economy shows there is cross-sectoral commitment to a vibrant and safe cultural economy. Although further work is needed to measure and map the creative industries within Chelmsford, the district's creative assets, markets, festivals, events and pop-ups have potential to contribute significantly to the growth of a vibrant creative and visitor economy over the next 10 years. Existing independent creative business and sole traders will need support to thrive. Bringing the strategy to life through district-wide, co-developed action plans will outline how we attract new businesses to Chelmsford's reenergised creative sector.

Chelmsford's Economic Strategy acknowledges the strength of the financial and business services sectors, research and development and advanced manufacturing sectors. The Economic Strategy has seven strategic priorities and a vision that drives the economic, cultural, leisure and retail centre of Essex. Digital and creative services have been identified as sectors for growth opportunities, based on research undertaken in 2014. Aspirations over the next 10 years include building Chelmsford's reputation as a University City, an investment opportunity for business, technology, health and social care as well as significant growth in housing and job creation. The Cultural Strategy can contribute towards these measures of success and will benefit from the wider economic growth of the city.



## 9. Our themes

Building on the strengths and opportunities revealed through research, consultation and analysis, three strategic themes emerged as the core of Chelmsford's Cultural Strategy:



1. Nurture our environment:  
built and natural



2. Improve Health  
and Wellbeing



3. Outstanding  
Festivals and Events

These themes will make the Vision a reality over the next 10 years.

# 1. Nurture our environment: built and natural (continued)

By 2033, Chelmsford's buildings, greenspaces and waterways will be at the heart of a dynamic cultural scene, showcasing artistic practice and building capacity for creative practitioners. The area's distinctive urban and rural assets will be part of our celebrated heritage and home to innovative new work and providing inspirational leadership in sustainable practices.

Compelling cultural events and flourishing creative hubs in repurposed and purpose-built spaces across the district will support growing audiences. Artists, makers, residents and cultural tourists will contribute to a thriving creative economy.

The district's built and natural environment offers rich opportunities for relevant and connected cultural programming through this Strategy. The green spaces and waterways are a significant part of Chelmsford's identity and a source of pride for residents. The open spaces can offer visibility and accessibility, bringing cultural activities into the public realm to attract new and strengthen established audiences. They also celebrate the local relationship with the natural environment. Cultural programming linked to the local natural environment and biodiversity can also develop skills and expertise in climate action, enable greener practices, and support audience engagement with sustainability issues. Increasing access to the waterways and rural areas through creative activities will promote safe outdoor spaces for everyone in Chelmsford. This active use of our landscape will foster social cohesion, improve wellbeing and offer creative benefits and opportunities for collaboration that can be achieved through joined up programming across the district over the next 10 years.

(continued)



# 1. Nurture our environment: built and natural (continued)

Chelmsford as the birthplace of radio has a distinctive and varied history which includes science and engineering innovation, the childhood home of artist Grayson Perry and lifelong inspiration for nature writer J.A Baker as well as a vibrant and diverse music scene. Drawing on different perspectives of the area's history and heritage, residents can explore the district's past, present and future and create a shared identity in a place that is set to grow and include significant numbers of new residents in the coming 10 years.

A range of buildings have been suggested for redevelopment as cultural centres in Chelmsford, and innovation is already proposed for spaces such as the Meadows Shopping Centre to cross-subsidise commercial with community and creative activity. In the first years of this 10-year Strategy, the potential of these places as performance spaces, pop-up stores or maker and artist hubs can be tested through the festival programme. Successful trials of venues and the growth of audiences will then shape an approach to repurposing current buildings and spaces in the following years.

Close collaboration with developers is fundamental to the success of the Cultural Strategy. Property developers in Chelmsford recognise that integrating cultural activity with new housing and other building plans can lead to better quality developments, complemented by social outcomes and volunteering opportunities. These combined benefits will create significant improvements in the fabric of Chelmsford. Improved quality of life, increase in civic pride and ultimately the appeal of the place to live, study, work and visit will put Chelmsford on the map.

Chelmsford's proximity to London and its easy transport links to other cultural centres offer the opportunity to invite talent and expertise from the capital and other cities. By contributing to Chelmsford's cultural programme, they can exchange knowledge and skills with home-grown talent and increase the diversity of creative practices and people.



## 2. Improve Health and Wellbeing (continued)

By 2033 there will be a measurable improvement in mental and physical health and the overall wellbeing of our people as a consequence of participating in cultural experiences. This will be visible across groups from elderly members of the community, to children and young people, and excluded groups.

There is an opportunity to reflect on the increasing role of culture in supporting people of Chelmsford to come together again after the pandemic and in coping with other pressures, including the cost of living crisis. The mental health and social benefits of participating in creative activities such as craft, and connecting with community groups, are widely recognised. Social prescribing, although facing challenges, is gaining momentum. There is an urgent need for a strong cultural offer that integrates with other strategies to enable people who are struggling to access practical and emotional support through culture. It is important that the different worlds of primary and secondary health care, culture and research create better connections and understanding. Cultural leaders should seek new collaborations to increase public understanding of health and wellbeing practices and support those who need help. Establishing a Culture and Health working group would help facilitate this and is a recommendation of this Strategy.

