

# Reigate & Banstead Borough Council

## Leisure & culture strategy

## Foreword

*Introduction by Cllr Sachdeva*

## Our vision

**A borough with an inclusive and vibrant leisure and culture offering that is accessible to all, where everyone can participate in meaningful activities that enrich their lives, promote wellbeing and foster a sense of belonging**

### Introduction

This strategy sets out our vision for leisure and culture in the borough. Leisure and culture play a vital role in making Reigate & Banstead borough a prosperous, healthy and attractive place to live. Helping our residents lead healthy, active and fulfilling lives is a top priority for the Council, as set out in our corporate plan (Reigate & Banstead 2025).<sup>1</sup>

As a public body, the Council plays a unique role in the leisure and culture sector within our borough. We provide quality, diverse and accessible services. This includes include parks and countryside, sports pitches, allotments, the Harlequin Theatre and Cinema and three leisure centres.

Whilst wide ranging, at their core our leisure and culture services support people to lead healthy and active lives, and participate in their local communities, and are therefore integral to the delivery of the vision set out above.

We recognise, however, that the Council can only do so much, particularly as we hold few statutory responsibilities to provide leisure and cultural services. As well as sustainably delivering our own services, we must also play the crucial role of enabling, supporting and promoting the borough's leisure and cultural life. Through partnerships with other providers, we are able to achieve far more for our residents. Collaboration fosters a strong sense of community ownership, helping to promote a sustainable and resilient leisure and culture sector that meets the needs of our communities well into the future.

We are adopting this new strategy from a position of strength. Our services are well used, highly valued by residents and visitors and are at the heart of our communities. We have built strong relationships with voluntary and community sector organisations, as well as local sports and arts and cultural organisations, and are able to capitalise on these partnerships to enrich the borough's leisure and cultural offering.

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<sup>1</sup> Available here: [https://www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/info/20205/plans\\_and\\_policies/280/reigate\\_and\\_banstead\\_2025](https://www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/info/20205/plans_and_policies/280/reigate_and_banstead_2025)

Despite our current strong position, we face a number of challenges and, as a result, there is much for us to do. The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the leisure and culture industry, whilst the current period of economic difficulty continues to threaten its ongoing viability.

The Council is itself in a period of financial challenge due to the current adverse economic conditions as well as the difficult local government funding context. We must be financially efficient and self-sustaining, ensuring that we achieve the best possible value from our services and spending whilst continuing to deliver on our residents' priorities and corporate plan objectives.

Despite these challenges, we are committed to providing a high-quality and appropriate range of leisure and culture services, recognising that in some instances these may need to be delivered differently in the future to ensure their ongoing viability and in balance with other corporate objectives.

We therefore see our role as complementing that of the private and voluntary sectors – we will use our resources and assets to deliver services that our residents value, but which the private or voluntary sectors are unable to deliver at an affordable price, or at all. A mixed economy of leisure and cultural service providers is key to enabling the leisure and cultural sector in our borough to thrive.

### About our strategy

The leisure and culture strategy provides a strategic framework for the achievement of our vision and objectives. It sets out the wider context, including the challenges and opportunities we face as a borough and our role as a local authority in the leisure and cultural sector.

This strategy sets out an expansive definition of leisure and culture. We recognise that leisure and cultural opportunities transcend organisational structures and boundaries. The strategy extends across a number of service areas, many of which do not sit within the leisure and culture portfolio, and also recognises the importance of external partnership and collaboration.

## What do we mean by leisure and culture?

Leisure refers to activities that provide enjoyment. It is what people choose to do with their free time. This definition includes a wide variety of activities, though particularly focuses on those activities that are done with the primary intention of enjoyment and the enrichment of life, such as physical exercise.

Culture describes the collective patterns of behaviour of groups of people. It exists in physical, material forms as well as within collective memories and consciousness that evolve over time. In the context of our strategy, culture may be thought of as a particular type of leisure activity and is similarly wide in scope. Various areas of human activity focus on expressing the cultural aspects of our lives. These include, but are not limited to, arts and historical collections and exhibitions, music, food and drink, dance, literature, the theatre, spiritual or religious activities, as well as secular rituals and ceremonies.

