

Briefing Note: UK Town of Culture 2028 Competition

To: Town Councils

From: Sandra Farnell, Programme Manager, Policy Team

Date: 9 December 2025

Subject: Exploring a Pendle Bid for UK Town of Culture 2028

1. Purpose of Report

To inform Town Councils of the launch of the UK Town of Culture 2028 competition.

2. Background

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) have launched the new UK Town of Culture 2028 competition, designed to celebrate and invest in the cultural identity of small and medium-sized towns.

The winning town will receive £3.5 million to deliver a cultural programme during summer 2028. The shortlisted towns will each receive £36,000 to develop full bids.

Applications will be judged on three main criteria:

- Your Story – the unique identity of the town and what makes it special.
- Culture for Everyone – how the programme will engage and represent all communities.
- Making it Happen – how the town will plan, fund, and deliver the cultural programme.

The competition builds on the success of the UK City of Culture programme, which has demonstrated substantial local benefits and supports the government's Plan for Change mission to break down barriers to opportunity, driving local economic growth and create jobs.

3. Eligibility

- Towns in the UK with populations of 75,000 or less
- Local authorities, town councils, or partnerships can apply.
- A single accountable organisation must be specified as the Lead applicants for communication purposes.
- Must demonstrate capacity to deliver a summer 2028 cultural programme.

Applications for Town of Culture 2028 will open shortly

4. Alignment with the Pendle Council Plan (2025–2028)

A Town of Culture bid would make a strong contribution to the Council’s strategic priorities:

Priority 2: Proud and Connected Communities and Places

- Encourage civic pride and community cohesion through accessible cultural activity.
- Supports delivery of the Community Cohesion Strategy

Priority 3: Good Growth

- Increased town centre use and economic regeneration.

Priority 4: Housing and Healthy Communities

- Supporting delivery of the Arts and Culture Strategy by celebrating Pendle’s creativity.

5. Context – Burnley’s Year of Culture 2027

Burnley’s Year of Culture 2027 provides a strong model of how a local authority can use culture to deliver social, economic, and reputational benefits. Led by Burnley Leisure & Culture, the programme aims to boost local pride, increase participation, and reshape the town’s cultural landscape.

Key aspects of Burnley’s approach include:

- Community involvement: Recruiting local “*Culture Makers*” from different neighbourhoods to help design events that reflect local identity.
- Investment and partnerships: Securing funding for cultural buildings, artists, and community-led programmes.
- Cultural development: Expanding opportunities in theatre, music, film, and public art to engage a wider audience.
- Health and wellbeing focus: Promoting the wellbeing and social benefits of culture, making it more accessible for all.
- Legacy creation: Ensuring long-term impact and new opportunities for the town beyond 2027.
- Changing perceptions: Using culture as a way to promote Burnley as a vibrant, creative, and inclusive place.

This model demonstrates how cultural investment can deliver far-reaching benefits and could help guide Pendle’s approach to developing its own bid.

6. Opportunity for Pendle

Pendle has several towns with strong cultural identities and regeneration potential. A bid could:

- Showcase heritage and creativity.
- Build on existing cultural assets and events.
- Strengthen place branding and economic growth.

7. Proposed Next Steps

To progress this opportunity, Pendle Borough Council could approach the Town Councils to gauge interest and willingness to lead a project.