(continued)



## 2. Improve Health and Wellbeing (continued)

Chelmsford's culture sector is already actively involved in promoting and supporting health and wellbeing. Examples of strong programming in this area include the Dementia Cafe and reminiscence boxes at Chelmsford Museum, sporting clubs and activities, Chelmsford Mind Body and Spirit Festival, Melfest, Ideas Hub and Essex Libraries Health and Wellbeing activities. There is an opportunity to strengthen links with health research and education at Anglia Ruskin University and to expand partnerships with Writtle University College, Chelmsford College, schools, the Integrated Care Board, the Voluntary and Community sector, public sector organisations and the Livewell campaign. Long-term partnerships will increase knowledge and understanding of culture's role in helping people manage a variety of physical and mental health issues, creating beneficial wellbeing experiences for people of all ages.

Building on historical links with science and using current assets in health research and education, Chelmsford can lead the way in innovative interdisciplinary approaches to health and wellbeing. Imaginative programming and partnerships beyond the usual boundaries will provide a distinctive and potentially replicable model attracting national and international collaborators.

“Voluntary arts play a huge part in helping people to live active and productive lives and many local charities and community groups will wish to be a part of the new Cultural Strategy. Getting involved in the campaign will be a golden opportunity for us all to embrace a collective vision to guide us through the next decade.”

**Lorraine Jarvis, CEO, Chelmsford CVS**





### 3. Outstanding Festivals and Events (continued)

By 2033, Chelmsford will have a coherent and inspiring programme of high-quality festivals, events and celebrations for all ages and cultural interests. This will include performances by internationally recognised artists alongside local grassroots creativity, embracing professionals, amateurs and volunteers.

Developing skills in content and production, both live and digital, will involve young people and diverse communities. Adaptable delivery packages will connect activity across the wider district expanding the profile of the whole area. The programme will connect Chelmsford to the county of Essex, to the wider UK, and by building international connections to the world.

Festivals and events will grow the creative economy through stimulating tourism, providing platforms to sell locally produced products and ideas, promoting local creatives, makers and technicians and facilitating networking opportunities.

Chelmsford is host to a high number of festivals celebrating different disciplines, interests and communities. A unified and coherent approach to festivals and events will offer opportunities to programme around different art forms and interdisciplinary themes. Expert programming can bring together Chelmsford's strengths, combining innovation with tradition, urban centres with rural environs, amateur performers with professionals, younger generations with older, and home-grown expertise with visiting talent.

(continued)



### 3. Outstanding Festivals and Events (continued)

A varied festivals and events programme that includes workshops, tasters, talks and schools programmes will build audiences for local venues and increase cultural participation over the years. Volunteering, mentoring and skills development schemes tied to festivals would create opportunities to expand the network of creative practitioners and develop the district's cultural leaders of the future. A carefully curated events programme as part of this activity will also develop and test capacity, audiences and models for delivering festivals across the district. Building on the success of Gaia at Chelmsford Cathedral, there is potential for events to be a core part of developing ideas, audiences and venues for larger festivals.

Key to success for the district's festivals is rooting them firmly in the local community. Partnerships with external companies will add exciting dimensions and reach wider audiences but it is important that they bring benefits to the local people and businesses. Festivals should draw on local assets and expertise and support growth of the local sector and creative economy. The influx of visitors and the economic model of festivals will bring economic benefits to the area, which can be reinvested into the creative sector.

There is a need to explore existing key festivals, their audiences and financial models, and assess the ability and desire for them to grow or expand across the district. The Chelmsford Festival is a good example of an existing festival with the potential to increase its reach and scale and the Science Festival has potential to further demonstrate innovation, link to wellbeing objectives and generate national profile. Community festivals such as Durja Puja and county wide events such as Essex Pride drawn on our diverse communities providing more opportunities to be inclusive in future programming. Some areas of the district would value content created and shared from the centre, providing a legacy of extended reach, learning and development.

It is recommended to undertake an audit of the existing festivals and events offer to spot gaps and identify activity, emerging and established, that could be successfully scaled up across the district. This audit can be used to create a festivals and events strategy, which includes planning for the right licensing and mechanisms to achieve the ambitions of this Cultural Strategy over the next 10 years. Culture Chelmsford will be an important vehicle for securing festival and event opportunities for Chelmsford.



# 11. Principles



Underpinning the three strategic themes are seven principles that influence the design and delivery of all activity. These principles will come to life through the way in which the Strategy is implemented now and as cultural activity evolves over the next 10 years.

**Equity, diversity and inclusion** are important to the people of Chelmsford. Opportunities and activities arising from this Strategy are respectful, fair, and welcoming to everyone.

