

# ***THE CRUCIBLE OF CULTURE***

THE CULTURAL VISION  
FOR HALTON

2023-2030





## OUR CULTURE COMMITMENT



Halton Borough Council is committed to ensuring that our borough is a place in which culture thrives and is nurtured. As a local authority, Halton will be the enabling force for the transformative change which the Crucible of Culture is founded upon.

Our commitment is highlighted throughout this Vision; here we put our names to that commitment. The Crucible of Culture will grow ever brighter as a result of this support for our borough's cultural and creative sector.

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# Foreword

When asked to write this foreword, I was reminded that writing is in itself an act of cultural engagement. The novel on the bedside table, the reference books on the library shelves, the diary we keep; all these are cultural touchstones, moments when humans interact with their own thoughts and those of others.

Culture is a difficult word to pin down. As a word, it can be where you are from, your beliefs, how you live your life. Here, it means the creative activity which engages you, which delights you, which makes your heart sing, or which – for a fortunate few – is what you do for a living.

Those who work in culture know its power. They know how a well-timed line in a pantomime can cause an audience to double over in laughter. They know how a song lyric about unrequited love can resonate with the listener's own experiences. That a musician playing a riff can induce instinctive toe-tapping. That an object or image from the past can help bring understanding to the present. That an artwork can provide hundreds of years of pleasure hanging on a wall of the homes of countless families. That a TV series can capture the attention of millions around the globe. In Halton, culture is all these things and more. It is your local theatre, your local

museum, your community venue, your library, your child's school, your local pub's live music slot... and many more.

I know that culture, creativity and heritage are important to all those who call Halton home and to those who visit our borough. This vision sets out Halton Borough Council's ambitions for the borough's cultural sector: as a local authority, we will work productively with cultural partners, funders and communities to deliver ambitious, innovative and dynamic creative activity with a strong link to Halton's past, present and future.

We find ourselves in a period of economic uncertainty, with a cost of living crisis and the continued impact of Covid. Culture was a constant companion for many through the pandemic, and remains a source of the 'feel good' moments in life for us all, boosting mental and physical wellbeing, bringing people together and providing

escapism from the realities of our current circumstances.

Despite these challenges, the period ahead brings bold and dynamic opportunities. A new library, an extension to the Borough's theatre and development for local creative industries and organisations. In 2024, Halton will celebrate its 50th anniversary, whilst 2026 sees the return of Liverpool City Region Borough of Culture to Halton.

I look forward to seeing this vision evolve, and to the delivery of a diverse portfolio of cultural activity that engages residents and visitors, and cements Halton as the crucible of culture. Our shared ambition is for Halton to step out of their doors and be met by world-class culture.

**Clr Paul Nolan**  
Executive Board Member - Employment, Learning & Skills, Community & Culture



## 2024

Halton will celebrate its 50th anniversary.

## 2026

The return of Liverpool City Region Borough of Culture to Halton.



“Our shared ambition is for Halton to step out of their doors and be met by world-class culture.”



# Context

2021 brought the Liverpool City Region's Borough of Culture to Halton. Much-awaited, this was Halton's moment to bring the region's cultural focus to this borough.



This borough has always been culturally alive. It's a place which acts as a crucible of culture, a nod to the borough's industrial roots, bringing together creative people, ideas, ambitions and dreams in response to a rich seam of heritage, creativity and sheer dynamism.

There is recognition that culture is a transformative power, providing change for the better and opportunities for

improvements in health, education and the economy. Halton is stronger with culture, and a stronger cultural sector has the ability to unlock the full cultural and creative potential of this proud and vibrant place.

This Vision has been informed by the consultation and resulting cultural strategy report, undertaken by Art Reach in 2022. The report was commissioned

as Halton's response to the Borough of Culture successes and the desire by the local authority to build a legacy for the Borough of Culture year and to ensure Halton is a place in which cultural thrives and is championed.