## Benefits of supporting local leisure and cultural services

### Physical health

Health and wellbeing outcomes of individuals and communities are influenced by the complex interaction between individual characteristics, lifestyle choices and behaviours, as well as the physical, social and economic environment. Taken together these factors are known as the 'wider determinants' of health.

Leisure and cultural activities help influence health outcomes by affording opportunities for people to be active and heighten their physical and mental health.

It is well established, for instance, that regular physical activity significantly improves healthy life expectancy and lowers the risk of early death.<sup>1</sup> To stay healthy, people should be active daily and should do at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week. However, on this measure, 18% of the borough's adult population are classed as physically inactive; the figure for children is 49%.<sup>2</sup>

Even relatively small increases in physical activity result in marked health benefits. A daily brisk walk, for example, significantly reduces the risk of heart disease, strokes and diabetes as well as other cardiovascular conditions.

## **Mental health**

Physical activity also boosts mental health, with research showing that regular physical exercise improves self-esteem, mood, sleep quality and energy, as well as reducing the risk of stress, anxiety, clinical depression, dementia and Alzheimer's disease.<sup>3</sup> Physical activity has also been shown to reduce loneliness and social isolation, as well as improving social functioning.<sup>4</sup>

As we age the benefits of regular physical exercise become more acute. For instance, muscular strength, bone health and the ability to balance are all developed and maintained through physical exercise and activity. They underpin physical function and help maintain independence and reduce the risk of falls.<sup>5</sup> Older people are also especially vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation, which can have a serious effect on health.

There is also a growing evidence base that demonstrates the effectiveness of cultural services in promoting health and wellbeing.<sup>6</sup> Attending a theatre production, watching a film or visiting an art gallery result in marked benefits on an individual's wellbeing and feelings of personal fulfilment.

## **Community and economic benefits**

Leisure and cultural opportunities also promote community understanding and cohesion, combat isolation, foster a sense of belonging and attachment to place. Indeed, culture may be viewed as the glue that brings and keeps our communities together. It helps create welcoming, distinctive and attractive places and communities, builds trust, cohesiveness and, ultimately, improves the health and wellbeing of participants.

The economic benefits of leisure and culture are also significant. Indeed, leisure and culture drives spending, employment and investment in local areas. A critical mass of cultural excellence also has significant place shaping benefits, with an area becoming known for its cultural output. This, in turn, helps drive further investment and other economic benefits.

Leisure and culture activities are therefore integral to the lives of our residents and the vibrancy of our communities. They help make the borough a healthy and prosperous place to live.

## Our role and objectives

### Where we are now

The Council recognises the importance of leisure and cultural opportunities to the health and wellbeing of our residents and life in the borough. That's why we maintain a diverse range of leisure and cultural services and facilities.

Our services and facilities are vital community assets and form an important part of the fabric of our towns and villages. They are well used and highly valued by our residents and visitors, allowing them to engage in a wide variety of activities that enrich their lives, help them stay healthy and provide enjoyment. They are affordable and accessible, with many subsidised. This subsidy helps to drive participation and engagement and also helps us to achieve positive outcomes for our residents and communities.

Our services include:

- **Leisure centres** – we own three leisure centres within the borough (in Tadworth, Redhill and Horley), operated on our behalf by an external organisation. Each centre provides a range of sports and fitness facilities, including gyms, heated swimming pools and space for exercise classes. In 2022 our three centres had over 1 million combined visits.
- **The Harlequin Theatre and Cinema** – serves as a cultural hub and provides a rich programme of arts and entertainment in the heart of Redhill, as well as hireable meeting and conferencing facilities. The venue also hosts important civic and municipal occasions.
- **Community centres** – our three in-house centres in Banstead, Horley and Woodhatch serve as focal points for our communities and play an important role in their health and wellbeing. The centres offer a wide range of free or low-cost activities across five core themes: arts and leisure, children's activities, fitness and exercise, welfare and technological support. They also provide valuable hire space for community use, allowing local civic and community groups to operate.
- **Parks and greenspaces** – the Council owns and maintains more than 70 parks and greenspaces within the borough, as well as over 1,250 hectares of countryside. Our parks and greenspaces help people stay active by affording them the opportunity to take exercise outdoors, which has clear physical and mental health benefits. Our parks and greenspaces are also used for cultural events and activities, including

outdoor cinema, theatre and food and drink festivals. Our urban parks help drive footfall to our towns and support the local visitor economy.