**Young people** are Chelmsford's future. They are a vital audience for the Strategy and can be a force in its implementation. The Strategy embeds opportunities for young people to co-create, co-produce and co-deliver to develop their creative awareness and skills.

**Innovation** is Chelmsford's heritage and is central to its future. The Cultural Strategy encourages bold ideas and new ways of doing things by creating the space to try things out.

**Transdisciplinary** work excites the creative community and those from other areas, paving the way for fresh thinking and action. Arts, science, education, engineering, health and business are integrated to facilitate different perspectives, approaches and solve challenges.

**Strength-based** mindsets encourage building on what is existing and good first before seeking to plug gaps. Action flowing from the Cultural Strategy uses the district's existing expertise and assets as drivers for work.

**Collaboration and knowledge sharing** underpin the way the cultural sector operates at its best, with Ignite an exemplar. Working together across sectors, within and beyond Chelmsford, fosters excellence in cultural and creative activity.

**Sustainability** matters for Chelmsford, with its natural landscapes and growth ambitions. Delivery of the Strategy respects and connects with landscaped and wild spaces and protects the natural world through training and developing the creative sector to be exemplary in ecological sustainability, create and co-deliver to develop their creative skills.



## 12. Challenges

Financial support is needed for the development of Chelmsford's creative economy and the underpinning of its Cultural Strategy.

There is not yet a firm commitment in place from all key stakeholders to collectively back and resource this Strategy. It is vital that a commitment from key stakeholders is stated and secured for this deliberately pan-Chelmsford initiative, set up to deliver not only cultural objectives but also the objectives of other sectors from housing to the economy, to health, education and business.

Successful creative businesses and freelancers will be crucial to a thriving industry and to elevating Chelmsford's reputation as a cultural hub. There are currently limited creative entrepreneurship skills development opportunities, mentoring, and creative business community building activities. Implementing these types of programmes can lead to a sustainable and growing creative economy over the 10 years and beyond.

Some cultural organisations are already leading initiatives for young people to develop creative work and become cultural advocates. More opportunities are needed, however, to encourage and support young people in developing creative skills as co-creators, empowering voices and influence. The success of the Cultural Strategy will rely on involvement and contributions from all sections of the community and developing creative leaders of the future. Collaborative programmes with education providers and intergenerational programmes will be an important part of engaging young people and nurturing talent.

Working across the whole district in the parishes, town of South Woodham Ferrers and the city centre brings opportunities as well as challenges to connect our rural and urban areas in a cohesive, integrated approach. Working successfully across the whole district will underpin the need to reflect both the distinctiveness of town and country within the joined-up vision for Chelmsford's future.



## 13. Delivery

For successful delivery over 10 years, the Cultural Strategy must be anchored in Chelmsford from the start. Seven actions should be undertaken in 2023–24 to launch and embed the Strategy.

### 13.1 Leadership and financial commitment

There needs to be strong leadership combined with financial commitment to take things forward. Discussions and findings indicate that there does not seem to be another organisation that is as well placed to take this strategic leadership role as Culture Chelmsford. The success of the Strategy will be contingent upon a strong financial underpinning of the Trust.

Chelmsford has two of the key ingredients in place to ensure cultural growth – a strong cultural leadership within Chelmsford City Council, with a growing cross-party political commitment, together with the potential of a strong Culture Trust with experienced leadership. The involvement of higher and further education institutions is key to the success and growth of Chelmsford and they can promote an understanding of the important role culture can play.

A strong independent Culture Trust is important to:

- Present a cohesive strategic picture for funders and stakeholders who can have confidence in an independent lead.
- Allow cross-party working on a cultural strategy that can weather local and national political change.
- Initiate and deliver capacity building programmes across the sector.
- Underpin a culture of strategic collaboration, innovation and evaluation which is particularly important in a challenging economic context.
- Enable nimble and agile working, particularly in relation to operations process and delivery mechanism.
- Enable a culture where the city responds to challenge rather than relying purely on Council intervention, increasingly important given the financial pressures on local government.

### 13.2 Partnerships

From the launch of the Strategy in March 2023, it is important that Culture Chelmsford has a more sustainable future, underpinned financially by a wide range of stakeholders, or a clear plan for how that will be achieved.

Potential stakeholders that could help resource the Trust include:

- Chelmsford City Council
- Chelmsford For You
- Anglia Ruskin University
- Writtle University College
- Notting Hill Genesis
- Dominus Real Estate
- Teledyne E2V
- Chelmsford Voluntary Service
- Mid Essex NHS
- Royal Horticultural Society

Other stakeholders could augment cash support with in-kind partnerships to ensure a sustainable context for Culture Chelmsford.

Discussions should take place with these stakeholders to explore the value of potential partnerships and commitments to the Trust that can form part of the launch of the Strategy and development of a cultural compact model.

