

Classification	Item No.
Open / Closed	

Meeting:	Bury Health and Wellbeing Board
Meeting date:	Thursday 15 th January 2026
Title of report:	Update on Bury Cultural Strategy against the five strategic pillars of the Strategy.
Report by:	Jackie Veal – Head of Wellness
Decision Type:	Information
Ward(s) to which report relates	All

Executive Summary:

This report consolidates cultural updates across the five strategic pillars of the Bury Cultural Strategy including updates on wider GMCA and local partners, highlighting Creative Health integration, UKSPF and Place Growth funding, Cultural Organisations Group (COG) priorities.

Recommendation(s)

That:

1. Note the report and strategy refresh and align with health priorities

Key considerations:

Bury Cultural Strategy: Five Strategic Pillars

The Bury Cultural Strategy is built around five strategic pillars that collectively aim to embed culture at the heart of the borough's identity, wellbeing, and economic growth. The **Stories** pillar empowers communities to share their own narratives through events, partnerships, and innovative storytelling initiatives, ensuring that residents are not just audiences but active creators. **Skills** focuses on developing creative industry pathways by supporting lifelong learning, artist networking, and talent development from grassroots to professional levels. **Strength** prioritises the integration of creative health into wellness frameworks, leveraging arts-based interventions like Arts-on-Prescription and music therapy to deliver measurable health benefits and reduce inequalities. **Space** is dedicated to creating inclusive venues and public spaces, with significant investment in infrastructure, venue improvements, and public art to ensure accessibility and vibrant cultural participation. Finally, **Support** facilitates collaboration and sustainable investment by aligning partners, maximising funding opportunities, and introducing robust KPIs to track engagement and impact, ensuring the long-term vitality of Bury's cultural ecosystem.

The following report summarise the progress made against the five existing strategic pillars.

1. Stories – Empowering Community Narratives

Bury's longstanding identity as a borough of storytellers is central to its cultural vision. The strategy moves away from a top-down approach, instead activating community agency so residents can tell their own stories—not just as audience members, but as authors and creators.

Community-Driven Events: The Bury Festival of Art drew over 1,000 attendees and showcased more than 100 local artists, reaching 20,000 people via social channels. The Bury Art Museum Festive Event welcomed 450 visitors, featuring performances, artist stalls, family activities, and workshops.

Ongoing Partnerships: Engagements with the Fusilier Museum, library programs, and the Wonderbird Project continue to celebrate and share diverse stories, with high attendance and ongoing momentum into the new year.

Innovative Storytelling: Initiatives like the interactive Peel Tower trail (QR codes linking to residents' stories) and the upcoming Storytelling Festival (with Bury Hospice and local schools) encourage heritage sharing and creative expression.

Bury Cultural Branding and Identity – Ongoing use of the Culture Bury Brand and working with Place colleague to further embed the Cultural Strategy into future place based branding.

2. Skills – Developing Creative Industry Pathways

Bury aims to become a leader in lifelong creative practice, setting standards for creative entrepreneurship and co-designed community programs. The strategy supports skill development at every stage, from grassroots to professional levels.

Artist Networking: Opportunities for local artists to collaborate and share ideas are expanding, with new networking sessions and partnerships (e.g., with Rob Dart) designed to foster creative exchange and professional growth.

Education and Lifelong Learning: Library activities and educational programs across Bury's libraries support creative development for all ages, while bespoke school projects and placements build confidence and skills in young people.

Creative Careers: The GMCA Creative Industries Sector Plan prioritises talent development, freelancer support, and diversity. Bury's cultural partners are working to collect performance indicators that demonstrate impact on creative careers and the broader economy

The GMCA's Creative Industries Sector Plan is advancing, with new governance structures and sector-wide initiatives to foster creative talent and industry growth.

Artist Networking sessions are planned for early 2026 and collaborative projects provide opportunities for local creatives to connect, share ideas, and develop new skills.

Library Activities and educational programs across Bury's libraries support lifelong learning and creative development for all ages.

3. Strength – Promoting Cultural Health and Wellbeing

Creative Health is now a strategic priority, with £1.6m GMCA/NHS investment (including £800k Arts Council match funding). Delivery models such as Arts-on-Prescription, dementia-friendly sessions, and music therapy have led to significant health impacts: 37% fewer GP consultations, 27% fewer hospital admissions, and a return of £4–£11 for every £1 invested.

The Bury Culture Weekend, scheduled for February, will focus on wellness, featuring activities like Fire Garden, circus skills, and early evening sessions to promote mental health and social engagement.

Projects like Bringing It Back to You (creative sessions in care homes) and Winter Care Packages for vulnerable community members further support wellbeing outcomes.

- **Strength – Promoting Cultural Health and Wellbeing**

Bury's approach to "Strength" is rooted in the integration of creative health into the borough's wellness framework, leveraging arts, culture, and community engagement to deliver measurable health benefits and address inequalities.

- **Strategic Investment and Integration**

Major Investment: The Greater Manchester Culture Fund, jointly led by GMCA and NHS, has committed £1.6 million (including £800k from the Arts Council) to embed creative health into health and social care. This investment supports a unified strategy across health, community, and cultural sectors, ensuring equitable access to wellbeing support in all neighborhoods.

Holistic Delivery: The strategy aligns curated cultural programs with grassroots activities, supporting holistic health and wellbeing. Bury Council's wellness strategies now include arts outreach, nature exploration, and anti-bullying initiatives, all designed to improve mental and emotional health.

- **Evidence-Based Impact**

Arts-on-Prescription: This social prescribing model enables individuals experiencing psychological or physical distress to engage in community arts (galleries, museums, libraries). Results show a 37% reduction in GP consultations and a 27% drop in hospital admissions, with a calculated social return on investment of £4-£11 for every £1 invested (an average saving of £216 per patient).