- **Outdoor activities** – there are over 40 Council maintained outdoor activity areas in the borough, including children’s playgrounds, tennis courts, bookable sports pitches, skate parks and a BMX track.
- **Allotments** – we manage over 1,200 allotments in the borough. Tending an allotment has clear benefits for physical and mental wellbeing, whilst also providing a source of fresh, seasonal fruit and vegetables.
- **Leisure activities** – there is an established link between being physically active as a child and health outcomes later in life. Given this, the Council’s in-house leisure team ensure that there are a wide range of sporting opportunities available for young people in the borough. These activities utilise our extensive leisure and cultural asset base and include holiday activities (R&BE Active), the Surrey Youth Games and Star for a Night, amongst several others.
- **Partnerships** – we work collaboratively with a number of other aligned organisations to advance the health and wellbeing of our residents. For instance, we host an Arts Officer for Health post, funded by NHS Surrey Heartlands, that will work to use cultural services to improve health outcomes.

We also work in partnership with local organisations and other local authorities in the delivery of two Wellbeing Prescription services in the borough. These services help people lead healthier lives by providing advice and signposting to services that will support their health and wellbeing.

Some of our key leisure and cultural assets, whilst owned by the Council, are managed by community groups with the Council’s support. This includes the historically significant Banstead Commons and Reigate Caves. We also work closely with local residents and groups in the management of our greenspaces, including Reigate Heath and Earlswood and Redhill Commons.



## Challenges

The ongoing sustainability of the Council's leisure and cultural services are key to supporting the health of our residents and communities.

However, the industry has recently faced a period of prolonged challenge. The Covid-19 pandemic upended normal life and had a significant impact on the sector, with many facilities required to close as part of the emergency public health response. The lost income, coupled with the high fixed costs of operating facilities such as leisure centres, left many operators in a tough financial position. The Council stepped in to support the operator of our three centres, meaning that when restrictions were lifted they swiftly reopened for the benefit of the borough.

Whilst the sector has generally recovered strongly, the current high inflationary environment and cost of living crisis has created new challenges to overcome. For instance, energy prices have dramatically increased, impacting the financial viability of leisure centres as high users of energy. Many of our residents will also now have reduced levels of disposable income, in turn reducing the money they have to spend on leisure and cultural activities.

The pandemic also substantially changed behaviours and preferences, many of which remain. For example, online exercise classes soared in popularity, whilst parks and greenspaces offered solace and a new arena for exploration and structured and unstructured exercise. Wider societal trends also point to people becoming increasingly health conscious, though services and facilities must accommodate changing needs and wants to remain relevant.

As well as these structural, industry wide challenges, our society also faces a number of health and wellbeing issues that, as we have seen, leisure and cultural services can help address.

In Reigate & Banstead, for instance:

- 18% of adults and 49% of children and young people are physically inactive.<sup>7</sup>
- Just 45% of the adult population walk at least three times per week,<sup>8</sup> whilst just 5% of the adult population cycle at least three times per week.<sup>9</sup>
- 61% of adults are classified as being overweight or obese.<sup>10</sup>
- 29% of children are overweight or obese at year 6.<sup>11</sup>

- Just 44% of adults do at least 2 activities per week that develops or maintain muscle strength.<sup>12</sup>
- 28% of the borough's population report feeling lonely at least some of the time.<sup>13</sup>
- It was estimated in 2017 that 15,155 of the borough's population aged over 16 has a common mental health problem, such as anxiety, stress and depression.<sup>14</sup>
- According to the 2021 census, 18% of the borough's population is aged over 65. By 2043 the number of residents aged over 65 is forecast to grow by 45%, compared to the 2020 baseline.<sup>15</sup>

## The role of the Council

As a local authority, we play a pivotal role in the leisure and cultural life within Reigate and Banstead. Our corporate plan (Reigate & Banstead 2025) commits us to using our leisure and cultural services and assets to support our residents to improve their health and wellbeing, whilst also committing to provide services that are accessible and meet peoples' needs.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the current adverse economic conditions have had a significant impact on the leisure and cultural sector, in some instances threatening its ongoing economic viability.