**“We are delighted to be working alongside partners to celebrate the best of Chelmsford. Our students and staff all have a part to play in the future of the city, and we’re delighted to see ARU’s values of inclusion and innovation as central parts of the Cultural Strategy.”**

**James Rolfe, COO, Anglia Ruskin University**

## 14. Pathways and capacity building

The ambition of Chelmsford currently exceeds its cultural capacity and therefore there is a recommendation that a capacity-building programme, including mentoring, should be developed to grow skills and the ability for the city to deliver and realise its potential. Education providers from primary schools through to further and higher education have a key role to play in ensuring Chelmsford's cultural offering is relevant and inspiring for their students. Activities and programmes developed collaboratively between the creative sector and the education sector will enable new discoveries and show children and young people ways into the creative sector. Although there are limited higher education creative courses in Chelmsford, there is an opportunity to create interdisciplinary collaborations with Anglia Ruskin University, bringing together students of other disciplines with creative practitioners to explore local and global challenges through different lenses. LCEP is well-placed to facilitate these partnerships and programmes.

Provision of informal learning, outside of formal education, is important for health and wellbeing and for building the capacity of home-grown talent. Some development programmes for young people are already offered through organisations such as Hot Box and LCEP and there is appetite among the sector to broaden the offer of expert-led training programmes and mentoring to build capacity.

This should extend to professional development as well. Supporting creative entrepreneurs and leaders of small businesses to develop their enterprise and innovation skills will strengthen the creative economy and could create a network of mentors for younger generations.

Chelmsford has decided not to enter the race for 2029 UK City of Culture. The proximity of Chelmsford to London and its relative affluence, while acknowledging that it still has areas of deprivation and inequality, mean it would be unlikely to be successful in the current national political climate. It is costly and resource-heavy to enter the competition, but the bidding process can bring a place together and mobilise strategic energy and resource. Instead, alternative approaches should be considered, to achieve a similar sense of unity and cohesion and present a strategic picture for funders and stakeholders, such as the Cultural Compact model. Cultural Compacts are partnerships designed to support the local cultural sector and enhance its contribution to development, with a special emphasis on cross-sector engagement beyond the local authority and the cultural sector itself. Appendix II provides more information on Cultural Compacts. Given that new Cultural Compacts are not currently being funded by Arts Council England, Chelmsford might choose instead to consolidate partnership and collaboration across sectors through a series of partnership agreements led by Culture Chelmsford. Whichever model or construct is used, there is evidence across the UK that a shared vision and wide stakeholder support, evidenced by financial underpinning, is attractive to funders and is extremely helpful to enable Chelmsford to tell its story and grow its funding base.



## 15. Development of each theme

The three themes have great potential and it would be helpful for the Trust and partners to consider which existing initiatives have the right ingredients to be grown and developed as part of a year-round programme of cultural activity. The existing Chelmsford Festival, Writtle's Health and Wellbeing initiative and ARU's Science Festival are among those worth reviewing for scalability, tangible benefits for local communities and impact against the ambitions of the Strategy. To understand the true potential and the resources required, concepts need testing, as does the appetite to collaborate on bigger projects. A base understanding through extensive mapping will help articulate the case for growing existing festivals and programmes alongside establishing new ones. It will develop thinking on how best to use the spaces and places available for cultural activity and how to grow audiences over the course of the 10-year Strategy. Developing roadmaps and establishing working groups to design and deliver strategic plans and partnerships will set the vision and ambition for each theme. As part of this work, specific and measurable targets should also be set.



## 16. Cross-party working group

A cross-party working group has been created to support the development of this Strategy. It is a recommendation that the group continues, beyond its original task and remains as a cross-party working group for culture, to ensure a consistent and unified approach that balances local political change.

## 17. Marketing strategy

A commitment to marketing is critical to the success of the Strategy and has been recognised by many stakeholders that need significant development and resource. A structured and targeted marketing strategy is needed to promote the cultural activities and to attract broad audiences from across the district and beyond. A comprehensive, city-wide listings resource will build Chelmsford's reputation as a reliable destination for regular cultural activity and entertainment. This is particularly important to fill gaps in destination and tourism planning, where a comprehensive strategy is currently lacking. Promoting programmes through a variety of online and physical platforms will ensure that communications reach diverse and relevant audiences. Well-considered marketing that reinforces the Cultural Strategy's vision and progress will keep the ambition visible, celebrate achievements and continue to engage new and established partners and funders. Resourcing this effectively needs to be a district-wide commitment.





## 18. Action plans and future reviews

As part of the ongoing engagement work, Culture Chelmsford will work with stakeholders and engage communities resulting in draft action plans with clear outcomes and an evaluation framework between March and June, for publication in Autumn 2023. In this first year, a comprehensive mapping of cultural assets will be undertaken to gather baseline evidence and other projects will be launched to begin building knowledge and capacity for achieving the 10-year ambition.