Therapeutic Outcomes: Music therapy has reduced agitation and medication needs in 67% of people with dementia. Art therapies have been shown to alleviate anxiety, depression, and stress, while increasing resilience and overall wellbeing.

Reducing Health Inequalities: Creative health initiatives bring together communities, the voluntary sector, local government, and health systems to tackle health inequalities. Access to creative opportunities helps mitigate the negative impacts of wider determinants of health, such as social isolation and economic disadvantage.

- **Community Engagement and Wellbeing Events**

Health-Focused Events: Projects like "Perfect Pitch" (English National Opera) and "Breathe Easy" (Bradford) use music therapy and online support to aid Long COVID recovery. The Victoria Wood Statue unveiling and Fire Choir performances foster civic pride and intergenerational engagement, contributing to emotional and social health.

Wellbeing Sessions: Practical staff programs, such as "Art to Reduce Anxiety and Stress" and wellbeing walks/runs, are incorporated into regular wellness sessions for both staff and residents.

Inclusive Access: Attendance at cultural health programs is being monitored to ensure inclusivity across educational levels, prosperity, and ethnicity, with targeted outreach to underrepresented groups.

- **Empowering Residents and Building Capacity**

Community Multiplier Fund: This initiative trains local communities in project development, fundraising, and event management, empowering residents to lead their own cultural health initiatives.

Shared Spaces for Healing: Cultural venues are activated as spaces for storytelling, heritage, and creative expression, offering residents opportunities to connect, reflect, and heal.

- **Ongoing Collaboration and Evaluation**

Cross-Sector Collaboration: Bury's Creative Health action plan is being developed in partnership with NHS and GMCA, with a focus on priority cohorts and referral pathways. Evaluation metrics are being established to measure impact and inform future investment.

National and Regional Alignment: The strategy is closely aligned with Arts Council England's "Let's Create," the National Centre for Creative Health, and regional frameworks, ensuring best practice and access to wider resources.

4. Space – Creating Inclusive Venues and Public Spaces

The strategy recognises that accessible, welcoming spaces are vital for cultural participation and wellbeing. Investments and partnerships are focused on making venues and public spaces inclusive and vibrant.

Infrastructure Investment: The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (£500k) and Pride in Place (£20m) have enabled hundreds of cultural events, engaged tens of thousands of attendees, and created hundreds of volunteer opportunities, enhancing access to cultural spaces across Bury and Radcliffe.

Venue Improvements: The Met's 50th anniversary and ongoing upgrades ensure that cultural spaces remain welcoming and accessible. The Met delivers over 200 live events annually, supports artist development, and provides inclusive programs for disabled adults, young people, and underrepresented communities.

Public Art and Heritage: Initiatives like the Irwell Sculpture Trail Tours and Walks offer guided experiences that connect people to art and heritage in public spaces, promoting wellness and community engagement.

Investments from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (£500k) and Pride in Place (£20m) have enabled 455 cultural events, engaged 37,500 attendees, and created 644 volunteer opportunities, enhancing access to cultural spaces across Bury and Radcliffe.

The Met's 50th anniversary and venue improvements, along with the expansion of public events and workshops, ensure that cultural spaces remain welcoming and accessible.

Initiatives like the Irwell Sculpture Trail Tours and Walks offer guided experiences that connect people to art and heritage in public spaces.

Warm Spaces and Supportive Collective – Many of the Cultural Spaces are Warm Spaces for vulnerable residents and Supportive Collections are now embedded into library provision.

5. Support – Facilitating Collaboration and Sustainable Investment

The strategy recognises that accessible, welcoming spaces are vital for cultural participation and wellbeing. Investments and partnerships are focused on making venues and public spaces inclusive and vibrant.

Infrastructure Investment: The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (£500k) and Pride in Place (£20m) have enabled hundreds of cultural events, engaged tens of thousands of attendees, and created hundreds of volunteer opportunities, enhancing access to cultural spaces across Bury and Radcliffe.

Venue Improvements: The Met's 50th anniversary and ongoing upgrades ensure that cultural spaces remain welcoming and accessible. The Met delivers over 200 live events annually, supports artist development, and provides inclusive programs for disabled adults, young people, and underrepresented communities. Submission to GMCA Public Retro Fund December 25.

Public Art and Heritage: Initiatives like the Irwell Sculpture Trail Tours and Walks offer guided experiences that connect people to art and heritage in public spaces, promoting wellness and community engagement.

COG partners (BAM, Libraries, The Met) are advancing key initiatives through joint bids, shared resources, and alignment with GMCA priorities.

The Creative Places Growth Fund (from April 2026) will further strengthen cultural infrastructure and support sustainable growth.

The strategy refresh for 2026–2030 will introduce KPIs to track engagement and visitor economy impact, ensuring ongoing evaluation and improvement.

Key Issues for the Board to consider:

Note the progress the Strategy and Strategy refresh

Community impact/links with Community Strategy – Alignment with Cohesion Strategy and Neighbourhood Arts and Cultural Delivery.

Equality Impact and considerations:

Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;*
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;*
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.*

The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.

Equality Analysis	<i>Please provide a written explanation of the outcome(s) of either conducting an initial or full EA.</i>

**Please note: Approval of a cabinet report is paused when the 'Equality/Diversity implications' section is left blank and approval will only be considered when this section is completed.*

Legal Implications:

To be completed by the Council's Monitoring Officer

Financial Implications:

To be completed by the Council's Section 151 Officer

Report Author and Contact Details:

Background papers:

Bury Cultural
Strategy FINAL April

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Term	Meaning
COG	Cultural Organisations Group