Our role, however, requires us to look beyond a purely financial motive and to also focus on the health and wellbeing of our residents. Our services are diverse in their range and scale, and we are uniquely placed to support our residents to lead healthy and active lives. We provide services and facilities that our residents rely on and which the private sector invariably does not deliver.

However, the Council is currently facing a period of sustained financial challenge due to the current adverse economic conditions as well as the difficult local government funding context. We must be financially efficient and self-sustaining, ensuring that we achieve the best possible value for money from our services and spending whilst continuing to deliver on our residents' priorities and wider corporate plan objectives.

As such, while we have no desire to limit or reduce the leisure and cultural offer in our borough, we must look at how we can do things differently to continue to achieve good outcomes for our residents and communities and to help tackle the challenges we collectively face.

We also recognise that the Council can and should only do so much, particularly as we hold few statutory responsibilities to provide leisure and cultural services and receive no government funding to do so. We see our role as complementing the services delivered by the private and voluntary sectors. We will therefore use our resources and assets to deliver services that our residents value, but which the private or voluntary sectors are unable to deliver at an affordable price, or at all.

A mixed economy of leisure and cultural service providers is key to achieving a sustainable sector within the borough. We see ourselves as having a key role in fostering this mixed economy.

We will therefore continue to develop partnerships and work collaboratively with leisure and culture organisations in the borough, supporting them to enrich the borough's leisure and cultural life. We will do so through using our unique role, position and connection with our residents, supporting and promoting local organisations and helping them to thrive. Partnerships and collaboration allow us to achieve far more for our residents, whilst fostering a strong sense of community ownership and helping to promote a resilient and sustainable sector that delivers on community need well into the future.

## Our objectives

In pursuit of our vision for this strategy we have set ourselves four core objectives. Our objectives should be viewed together as they interrelate and mutually reinforce one another. Each objective is supported by a series of outcomes that we will seek to achieve through our service delivery and partnership activities, and which we will use to inform our more detailed business plans.

### Objective 1: Inspire and encourage residents to lead healthy and active lives

Being active leads to improved health outcomes, including preventing poor physical and mental health. We will continue to provide and promote a vibrant range of services and opportunities that support our residents to lead healthy and active lives, whilst also promoting other opportunities delivered by our partners. We recognise that health outcomes are often unequal and so we will use our services to help reduce health inequalities through targeting particular groups where evidence and insight suggests this is appropriate and will be effective.

#### Outcomes:

- Increased levels of participation in leisure and cultural activity across the borough, utilising our leisure assets and services to drive participation.
- Elevated prominence and use of the Harlequin Theatre and Cinema, with the venue and its programme of events creating an enduring affinity for the arts among patrons.
- Increased and wider use of our parks and greenspaces for leisure and cultural activity, as well as for play and sport.
- Greater resident awareness of the Council's leisure and cultural services as well as the benefits of being active.

### Objective 2: Provide sustainable services that are accessible to, and meet the needs of, our communities and visitors

We are committed to putting the needs of our residents and visitors at the heart of what we do. Behaviours and preferences continually shift, and we must embrace change to remain relevant and to provide the services that people value. We will review and design services to ensure that they are delivered in a sustainable way, and that they meet current and future needs and increase accessibility, participation and inclusivity. We will explore implementing new delivery models where doing so will result in clear benefits.

### Outcomes:

- A greater understanding of the needs of our residents and visitors and how these are likely to change, using this insight to ensure that Council services are delivered at levels appropriate to need and demand and within the budget available.
- A well-balanced leisure and cultural asset base that is fit for purpose and receives appropriate levels of investment and ongoing maintenance.
- High levels of resident and customer satisfaction with our services, those delivered through our assets and with those provided on the Council's behalf.
- The removal of barriers to participation so that everyone in the borough can access a full range of facilities and information to help them lead a healthy and active life.
- A leisure and cultural landscape that promotes and celebrates equality, the borough's diversity of people and cultures, communities and places, as well as its rich history.