A Strategy review should be incorporated into an annual cycle with a more in depth mid-point review in the fifth year of delivery. The reviews will track against the targets set for each theme to assess and celebrate progress, identify learnings from what is not working so well, check the themes and principles are still relevant as external factors shift and to look ahead to delivering the next five years of the Strategy.

“The vision and implementation of Chelmsford’s Cultural Strategy, can bring valuable and endless opportunities to those who visit, live and work in Chelmsford, to experience a city rich in culture. This strategy will no doubt support and nurture existing events and festivals, but also inspire creatives to develop new concepts, which bring benefit to individuals, families, and groups.”

**Garry Ormes, Essex Pride,  
Visitor Experience Manager – Chelmsford Theatre**



# 19. Summary of recommendations



The following summarises the recommendations of the Cultural Strategy, which centres on the vision statement.

There are three themes, established through research, consultation and analysis, which have emerged as the core of Chelmsford's Cultural Strategy. They are:

- Nurturing our environment: built and natural
- Improving Health and Wellbeing
- Outstanding Festival and Events

## **Nurturing our environment: built and natural**

- Chelmsford needs to maximise its natural assets and cultural heritage, and ensure they are at the heart of a dynamic cultural scene.
- There is an opportunity to connect Chelmsford's history of science and engineering innovation and focus on an interdisciplinary approach.
- Culture should be embedded in Chelmsford's aspiration for growth and close partnerships established with planners and developers to ensure the city maximises its appeal as a place to live and work.

## **Improve Health and Wellbeing**

There will be an increased role of culture in helping improve the mental and physical health of the people of Chelmsford through the development of a Culture and Health road map and working group, led by Culture Chelmsford, that brings together key stakeholders from an Integrated Care Board, Chelmsford City Council, the voluntary, education and cultural sectors.

## **Outstanding Festivals and Events**

- Chelmsford will develop a coherent programme of festivals and events which span the district, appeal to all ages and cultural interests, capitalise on the strength of amateur provision, and grow the city's creative and visitor economies.
- A road map will be developed to ensure that the right conditions are created for festivals and events to flourish, grow professional capacity, and ensure a cohesive offer which puts Chelmsford on the map.
- Detailed mapping will be a helpful next step to understand exactly what assets Chelmsford can capitalise on to host festivals and events in future.

## **Delivery**

- In order to deliver the vision through the themes, there needs to be strong leadership and partnership working with tangible financial support to deliver the Strategy.
- Culture Chelmsford seems the best vehicle to provide the independent leadership needed, drawing together key stakeholders.
- The Cultural Compact model should be considered to provide clarity around the roles of stakeholders and to ensure delivery against objectives.
- Continued cross-party working is recommended to ensure consistency over a 10-year period and beyond.

## 20. Appendix I: Research findings



The following sets out the findings from our research activities and how they informed the Strategy.

### i. Literature review

An extensive review of documents included previous consultations, scoping studies, current strategies across a range of relevant areas, and input and reviews from across the cultural sector at varying levels of detail.

Much consultation had happened already and the findings from this are integrated into the recommendations of this Strategy. And while ‘consultation fatigue’ was mentioned for many, there was nonetheless a gap in hearing about the needs and opportunities experienced in outlying parts of Chelmsford. Further consultation activities were planned to involve several seldom heard communities across the wider district.

It was apparent that there were plenty of specific ideas about what Chelmsfordians would like to see taken forward culturally. The cultural sector identified priority themes including:

- Reinventing the city centre.
- Making more of the waterways.
- Improving access to space and assets.
- Nurturing youth voice and representation.

Previous reports of note included studies of the best way to revitalise and make sustainable and connected the use of a range of cultural places and spaces. A creative space feasibility study identified a range of conditions that would need to be met for this to be viably progressed as an idea.

There are clear points of connection between a Cultural Strategy and other sectors. This includes a strong fit with the Chelmsford 2013-2036 plan that focuses on growth and housing development, with culture having a powerful role to play in fostering a sense of identity and place in an expanding city and wider district.

The LCEP vision includes a commitment to “Building on Chelmsford’s strength and heritage in innovation, provide all Children and Young People sustainable and accessible cultural and creative opportunities that broaden their horizons and support them to reach their potential”, while Anglia Ruskin University’s strategy identifies community engagement as a priority. Both of these positions fit clearly with this emerging Strategy.

The BID focuses on providing entertainment and increasing city centre footfall for economic benefits. There is an obvious link to a Cultural Strategy that delivers thriving creative industries. It will build a strong visitor economy and elevate Chelmsford’s reputation as a vibrant and attractive destination, which supports business growth and increases repeat visits to Chelmsford for entertainment and inspiration.

The emphasis on the city centre is balanced by the articulated needs of Chelmsford’s wider geography, where there is an appetite to embrace a more comprehensive local offer, building on existing strengths and activities, creating a more connected district.

