



# Briefing Note – UK Town of Culture

**Date** 26 January 2026  
**Prepared by** Town Clerk

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The UK Town of Culture competition was launched by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on 30 October 2025 as a companion to the long-running UK City of Culture programme. Its purpose is to:
  - Celebrate the cultural identity of towns across the UK
  - Boost local pride and community cohesion
  - Drive economic growth through cultural investment
  - Support the government’s “Plan for Change” mission to expand opportunity and revitalise towns
- 1.2. The first title to be awarded for 2028.
- 1.3. The competition is open to any town without city status, regardless of governance structure. This includes towns governed by:
  - Unitary authorities
  - District councils
  - Town councils
  - Parish councils (where the parish is coterminous with a town)
- 1.4. Sandown is currently at a crossroads, facing significant economic decline and dereliction. The UK Town of Culture 2028 competition offers a unique, nationally-funded platform to reverse this narrative.
- 1.5. By leveraging our unique heritage, from Darwin and Carroll to our Biosphere in the Bay status, it presents the opportunity to secure the investment needed to begin transforming the town.

## 2. LEGISLATION

- 2.1. The Town Council holds General Power of Competence as provided by the Localism Act 2011 (Chapter 1, Sections 1 – 8)<sup>1 2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Localism Act 2011 - Explanatory Notes](#)

<sup>2</sup> [The Parish Councils \(General Power of Competence\) \(Prescribed Conditions\) Order 2012](#)

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1. There is no application fee charged by DCMS.

3.2. Typical local costs for the Council would be internal and could include:

- Staff time to prepare the EOI
- Consultation and community engagement
- Commissioning cultural partners or bid writers
- Developing the full bid (if longlisted)

3.3. However, longlisted towns receive £60,000 specifically to support bid development, which offsets most major costs.

3.4. The financial benefits are as follows:

- The Winner will receive £3 million to deliver a cultural programme in 2028
- Two runners-up: £250,000 each
- Other strong bids: £60,000 development funding

Sources:

### **4. APPLICATION PROCESS.**

4.1. The deadline for Expressions of Interest (EOI) is open until 31 March 2026 for the 2028 title.

4.2. The Expression of Interest should outline the towns cultural vision, story, and proposed programme.

4.3. Strong EOIs are longlisted.

4.4. Each longlisted town receives £60,000 to develop a full bids

4.5. Three finalists are selected during Short Listing:

- One small town (<20,000 population)
- One medium town (20,000–75,000)
- One large town (>75,000)

4.6. Sandown qualifies for the Small Town category and a guaranteed spotlight on our specific coastal challenges.

4.7. The Criteria for judging includes:

- Your Story – the town’s unique narrative
- Culture for Everyone – inclusivity and community reach
- Making It Happen – deliverability and operational planning

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (i) THAT Council formally approve the submission of an Expression of Interest (EOI) for the UK Town of Culture 2028 competition before the March 31st deadline.
- (ii) THAT Council act as the "Accountable Body" for the bid, providing the necessary local authority partnership required by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).
- (iii) THAT Council endorse the formation of a dedicated bid partnership comprising local cultural, scientific, and community leaders to lead on the vision and content of the EOI.
- (iv) THAT Council nominate two Council representatives to sit on the steering group to ensure alignment with the Council's existing regeneration and dereliction surveys.