### **Objective 3: Act as a leisure and cultural facilitator and convenor, drawing together and promoting the borough's rich array of activity and helping it to thrive**

We are proud of the high-quality services that we provide. However, our services are only part of the picture. We see ourselves as playing a vital supporting and enabling role within the borough's leisure and cultural life. This means that we will use our assets, resources and programmes to support and promote external organisations and community groups. Our partnerships will help foster community ownership and will sow the seeds for a rich leisure and culture landscape within the borough. This will also have significant place-making benefits, with the borough and our communities known for their leisure and cultural offering and output, and with the Council recognised as supporting this.

### Outcomes:

- A sustainable, mixed economy of providers of leisure and cultural activity that work together and with the Council to heighten activity and participation.
- Our assets used to deliver events and services by organisations aligned with our leisure and culture objectives.
- Close partnership with external leisure and cultural organisations and community groups to help them thrive and grow.
- A borough-wide leisure and culture map that helps residents discover activities and services that support their health and wellbeing.

#### **Objective 4: Achieving a financially sustainable leisure and culture service**

Our financial challenges arising from the current economic situation and the difficult local government funding context require us to increase income, achieve savings and to be responsible with our finances. We recognise that many of our services would not be viable in the highly competitive marketplace without subsidy, notwithstanding their significant benefits for our residents and communities. Whilst the Council's role as a public body requires us to look beyond profit and to focus on the health and wellbeing of our residents, we are not immune to economic pressures. We will therefore pursue a balanced approach to our leisure and culture services, with a focus on driving maximum value from our spending and income generation opportunities, whilst still supporting and delivering initiatives that are less commercially viable to benefit our residents.

#### **Outcomes:**

- Income generated covering the costs of services we provide.
- The prioritisation of our resources in areas of most need and on initiatives and services that have the greatest impact.
- Increased use of external grant funding to support the delivery of Council services, as well as those provided by the voluntary and community sector.
- Increased commercial events and bookings using Council assets to help subsidise the delivery of non-commercial initiatives.
- Where appropriate, the introduction of new, innovative delivery models for services that save money and/or increase income.

## Commitments

In accordance with our corporate plan (Reigate & Banstead 2025), we recognise that in delivering services, it's not just about what we do, but also about how we do it.

In achieving our leisure and culture objectives, we commit to:

- **Clear and effective communication** – we will use our communications resources and assets to raise awareness of the leisure and cultural opportunities we provide, as well as those provided by our partners. Raising awareness of leisure and cultural opportunities will support the sector and help it to flourish.
- **Putting residents and other customers at the heart of what we do** – our services will only be viable and sustainable if they reflect resident and customer need. We will therefore ensure that the needs of our residents and customers are at the heart of our decision-making through ensuring that we consult and engage, as well as use robust data to inform our decisions. We will use our leisure and cultural services to promote and further equality, diversity and inclusion.
- **Environmental responsibility** – our leisure and cultural assets and services have a key role to play in achieving the Council's environmental sustainability objectives. When investing in facilities or designing services we will ensure that environmental considerations are at the forefront of decision-making and positively contribute to reducing the Council's impact on the environment.
- **Partnership working** – we cannot deliver our vision alone. We will continue to develop effective and supportive partnerships with local leisure and cultural groups, which will enhance leisure and cultural opportunities in the borough.
- **Responsible use of data** – we will use insight from data to design and deliver our services in the most efficient and effective way.
- **Financial efficiency** – being financially efficient is crucial to achieving sustainable and economically viable leisure and cultural services. We will ensure we maximise our income and the value for money from our expenditure. We will achieve savings in a balanced and proportionate way while maintaining the services that benefit our residents.

## Implementing our strategy

Our strategy defines our vision for leisure and culture in the borough, as well as what we are aiming to achieve in the delivery of our services. Whilst the strategy sets out these high-level aspirations, it will be underpinned by detailed implementation plans that together will show how we will deliver on our identified outcomes.

The implementation of the strategy is wider than the Leisure and Culture portfolio and will involve multiple service areas. The plans for its implementation may take several different forms. They may be stand alone or may form part of wider service delivery or business plans. Developed in consultation with relevant Executive members, implementation plans will identify actions, roles and responsibilities, delivery partners and funding mechanisms as appropriate as well as – where relevant – specific performance indicators.

We will report on our performance and progress annually.



## References

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