(continued)

## 20. Appendix I: Research findings



### ii. Initial mapping

Drawing on this research, basic and preliminary mapping identified the cultural and creative places, spaces, activities and associations, as well as the creative economy, cultural heritage and stories of Chelmsford. This revealed proliferation within the district and gaps in provision.

Festivals emerged strongly with a wide variety of programmes for different ages and interests, including sport, music, books, art, performance, film, crafts, food, wellbeing and science. Festivals are also places where Chelmsford's thriving local amateur scene convenes.

The district's museums, theatre, libraries and community centres provide space for cultural activities but there is no venue for large audiences of more than 800 people. There is, however, plentiful available green space across the district and several promising buildings and other spaces that are currently unused and could be, with investment, utilised more fully.

The basic mapping exercise also highlighted local partners who could be essential in shaping, delivering, or funding the Strategy. This includes but is not limited to City and Parish Councils, ARU, Writtle College, Chelmsford Theatre, Hot Box, Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), LCEP, Ignite and local artists and cultural leaders.

### iii. Stakeholder consultation

Findings from the research were tested with a range of stakeholders across sectors in November 2022. Initial conversations took place with Dominus Real Estate, Chelmsford For You, Chelmsford Theatre, Chelmsford Voluntary Service selected individual Councillors and Chelmsford Council employees including the CEO.

Comments on the purpose of culture for Chelmsford, included reflections on how it can improve connectedness, health and wellbeing, a sense of pride and place, and city footfall. Stakeholders were keen to consider the social value that can be created through culture.

Emerging themes included the centrality of festivals – reinforced by successful events already hosted, for example, Chelmsford Festival, 3Foot and Fling – and bolstered by new ideas about comedy. Making the most of Chelmsford's green spaces, waterways, and agricultural heritage and setting stood out. The positioning of Chelmsford as a connected city, and as a cultural destination, with fresh and exciting cultural events on a regular basis drawing people in, was a popular idea. Ultimately stakeholders wanted to foster a sense of place embedding art and culture.

In considering who the Cultural Strategy is for, stakeholders observed how cultural work can cross boundaries. They reflected on how culture can create a reason for people to come into town and stay there, and balanced this with the importance of cultural activity taking place in the outlying parts of the district. The idea of the theatre being not a community theatre, but a theatre at the heart of the community and balancing what this means with commercial imperatives, resonated with wider findings.

There was broad support for the Strategy to be co-funded and delivered by key stakeholders. The importance of volunteers stood out, and conversations reflected the need for a joined up marketing strategy and improved communications to promote activities and encourage participation.

(continued)

## 20. Appendix I: Research findings



### Ignite Chelmsford

Ignite Chelmsford Cultural Partnership brings together people from the Council, creative and education sectors, and community groups to represent their networks and to inform, challenge, and feed into strategic development opportunities. Through the Ignite group, themes that had started to emerge from the literature review and stakeholder discussion were tested, particularly festivals, health and wellbeing, and placemaking.

The Partnership highlighted the desire for a transdisciplinary approach that goes across and beyond the arts and draws together a wide range of disciplines within each project. This builds on the success of Essex 2020: A Year of Science and Creativity and its programme of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) related festivals, exhibitions, performances and other events.

There were comments on the need for a strong programme of capacity building and hub support for creative practitioners to grow the creative economy. Partners spoke of the need to create more opportunities for young people within the Cultural Strategy and a district-wide commitment to health and wellbeing. They also referenced pride in Chelmsford's distinctive environmental features.

Specific feedback on the emerging themes included:

### Festivals

- Using more of the green/blue landscape for festivals, with easier and greener transport access to festivals across the district.
- Better marketing, PR and advertising.
- Creating opportunities to celebrate history, traditions and cultures.

- Festivals that relate to the distinctiveness of Chelmsford, tell stories of its heritage/traditions and encourage collaborations across the district.
- Ensuring that festivals include opportunities for the development of local talent and create a legacy that goes beyond the specific event.

### Health and Wellbeing:

- An appetite for more spaces where wellbeing and creative expression can come together and where there are possibilities to play and be active.
- Making better use of Chelmsford's existing natural resources, including green spaces and water.
- Making sure that the natural environment is accessible, affordable and open to everyone, reflecting different traditions and the voices of young people.

### Placemaking

- Expanding Chelmsford's reputation as a destination for shopping, which is felt to dominate its current identity and was felt to be "not enough", to include cultural moments and experiences that put the city on the map.
- To ensure that children and young people are fully involved in shaping the future cultural programme.
- Creating a visible cultural hub in the city, which incorporates mixed usage across the cultural, creative and education centres and opening hours which extend into the night-time economy.
- A public art strategy to encourage more investment in distinctiveness of art in the public realm and forge an identity across the wider district.
- A programme of capacity building for the sector, including a better understanding of a broader range of economic models and drawing on the experience of other sectors to support and connect what is already in place.