## The Crucible of Culture

The Cultural Vision for Halton Borough is accompanied by an Action Plan, which sets out the pathway for future cultural development and growth across the borough.



The Crucible of Culture forms the bright centre of this vision.

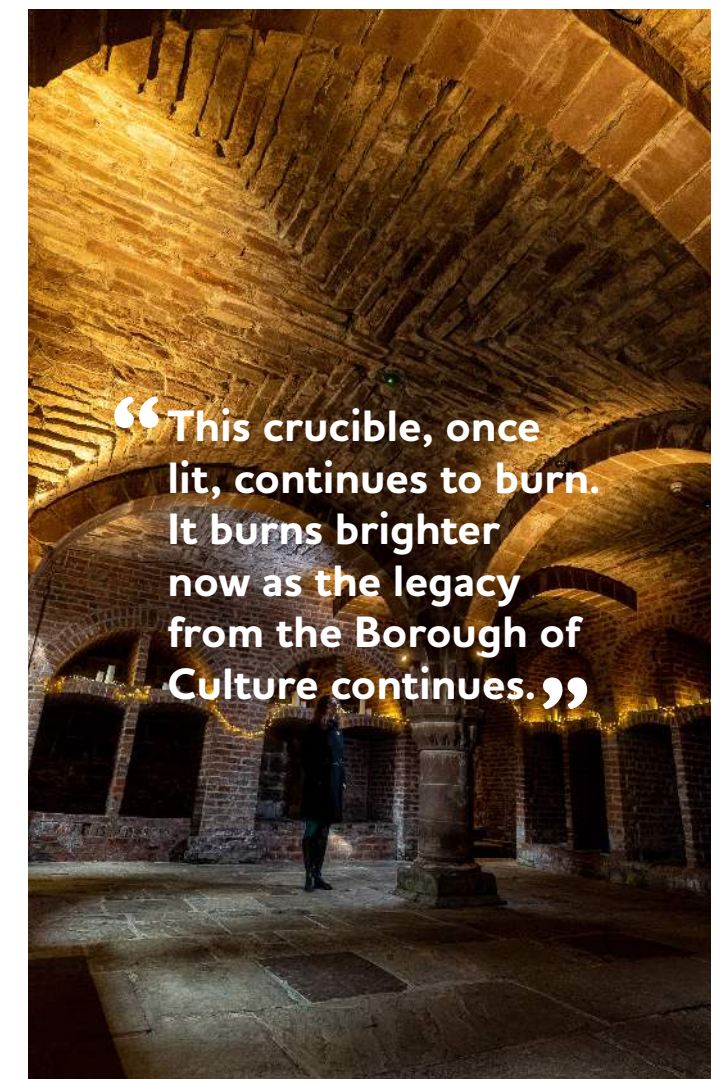
Halton comprises of the two towns of Runcorn and Widnes, surrounded by smaller communities, each with their own identity. These communities include the civic parishes of Daresbury, Hale, Halebank, Moore, Preston Brook and Sandymoor. Since 2014, the unitary authority of Halton has been part of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

Whilst the global pandemic tempered the aspirations which the Borough of Culture brought, it did not alter the desire for change. A change in how culture is perceived and in where it sits. Culture HQ, based in one of the borough's key shopping centres, provided a literal shop window for culture, breaking down barriers and taking cultural excellence into the high street: quite simply, connecting everyday people with a cultural touchpoint during moments of everyday interactions.

Culture HQ provided residents with a magical Mr. Benn moment; an opportunity to step into the world of culture, feeling immersed and engaged with the experience and being empowered to feel part of that world. It's an everyday experience which should become the norm. Culture on the street corner. Culture created in Halton, by Halton's own, the product of our own crucible of culture.

This crucible, once lit, continues to burn. It burns brighter now as the legacy from the Borough of Culture continues.

This crucible of culture forms the bright centre of this Vision. We invite you to join Halton's journey to ensure that bright centre burns ever brighter as we reposition culture as a powerful force for positive change, personal growth and wellbeing, and economic success.



