

Culture and Visitor Economy Recovery Action Group – report for Overview & Scrutiny committee

Date of report: 20 Nov 2020

Date of meeting: 30 Nov 2020

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1. Background

City-wide thematic recovery groups were established in June 2020 in response to the coronavirus pandemic which has impacted on all areas of business and life since national Lockdown in mid-March 2020.

The Culture and Visitor Economy Recovery Action Group (CVERG) was established in April and emerged from the existing Strategic Events Programming Group (SEPG) which included members of the City Council, Cathedral, Culture Trust, Gloucester BID, Gloucester Rugby and Peel.

2. Participation

The intention was to bring members from across all areas of the cultural and visitor economy sectors and has been well-attended by a wide range of voices and partners including;

- Active Gloucestershire
- Aspire Leisure Trust
- Gloucester Rugby Club
- Visit Gloucestershire
- Cllr Steve Morgan – Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and the Visitor Economy
- Cllr Seb Field – Councillor for Podsmead, Gloucester City Council
- Cllr Neil Hampson – Councillor for Moreland, Gloucester City Council
- Head of Cultural Services, Gloucester City Council
- Corporate Director, GCC responsible for city-wide co-ordination for Recovery
- GFirst LEP
- The Music Works
- Eastgate Shopping Centre
- Kings Walk Shopping Centre
- Gloucester BID
- Gloucester Cathedral, Civic Trust and Heritage Forum
- Gloucester Quays and the Peel group
- Gloucester Culture Trust
- Tourism & Destination Marketing, GCC
- University of Gloucester
- Licensed Victualers Association
- MP for Gloucester

In many cases the individuals attending are part of other city, regional and national bodies – including GFirst LEP, British Licensed Victualers Association, Gloucester BID, Civic Trust, Heritage Forum, Visit Britain Destination Marketing network and there is some crossover with other city-wide Recovery groups.

The city council's lead for Recovery – Corporate Director Jonathan Lund attends this group and relevant information is shared across other Recovery groups to avoid duplication and to share info.

The group is coordinated and agendas set by Philip Walker GCC's Head of Culture and is chaired by Steve Morgan, Cabinet Member for Culture & Leisure, with minutes and admin support provided by Karen Pinkney, GCC Corporate Support.

3. Meetings schedule and process

CVERG met initially on a monthly basis then every fortnight as lockdown 1 ended on the following dates;

11 June, 25 June, 9 July, 23 July, 10 September, 15 Oct, 12 Nov

Attendance has been consistently good across retail, heritage, sports, culture and tourism, with invaluable support and involvement from councillors from all 3 main parties and endorsed by Richard Graham MP.

Agendas and minutes for meetings are sent out in advance, often with a thematic focus for each session. Other guests are invited where appropriate to provide detail and context for activity happening that is useful for participants. Meetings are focused and last approx. one hour.

An action log was established initially to identify key areas of concern and log actions.

In addition to the info circulated, notes and papers, the city's Tourism marketing officer has provided updates from Visit Britain in addition to other useful business relevant information.

4. Key achievements

The group agreed to develop a city-wide marketing campaign to build confidence in residents, visitors and to support the safe return of businesses as the city emerged from lockdown.

Gloucester Good to Go Campaign was funded by the city council by £10k – which unlocked a further £15,335 from other partners and identifying funding sources. The total cost of the campaign achieved a reach of nearly 3 million across a range of media channels. The majority of engagement was tracked through to the cultural activities taking place in the city – including Of Earth and Sky, Looking Up, Gloucester History Festival, Gloucester Day, Interactive Archaeology and Monster Hero Safari.