(continued)

## 20. Appendix I: Research findings



### District-wide workshops

To ensure that voices beyond the city centre were heard, a series of workshops were held in South Woodham Ferrers, Danbury and Writtle. Participants included community, religious and cultural leaders, artists and practitioners who were active in the areas' cultural life.

Findings included:

- An appreciation of being included in the consultation and an acknowledgment that the district context is very different to that of the city centre. There was an emphasis on the importance and strength of the natural environment and a strong rural feel from some areas. The river and waterways came out as important in all workshops. There was a pride in the quality of the natural landscape and generally an enthusiasm for celebrating this more, combined with some concerns about the experience being spoilt for local people if it got too busy.
- The RHS, with its major site at Hyde Hall, emerged as an important stakeholder with a strengthened outreach presence.
- South Woodham Ferrers feels very disconnected from Chelmsford and faces Wickford, London and Maldon more, reinforced by the train connections which make a journey to Chelmsford by train complicated.
- Volunteering is important and there is a need to expand the group of volunteers to ensure there isn't over reliance on the same group of people to deliver more cultural activity.
- There is sometimes an issue with capacity, so access to festivals and event content that is initiated and produced centrally was popular. This content would need to be adapted to a local context to ensure relevance and legacy; there are good national models to draw on.

- The focus on Health and Wellbeing resonated strongly, although there were different interpretations of the meaning of this potential theme across different groups. It could be a strength to have a theme that is adaptable across different geographies and communities while still being part of a cohesive strategy.
- Science is a strength across FE and HE providers in Chelmsford offering scope for more connections to Health and Wellbeing as well as interdisciplinary work and collaboration across sectors.
- A strategy to increase capacity in the cultural and civic sectors to improve delivery over the next decade seems important to help Chelmsford realise its cultural ambitions.

Feedback from Ignite and the district workshops led to the adaptation of the original theme of Placemaking, which did not resonate, to that of embracing Chelmsford's ambitious development plans and greater celebration of its natural assets, by focusing on the built and natural environment.

# 21. Appendix II: Cultural Compacts



Cultural City Compacts bring together civic leaders and partners from culture, business, and education, to make best use of resources and secure the social and economic benefits that come from embedding arts and culture in civic life. The Cultural Cities Enquiry provides more details on the leadership, investment and talent needed for Cultural Compacts.

## Why?

- To grow a place's cultural ecosystem, to drive lasting social and economic benefits.
- Shared ambition for culture and place, to co-design and deliver a vision for culture within a place.
- A new kind of leadership for culture - a wider coalition of support across different local sectors and interests.
- To leverage more investment into local cultural development in a sustainable way that will provide lasting social and economic benefits for cities and towns.

“Strong and sustained collaboration between strategic city partners can support collective, coordinated action to grow a city's cultural ecosystem, to drive lasting social and economic benefits. Cities with a clear vision for culture supported by business, city authorities, education and the cultural sector can align activity and funding and leverage new resources”

## What is it?

- An independently led group of stakeholders across a city that come together with a shared vision and value for culture-led cities.
- Cities and towns with a clear vision for culture supported by business, local authorities, education and the cultural sector align activity and funding and leverage new resources.
- They are goal driven.
- They are formed of cross -sector partnerships.

## Who is involved?

- Strategic place-based partners.
- Local authorities, businesses, education providers, cultural and community leaders.

## Challenges to consider if setting up a Compact

- Embedding diversity and inclusion into the composition of the Compact itself and across its programme of activities.
- Creating genuinely cross-sector partnerships, with deep engagement from, in particular, the private sector and the health sector.
- Existing cultural compacts don't appear to have established a financially sustainable model.

(continued)

# 21. Appendix II: Cultural Compacts



## What it does well

- Positioning, leverage and impact. The experience of the Compacts so far demonstrates that by extending the more strategic, broader based approach to cultural leadership this can raise the profile of culture and start to leverage additional resources.
- Independence and autonomy. The appointment of an independent chair is highly beneficial for Compacts. The skills, knowledge and independent local profile of the chair is proving to be an important success factor for all Compacts, along with autonomy from any particular sector, institution or interest group.
- Aligns work that the compact members do and encourages accountability.
- Invests in a programme of work that benefits everyone in the city.
- Has a flexible pot of money which can undertake quick strategic pieces of work on behalf of the city.
- Provides a peer group to learn from.
- Is attractive to funders and investors for effective and impactful use of private or public funds.

## What it can do together:

- Support and encourage cross-sector agendas.
- Answer questions of how to leverage opportunities such as releasing the value of local assets or considering the implementation of financial / investment strategies locally, joint investment opportunities, Corporate Social Venture Funds and tax reliefs.
- Jointly own and be advocates for the Cultural Strategy.
- Jointly own the need to be diverse, inclusive and accessible in our work and teams
- Influence other strategies (local skills, health & wellbeing etc)
- Have a joint business plan with outcomes.