“This crucible, once lit, continues to burn. It burns brighter now as the legacy from the Borough of Culture continues.”



# Our Vision

**Halton is a crucible of culture, at a point of change. In this borough, run through by the mighty Mersey, culture thrives. The guardians of culture are venues, partner organisations and regular festivals and celebrations which populate this diverse and innovative borough. People value culture, engage with culture and, through culture, celebrate the richness of Haltonian ambition.**



Heritage has forged the borough and the stories borne from the shared history of residents, past, present and future, continue to shape and influence creative outputs. Our history continues to shape our lives and is reflected throughout the cultural landscape.

Through our cultural aspirations, ignited by the Liverpool City Region's Borough of Culture in 2021, we can improve health and wellbeing, build sustainability into the economy and champion the 'feel good' moments. This is Halton's land, this is the story of proud communities looking for a more positive, more vibrant and more diverse future.

The Vision reflects the sense of strong community, heritage, self-starting creativity and collaborative working that exists in Halton. The combination of these factors forms the foundation from which to realise the full cultural potential of Halton. More than a neighbouring borough of the City of Liverpool, Halton has huge potential to become a cultural destination in its own right. The Borough of Culture showed what was possible. It demonstrated what

could be achieved. Even against the backdrop of a global pandemic, culture shone through as an undimmed light in Halton.

This vision for culture capitalises on that, it defines and promotes new and existing strategic partnerships, and in so doing increases the likelihood of securing larger amounts of funding, such as from Arts Council England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Culture can be analogue, for example, the word on the page, the object in a museum case, the performance on the stage. It can also be digital, such as an augmented reality installation, a virtual museum, or a heritage Facebook page. Whatever its form, it is always about people: social connections and opportunities, sharing and (lifelong) learning, better understanding about us and our place in the world.

Set against an industrial past, Halton is a collection of proud and dynamic communities, studded with cultural excellence and bold creative aspirations. The cultural canvas of

the borough reveals theatre, music, heritage, visual arts and performing arts. It brings together professionals, amateurs, volunteers and audiences to create a rich seam of opportunity and talent. These are the elements which when freed to achieve their potential will combine to create something new. Something bright. Something magical. Something Halton. This is our commitment, as a local authority, to connect organisations at all levels, to help forge new partnerships and to champion culture at every opportunity. This is our crucible. These are our people. Halton's culture is for everybody. We invite people from across the sector and beyond to join us on a journey which will take us to the next Borough of Culture in 2026 and onto 2030, when the Vision will be reviewed.

We will work to enable our cultural sector to become a shining light in this crucible of change, which will draw in new audiences and build on the strong foundations which already exist in the borough. We have identified four priorities, the Elements of Culture, which when combined will create new programmes of activity and opportunities for our children and young people, right through to our most experienced residents.



**Our Vision is to establish Halton as the crucible of culture, bringing together elements of excellence to create a new, vibrant cultural economy, improving health and wellbeing for residents and visitors alike, whilst building a strong economic platform and creative opportunities for all.**





# Introducing the 4 Elements of Culture

These elements have been established through consultation with Halton's Cultural Sector and together provide the basis for a new way of working between Halton Borough Council and those organisations, be they professional, amateur, or volunteer-led, which form the bedrock of the Borough's vibrant cultural sector.



## LEADERSHIP

### The First Element

**Leadership:** Providing a conduit between Halton Borough Council and the Borough's Cultural Sector to maximise opportunities and establish culture as a cross-cutting priority that forms a golden thread through the Council's different agendas.

## COMMUNICATION

### The Second Element

**Communication:** To increase awareness of cultural opportunities and activities in Halton, both with residents and with visitors. Halton has an active cultural sector, the vibrancy and impact of which can only be enhanced through heightened public awareness.

## DIVERSITY

### The Third Element

**Diversity:** To ensure programming speaks to the widest possible audience, providing a voice and a creative space for everyone, whilst raising aspiration and providing talent and skill development opportunities for all ages.