The **Looking Up** programme was another example of successful city-wide collaboration that brought many of the city's heritage organisations together to cross-promote each other's sites and engage with diverse communities. This emerged from the strongly connected heritage sector via the city's Heritage Forum and the team at Gloucester History Festival resulting in a Digital Map (providing virtual tours of venues across the city) Living History (augmenting the *City Voices* programme through working with communities to capture history being lived right now) and

Cultural Commissions – (supporting local artists to create accessible programmes of activities, developing audiences and bringing heritage sites to life). The funding by closely linked with the 10th **Gloucester History Festival** which went ahead with a series of successful digital talks and new forms of delivery and attracting world-wide audiences for the online talks.

Of Earth and Sky – a city-wide artwork by the artist Luke Jerram drew in additional partners provided a strong narrative and content for the Good to Go campaign. The city council's investment leveraged double the amount through a combination of partners contributions and successful funding bids.

By continuing to plan, develop and implement new cultural activity for residents and visitors to be able to engage with and draw them to the city centre has been an important aspect of the recovery. Providing activities such as festivals and events had the effect of sending out the signal that it is possible to safely visit Gloucester, explore the city and participate in activity – and support of retail and hospitality businesses in the process. This has been a focus of the recovery group – to identify and amplify the activity that would most likely result in a return in confidence in visiting Gloucester, shopping and supporting local businesses whilst providing high-quality activity in line with the city's Cultural Strategy.

Later on in the campaign saw a focus upon **Gaia at the Gloucester Cathedral** which drew a sell-out audience with sales of 14,000 tickets during a 3-week period in October. This brought in some much-needed income to the Cathedral, who were able to provide a high-quality ambitious and covid-safe cultural experience. The impact on retail and hospitality businesses in the vicinity must have been considerable.

Presentations from other partners have included the Development Director of the Reef group as well as the creative directors of the Bright Nights programme. Both occasions resulted in positive outcomes. A group was co-ordinated to look at the Kings Square and Quarter's cultural ambitions and explore delivery options. The Brights Nights programme will be expanded as more partners participate and contribute finances.

Following on from the success of the cultural programming, a new idea for a winter festival called Bright Nights emerged. With the city council providing the majority of the funding other partners have joined to augment the investment and demonstrate a credible programme to funders such as Sport England and Arts Council. An ambitious project which will bring communities together during winter and some inspirational light-works around the city. This could not have been done without the collaboration and financial contribution of city council and its partners in the city.

Other sub-groups have emerged to explore Queuing Apps options for retail and attempts to provide support to the night-time economy.

As a consequence of the city council's involvement with Visit Britain, free training was delivered to businesses to plan for re-opening.

5. Key outputs and results to date;

- Regular and recent updates on National and Local situation re. transmission rates (ie. R Rate), and measures that the city council is taking to mitigate this
- Information sharing
- Training arranged for Gloucester businesses
- 2 x Marketing Campaigns funded jointly worth £45k (of which £10k was funded by GCC and the remaining £35 provided by partners & covid funds)
- Marketing Campaign 1: reaching nearly 3 million across media channels
- 2 new Cultural projects – Of Earth and Sky and Bright Nights supported – OEAS attracting over £25k from other sources
- Gloucester Day and Gloucester History Festival supported by GCC funds
- New partnerships emerging – GL1 & Gloucester Rugby Club joining Bright Nights programme
- City-wide collaborations to support and cross-promote each other activity.
- Coherent supportive group with regular attendance at meetings across sectors
- Closer working between retail, hospitality, attractions, sports and leisure, culture and heritage, night-time economy sectors in the city.

6. Lessons learned

- Flexibility and adaptability is key to survival
- Information sharing is valued
- Collective and collaborative working has resulted in successful funds being drawn to the city
- Partnerships are essential to pool the sectors limited resources in order to have greatest impact and maximise collective investment.
- Each organization and sector has something to offer the others
- Increased understanding of how other sectors are affected and how they can be supported

7. Next Steps

Initially reactive and responsive, the group is now looking further ahead to see where there are ways in which this group can be more strategic and longer-term. Meetings will continue monthly as long as the group feel it to be useful and will continue to explore ways to support the sector, collaborate and partner to benefit all.