What a cultural compact could look like in Chelmsford:



## 22. Appendix III: Sources for literature review

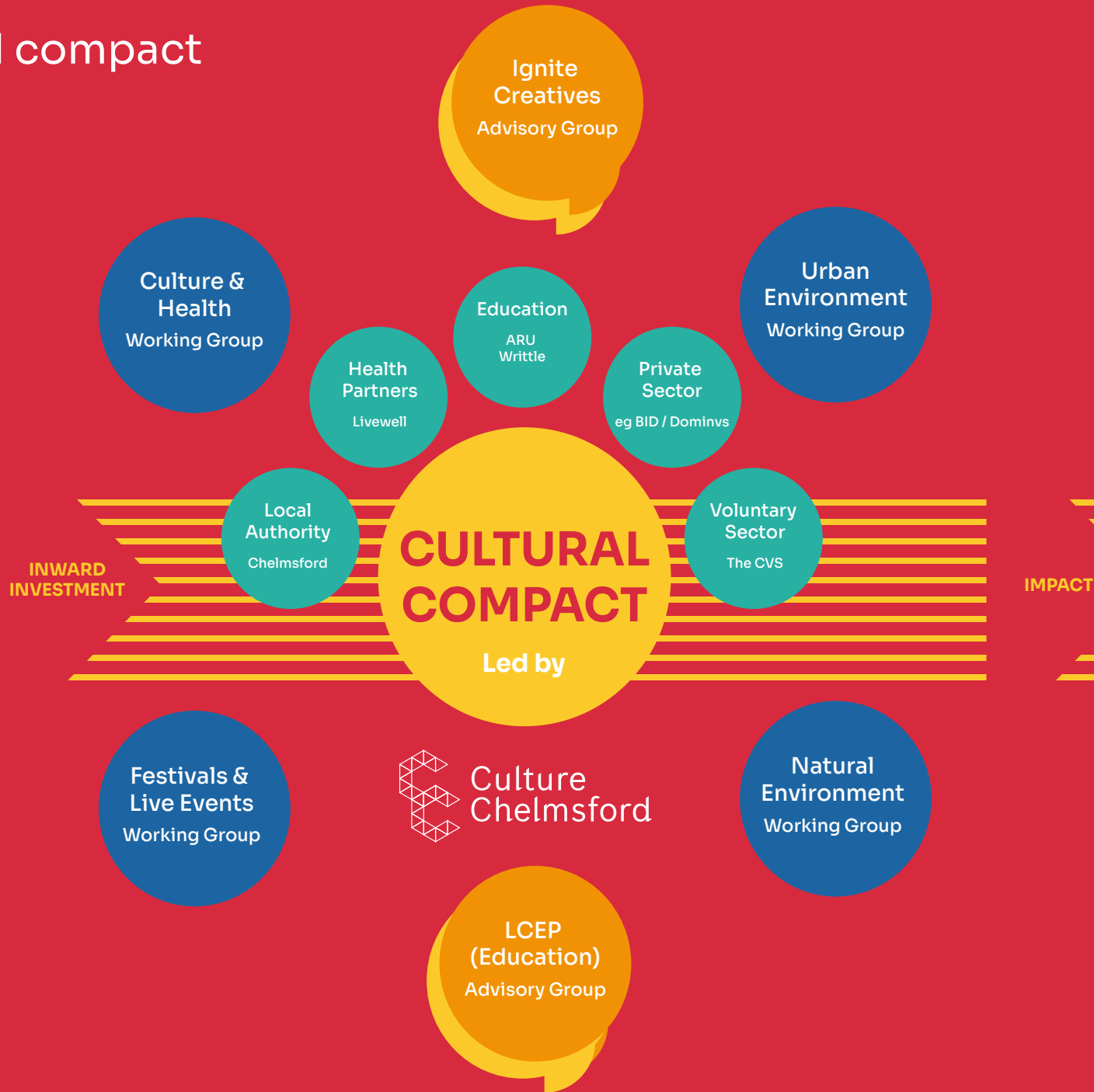


- All Stakeholder Postcards
- Anglia Ruskin University Strategy
- Chelmsford A City of Culture
- Chelmsford Cultural Strategy Brief
- Chelmsford Hub Report
- Chelmsford Local Authority Profil – Joint Needs Assessment 2019
- Chelmsford The Place to Grow
- City of Culture Scoping Study
- Creative Space Feasibility Study
- Developing a City-Wide Narrative
- Essex 2020 Report
- Essex IMD 2019
- From the Summit to Ignite Chelmsford Labs
- Ignite Lab Evaluation Survey Feedback
- Master Fact File
- Partnership Investment Application
- Progress Report Centre Stage Ideas Lab
- Towards 2040: A Shared Cultural Vision

This Strategy was commissioned by Culture Chelmsford in partnership with Chelmsford City Council supported by European Regional Development Fund and written by Seriously Inclusive Ltd.



# 23. Cultural compact



# CHELMSFORD CULTURAL STRATEGY



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