## DYNAMISM

### The Fourth Element

**Dynamism:** To enable aspiration, ambition and creative excellence to flourish across the Borough, through supporting bold and energetic programming at a Borough-wide level, showcasing creative confidence at the heart of the crucible of culture.



## FUNDING: THE AGENT OF CHANGE

These 4 elements are not complete on their own. Alongside the 4 Elements of Culture sits Funding, the Agent of Change.

**Funding:** The 4 Elements of Culture require a unifying factor to bond them together and bring about change. That bond is provided by Funding. For change to happen in Halton's Crucible of Culture, funding is necessary... it is the 'agent of change', and the Four Elements are the enabling forces that will support the unlocking of external funding to deliver the ambition outlined in this Vision.



# LEADERSHIP

## The First Element of Culture

This Vision establishes Halton Borough Council as the enabler of cultural change in the borough. The value of culture and of the borough's active and successful cultural sector is recognised and championed at the highest levels, by both the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council. Together, these two roles will work to raise awareness of the power of culture to improve both mental and physical wellbeing and to grow Halton's economic sector, bringing in more jobs and more opportunities. Two posts will sit alongside existing Council departments to directly engage with the Cultural Sector. These are an Events post and a Cultural Officer post. Together, these roles will support the sector in delivery of key annual events and festivals and in forging deeper connections, both within and outside the sector. The Cultural Officer role will also provide a bridge between the sector and external funding bodies to maximise



the flow of cultural investment into the Borough. Leadership also resides within the sector itself, through Cultivate and Halton Heritage Partnership (HHP). Cultivate comprises of a number of professional-led organisations and includes Council representation, whilst HHP represents over 20 volunteer-led heritage organisations.

Through strong leadership, culture will thrive, providing everybody, across the borough and beyond, with the opportunity to enjoy world-class cultural activities which have been forged in Halton, the Crucible of Culture.

## Our Leadership Commitment

1

To be advocates for Halton's Cultural Sector at all levels and to embed culture in the council as a part of statutory services, including Education, Economic Development and Health.

2

To ensure Halton has a voice both within and outside of the region and with key funding bodies.

3

To support and champion leadership from within the cultural sector, with the council acting in a facilitatory capacity, enabling Halton's cultural sector to be self-sufficient, through providing quality venues and facilities, alongside strong cultural connections.

# COMMUNICATION

## The Second Element of Culture

Communication is central to the success of this Vision. With increasing levels of cultural activity across the borough, comes a call to raise awareness of, and engagement levels in, creative opportunities for all.

Within this element is a recognition that communication is not only about levels of engagement as audiences, but also as participants. Halton is alive with opportunities for creatives to produce and curate work, be they professionals or amateurs, younger or more senior. But it runs deeper than that. Awareness of opportunities for skills development, to give something back, to be socially – and culturally – connected are all part of the canvas which communication must cover. Our vibrant cultural sector relies on volunteers to bring added value, to share passions for art and heritage and to be actively involved in the vibrancy of the Haltonian cultural landscape.

Here, communication means raising awareness of opportunities for engagement in cultural and creative opportunities at every level, a call to action for us all, for everyone, everywhere to hear the clarion call and to be part of the crucible of culture as individual elements: a part of the whole, a part of Halton's creative picture. Working with Cultivate and HHP, Halton Borough Council will ensure that culture in Halton is visible as never before. That people know how, where and when they can be involved, and that audiences for cultural activities grow. Those same audiences will be encouraged to be 'Culture Champions' sharing experiences with friends and families in person and through their own social media accounts using the #CrucibleOfCulture and #HaltonHighlights tags to unite their stories and experiences.



## Our Communication Commitment

1

To establish recognised 'go to' places for cultural activities across Halton, uniting people with opportunities to be engaged and to capitalise on visitor economy programmes of work, including Visit Halton.

2

To promote opportunities for volunteering to enhance and grow the cultural sector, whilst also ensuring the amateur sector is included in the conversation.

