

**UK TOWN OF CULTURE 2028 COMPETITION**

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**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to request Council approval to proceed with an Expression of Interest (EOI) for the UK Town of Culture 2028 Competition and to enter the Isle of Bute as our submission.
- 1.2 The UK Town of Culture 2028 Competition is a new initiative launched by the UK Government and aims to build a more socially cohesive country where communities feel proud of their place and empowered to celebrate it. It is an opportunity for places and communities to use culture and creativity to tell their story of why they are proud of their community and leave a lasting legacy of social and cultural change.
- 1.3 Officers have considered the ambitions, criteria and deliverability of the competition and which town might best fit with both these and the required deadlines and are proposing the Isle of Bute as our submission.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Council approve the submission of an Expression of Interest (EOI) for the UK Town of Culture Competition 2028, agreeing that the Isle of Bute will be the proposed submission and that Officers will work with Rothesay Pavilion Charity Trust to develop and submit the EOI.

**3.0 DETAIL**

- 3.1 The UK Government is inviting towns (this can include town clusters or islands) across the UK to enter the competition. There will be three categories of winners, small (less than 20,000) medium (20,000-75,000) and large (over 75,000). Any Argyll and Bute entry will fit in the small category of less than 20,000 people. A link to the information is here [UK Town of Culture 2028 Expression of Interest: Guidance for bidders - GOV.UK](#).
- 3.2 A total prize fund of £3.5 million is available. Following EOI stage, shortlisted towns will receive £60,000 to develop a full bid. Three finalists will then be selected, with the overall 2028 winner receiving £3 million and the remaining two finalists each receiving £250,000. There is also significant social, publicity and

tourism benefits from being shortlisted.

- 3.3 EOIs should demonstrate the capacity for a town to successfully manage, fund and deliver a programme and partnerships over a period of six months in 2028. Delivery needs to be made on a partnership basis and must include the local authority, however the local authority does not need to be the lead applicant and officers, given resourcing, would wish to partner with an organisation that has the capacity to submit the EOI.
- 3.4 In addition, the EOI asks how the proposed culture programme builds on, or prepares for, other funds and initiatives as well as how it is integrated into wider local and regional inclusive growth plans. This means that at EOI stage officers will need to consider which other funds to apply for, and which funds may already be programmed that can add value to any proposal. It may be possible to consider the use of Place Based Investment, or Crown Estate Funding however it is recognised that this would also require further Council approval.
- 3.5 This is a two stage competition, with shortlisted towns awarded funding of £60k to develop a full proposal. The timescale for the competition is detailed below and officers would be required to work with an organisation to outline a cultural programme, demonstrate need, and agree on governance prior to submitting an EOI by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026.

<b>What</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
<b>EOI Deadline</b>	<b>31<sup>st</sup> March 2026</b>
Shortlist announcement	Spring 2026
Full application period	Spring – Autumn 2026
Panel visits	Autumn 2026
Delivery period	6 months in 2028

- 3.6 Argyll and Bute has five main towns that could all be worthy contenders for the 2028 Town of Culture Competition. Whilst all or our towns have their own individual merits it is considered at this time that the Isle of Bute affords the best opportunity for achieving the 2028 Town of Culture in this round of funding.
- 3.7 Officers have considered the ambitions of the fund and whether there would be an appropriate town that might both fit with these ambitions and the required deadlines. In addition, officers have also considered the resource requirement for submitting a bid, and for this reason have concluded that there needs to be an existing cultural body in place who would be able and willing to consider taking on a substantive role in both developing a bid and facilitating a programme of delivery. For these reasons officers have concluded that the best fit would be the Isle of Bute, with the Rothesay Pavilion Charity ideally positioned to deliver this working with other stakeholders as appropriate including local community representatives and bodies such as the Mount Stuart Trust.

3.8 In addition to this the Isle of Bute can offer the following:

- I. Priority area within the Argyll and Bute Economic Strategy 2024-2034 Action Plan to increase the population and drive economic growth.
- II. Opening of the Rothesay Pavilion in 2027 as a key cultural venue.
- III. A rich cultural heritage over 5,500 years with key venues such as Rothesay Castle, the Winter Gardens, Bute Yard, and Mount Stuart amongst others.
- IV. Significant number of festivals and events such as ButeFest, Isle of Bute Jazz Festival, Bute Noir, Bute Annual Highland Games and Agricultural Show, Pride and others.
- V. Growing number of creative people living and working on Bute.
- VI. Key anchor organisations such as Bute BID and many other community organisations with an interest in cultural activity.
- VII. Potential community ownership of the Winter Gardens
- VIII. Availability of multiple venues such as the Pavilion, Bute Yard, Mount Stuart, Secondary School etc.

### **Current Position**

3.9 Initial talks have taken place with the Rothesay Pavilion Charity who have confirmed their interest in supporting a bid in partnership with the Council and local stakeholders. If approval is given by Council, officers will enter discussions to consider and hopefully agree scope, governance and resourcing. It is intended to approach other key partners on the island to collaborate on the bid as appropriate.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

4.1 The UK Government have launched a new UK Town of Culture 2028 Competition which presents an opportunity for the Council to bid for funding with associated socio economic benefits. Given both the criteria and the considerable resources required to submit an EOI, it is proposed that the Isle of Bute is best placed to represent Argyll and Bute. This would include the council working with Rothesay Pavilion Charity and other key partners to submit an EOI however without a partner organisation, officers do not have the resources to do this alone.

## **5.0 IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Policy – None.

5.2 Financial – None currently however there may be a requirement for funding. This might be accessed from external funds and subject to a separate approval process. Should the EOI be successful £60k will be awarded by UK Government for shortlisted towns.

- 5.3 Legal – None at this stage however a partnership agreement or similar will be required and this will be considered as part of the EOI.
- 5.4 HR – Resource will be required to manage this process however this is currently managed from existing staff.
- 5.5 Customer Service: None.
- 5.6 Risk: Risk is that if Argyll and Bute does not submit an EOI then the opportunity for funding and publicity will be lost. It should be noted that this will be a highly competitive process with no guarantee for success. However, even entering this competition could help raise the profile of Argyll and Bute as a destination.
- 5.7 Climate Change: This will be considered as part of the EOI.
- 5.8 Fairer Scotland Duty – None.
- 5.9 Equalities – Protected characteristics: This will be considered as part of the EOI.
- 5.10 Consumer Duty – This will be considered as part of the EOI.
- 5.11 Island Communities – This provides a cultural and socio-economic opportunity for the Isle of Bute.
- 5.12 Children’s Rights and Wellbeing – Will be considered as part of the EOI.

**Kirsty Flanagan, Executive Director with overall responsibility for Development and Economic Growth**

9<sup>th</sup> February 2026

**Councillor Math Campbell-Sturgess, Policy Lead for Business Development**

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## **APPENDICES**

None