3

To encourage our residents and visitors to be active engagers and 'Culture Champions', using their own social media accounts and our dedicated hashtags to champion the cultural activities they have engaged with and enjoyed.







# DIVERSITY

## The Third Element of Culture

The bold vision outlined here is for everyone, everywhere to access culture. It's about sharing Halton's creative capital with residents, but also welcoming people into our Borough to share our artistic ambition and our Halton highlights. We all need a stage, a place to create, a platform from which to share. From the everyday sharing of stories over a pint in the pub, to watching a world-class performance in the theatre, each of us has a moment when we shine. We become our own crucibles of culture, adding bright spots and moments of inspiration to Halton's creative canvas. We are also each different. The cultural activities we enjoy are varied. The places we come from are different. Our needs as individuals flex and change over time. This individual and collective diversity matters. We represent different genders, abilities, age groups, ethnicities, sexual preferences and religious beliefs. We may rely on

technology to improve our vision or hearing, we may use wheelchairs or have 'unseen' differences, such as being autistic. Our differences should unite us as humans. We are all the same.

The crucible of culture in Halton reflects this. Through accessible performances and exhibitions, and equality of opportunity for all creatives, we will build a fully inclusive cultural canvas which reflects the diversity of us as individuals. Our programme will be rich and varied, from small intimate experiences to stadium-filling concerts, and from community co-created installations to internationally recognised performances, our culture will speak for everyone. Our approach will ensure equity of treatment for all.

The power of culture to support mental and physical wellbeing is recognised, via social prescribing, combatting social isolation, enjoying shared experiences, creating artwork, giving something back as a volunteer, or learning and developing new skills. Culture does all these things: our vision ensures this contribution is recognised and championed.

We will champion opportunities for skill and talent development, reaching out to children and young people to provide experiences and opportunities in their own communities: our talent will be home-grown, nurtured through the crucible of culture. Our Vision will ensure programming speaks to the widest possible audience, providing a voice and a creative space for everyone, whilst raising aspiration and providing talent and skill development

## Our Diversity Commitment

1

To actively support a cultural canvas which is inclusive in content, form and messaging. In the crucible of culture everyone is welcome to play a part, either on the stage, in the wings or in the audience. Halton's culture is for everyone, now and always.

2

To listen to the needs of our cultural sector partners and organisations and ensure cultural interventions are a central part of the borough's strategy for improved health and wellbeing for all residents.

3

To work with our educators, at all levels, to ensure access is readily available for children and young people throughout their development, from Early Years sessions in libraries to opportunities to perform and showcase work and talent, developing integrated lifelong learning through cultural endeavours.

# DYNAMISM

## The Fourth Element of Culture

Our vision is bold, dynamic and innovative. The programming that the crucible of culture inspires will be energetic and will showcase the creative confidence which runs through the sector. Our cultural canvas is varied, with a network of venues and spaces in which to create, to perform, to animate.

We know Halton's creative sector is up to the challenge and is keen to be part of a step change in the role culture plays in the Borough. Through Cultivate and HHP members, combined with Liverpool City Region programmes and Halton Borough Council's own strategic direction, we will ensure culture is at the centre of Halton's success. In the crucible of culture, we will provide the spark to start the change. We will support the growth of the sector through external funding opportunities, through conversations at regional and national levels and we will share the ambitions of the cultural



sector. Creative platforms within Halton will be opened up, bringing vibrancy to the sector and supporting health and wellbeing outcomes through those touched by the programme.

Through nurturing creative excellence, the cultural sector will build sustainability, becoming a 'go to place' for those seeking quality experiences. Those seekers of experience will, in turn, support a vibrant cultural economy, helping grow businesses and attract new investment into the borough. Building quality 'doorstep' cultural and creative opportunities for residents creates a desirable place to live and a place to set up new businesses and attract new workforces. Our ambition is that no one in Halton should be more than 10 minutes from a cultural event or experience. Together with the sector, we will celebrate accidental interactions with culture, alongside those long-awaited, venue-filling performances. Our audiences will be on the edge of their seats as they lose themselves in the creative products of Halton's crucible of culture.

## Our Dynamism Commitment

1

To commit to ongoing consultation with the cultural sector and to work together to unlock new opportunities.

2

To support the sector to unlock external funding to continue to increase quality creative output which delivers the step-change the sector is so keen to achieve.

3

To ensure the crucible of culture is at the centre of wider strategic planning, using innovative creative interventions to capitalise on the 'soft power' of culture to grow the economy and support mental and physical wellbeing.





**“With increased external funding success comes greater activity: the crucible of culture becomes more active, vibrant, hotter.”**

# FUNDING

## The Agent of Change

In the crucible of culture, an enabling force is needed to spark or trigger the reaction between the elements. That ‘agent of change’ is funding. The cultural sector needs funding to be sustainable and resilient. Funding can come from two main sources: trading income and non-trading income. Trading income is that which is earned, whilst non-trading income comprises grants, sponsorship and donations.

Non-trading income can be used to build resilience and to grow trading income. For many cultural practitioners, trading income comes from fees and / or ticket sales. Halton’s cultural sector has in the past received lower levels of non-trading income from external funding bodies than the national average. The borough has enjoyed success in grant applications headed by Halton Borough Council, and using the Four Elements of Culture, the success rate of

applications from cultural organisations in the borough will increase.

Those organisations will grow in confidence and ambition, as the demand grows from residents and visitors to the borough alike. With more activity taking place, in more spaces and more frequently, the desire for quality creative installations and performances will grow. With increased external funding success comes greater activity: the crucible of culture becomes more active, vibrant, hotter. As the critical mass of culture grows, so do opportunities for increased inward investment.

Key external funding partners within the cultural arena include Art Fund, Arts Council England (ACE), Clore Duffield Foundation, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Foyle Foundation, National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and Theatres Trust.



## Our Funding Commitment

**1**

Halton Borough Council’s Programmes Office and Community Development Team will work with local organisations, including at grass root level, to facilitate and secure funding to allow cultural growth across the borough to be nurtured.

**2**

A dedicated officer will lead on Halton’s Visitor Economy, ensuring that culture and cultural activity is a key driver within the visitor economy.

**3**

The Council will engage with key funding bodies, sharing the Crucible of Culture and its aspirations and raising awareness of the need for cultural investment within Halton to realise this ambition.



# What Next?

**With a stronger and increasingly vibrant cultural sector comes new opportunities, attracting inward investment and developing the visitor economy. In this place, forged of industry and canal-crossed, emerges a new industry of creative innovation and excellence. Born of the crucible of culture, this new-found drive and determination will enhance and enrich the borough. As cultural sector sustainability grows, so too will that of the wider economy. Culturally richer and financially richer.**



The council will work to ensure that money being spent on regeneration and facilities improvements are coordinated through a Culture Group headed by Cultivate and its representatives. The council will have a role within the Culture Group and will forge a new way of working between the council, private sector and third sector organisations, establishing a cultural partnership delivery model. A new Culture Officer post will be recruited to by the council, underlining local authority commitment to this Vision and cementing Halton's place as the crucible of culture. Alongside this, a cultural action plan has been developed, the delivery of which will be central to the translation from cultural ambition on the page, to cultural reality in Halton's communities. The action plan, which sits alongside this Vision, will be a live document, adapting to community aspiration and need and working in tandem with the priorities of the Vision and will be a published document.

Halton's aspirations include growing the number of National Portfolio

Organisations in the borough and looking to other Arts Council England programmes, such as Creative People and Places to deliver the necessary step change to the borough's cultural programming. As part of the Let's Create vision identified by Arts Council England, the crucible of culture is well-placed to capitalise on delivery of bold, innovative and dynamic content.

In finding places for cultural work to exist, the concept of spaces or 'community crucibles' emerges. As culture becomes a transformative force in the borough, Halton Borough Council will become a facilitator, or cultural broker, between arts groups and organisations and those who hold the keys to underused spaces, be they commercial or community spaces. There is a clear need for the establishment of exhibition and performance spaces, but also for start-up spaces and meeting spaces for groups, especially those from the voluntary and amateur sectors.

As a new cultural sector grows in the centre of old Runcorn, bringing theatre, library and creative partner

organisations closer together, plans for a cultural quarter in Widnes will be considered. Using the stoic Victorian architecture of the old Town Hall, the Kingsway buildings and St Paul's Church as physical markers, this area has huge potential as a cultural quarter, and a twin to the development planned in Runcorn.

Halton's children and young people represent the future of the borough. Through digital media, their connections with culture sit in their hands in a way previous generations could only have dreamt of. For them, providing real world experiences, 'hands-on' rather than 'hand-held', are key. Young people need physical spaces, exhibition and performance spaces, volunteer and skills development opportunities and a voice to shape what happens in their own communities.

Working with education providers at all levels, from Early Years through to college level, this will be a clear priority: the crucible of culture starts in the formative years and becomes a lifelong engagement.

**“As cultural sector sustainability grows, so too will that of the wider economy. Culturally richer and financially richer.”**





# Accountability

The success of the vision relies on a transformation in the way in which culture is both perceived and delivered in the borough. This vision establishes culture as an enabler of positive change. Halton Borough Council will provide the impetus for this change, working with an already engaged and active sector.

The crucible of culture relies on the Four Elements of Culture being supported and adopted by all who are invested in this vision. When the Four Elements are brought together, the opportunities to secure meaningful levels of funding (the Agent of Change) increase greatly.

Accountability to deliver on this ambition sits firstly with Halton Borough Council, as owner of the vision and the driver of the aspirations laid out within this document. This is a partnership delivery model, so that accountability will also be carried by organisations such as Cultivate and HHP.

Halton Borough Council's intention to facilitate and drive cultural change and growth is underlined by its commitments, as defined here in The Crucible of Culture: The Cultural Vision for Halton, which includes investment in a new Cultural Officer post and the ownership of the Borough's cultural Action Plan. The local authority also has a key enabling role to play in the realisation of the Agent of Change, Funding, for the Borough's vibrant and dynamic cultural sector.

In the wider cultural landscape of the borough, that accountability, that drive for excellence, dynamism and creativity also sits with the organisations which together form the crucible of culture, the venues, the organisations, the volunteer and amateur groups, the participants and the audiences. Groups and organisations are encouraged to use the Vision to support grant funding applications.

# Acknowledgements

There is more information about Halton's cultural DNA at [visithalton.co.uk](http://visithalton.co.uk), the Visit Halton website. To be part of our ambition and find out more about the Crucible of Culture, visit [cultivatehalton.co.uk](http://cultivatehalton.co.uk), to discover the organisations which together form part of Halton's cultural forum, Cultivate.

To share your own experiences and photographs of Halton's cultural highlights as 'Culture Champions' on social media platforms, please use our hashtags #CrucibleOfCulture and #HaltonHighlights.

The Crucible of Culture: The Cultural Vision for Halton has been authored for Halton Borough Council, by Rob Sanderson-Thomas, Chief Executive of Norton Priory Museum and Gardens, in conjunction with representatives of Halton's cultural sector and Halton Borough Council colleagues. The vision is owned by Halton Council. However, it is the culmination of consultations and workshops with the cultural sector, facilitated by Art Reach. The full document 'Halton Cultural Strategy Consultation Results' is available on the websites.







## **CRUCIBLE** *noun*

A container in which substances may be subjected to very high temperatures, to bring about change. A place in which different elements can interact, leading to the creation of something new.

# &

## **CULTURE** *noun*

The collective expression of human creativity and imagination, shaped by the value and beliefs of a society, and reflected in its art, music, literature and other creative works.