

West of England (Perma)Cultural Plan

An alternative produced by Bristol's
grassroots creative community

Introduction

As producers and consumers of art, culture and creativity, and as residents of the West of England making work with and for local communities and audiences, we believe the grassroots creative sector must play a central role in planning the region's future to ensure the sector and the cultural experiences it creates are inclusive, equitable, and impactful.

This document reflects that vision and practical policies to begin to make it a reality.

In this Plan, you will find:

A Vision for the region outlined in six Emblems that describe the strengths and values of arts, culture and creativity

Four Priority Areas and actions to support us to deliver against them

An Evaluation Matrix to assess our progress and ensure our activity aligns with our Vision and Priority Areas

Appendix: **A Creative Sector response** to the region's previous (2022) cultural plan.

DESIGNING THIS PLAN: THE PROCESS

Over two and a half years, between 2023 and 2025, over 50 creative practitioners participated in seven intensive research workshops hosted by the Fair Creative Economies (FaCE) project. FaCE is part of the £30million MyWorld creative technology programme in the West of England region.

The FaCE project has building knowledge, capacity, and critical mass around 'alternative' and 'diverse' economies at its heart. It is primarily concerned with artists, creative freelancers, and small organisations that produce culture.

The workshops helped us to describe the existing values, practices, and metrics that the current systems that support the creative economy prioritise and make visible. We then asked what are the things that make it hard to do the work you want to do and be paid appropriately to do it? The workshops showed the ways that creatives are almost always working in the cracks, glitches, and invisible spaces of that system and looked at how the labour that happens there might be better supported and valued. Finally, the workshops have reimaged how the system could be transformed to be more equitable and better support thriving cultural communities.

In the final two workshops, FaCE workshop participants reviewed the West of England's publicly available Cultural Plan at that time (published 2022) and thought about its relevance to their own lived experience as creative producers and audiences. A summary of this can be found in the Appendix at the end of this document. They also reviewed four examples of 'alternative metrics' evident in policy documents: Wales' Wellbeing of Future Generations; The Centre for Thriving Places' Thriving Places Index; Carnegie UK's SEED model (Social, Economic, Environmental and Democratic Wellbeing) and Bristol (Mayoral) OneCity's use of UN Sustainable Development goals. They interrogated the role that arts and culture played in these metrics and considered where it could be additionally incorporated.

This alternative Cultural Plan is the culmination of all that thinking and marks a starting point for working towards that vision. It has not been designed to offer detail about how this work might be financed because we asked workshop participants to imagine beyond current financial constraints, although some suggestions are made. The Plan summarises the policies and practices that our creatives felt would stimulate grassroots culture so that we can begin to collectively decide how it might be delivered.

This plan offers an 'alternative' in several respects. It is an alternative to the usual modes of top-down consultation with the creative sector that feed into this type of plan across the UK, due to its sustained, collective thinking. It is also alternative in that it is a bottomup reflection of the needs and desires of a sub-section of Bristol's creative community who, in some respects, are themselves alternative to

mainstream visions of what the creative sector 'should' look like. They work across different types of community and creative work; they prioritise stability and wellbeing over growth and profit.

WECA have since published the first ever citizen-led Cultural Plan (2026); a version of this document was submitted and accepted as evidence from the sector for citizens to consider in the assemblies that were used to co-create the region's new Plan. This document provides a companion to WECA's plan because it offers many tangible, practical mechanisms and ideas to deliver the many shared ideas outlined in both plans. It also builds on the values-based backdrop driving both plans.

The following Vision statement is the result of multiple conversations that happened across FaCE workshops and the themes that emerged as the most important to the participants: community, stability, belonging, empathy, playfulness, human connection and equality of opportunity.

Vision

Our vision is led by six core approaches which will allow us to build a vision of a future where arts, culture and creativity are embedded, equitable, and their role and strengths are valued in the West of England region. These are represented by six emblems. They underpin the Priority Areas we outline on page 18 and are essential in enabling this vision to flourish through the actions we take. Each emblem sets out a series of questions to address in ongoing and new activity we initiate in the West of England Region.

The six symbolic emblems are:

- **The Three Sisters** stands for centring the margins and supporting the whole.
- **The Tortoise** represents slow growth, stability and indigenous wisdom.
- **The Open Hearth** stands for the role of arts and culture in civic life and inclusive public spaces.
- **The Flowing River** symbolises the importance of empathy and emotion in creative practice and experiences.
- **The Compass** stands for the willingness to change whilst keeping a true course to our purpose and values.
- **The Jester** captures the fundamental role of play and adventure in nourishing us, and art's capacity for social commentary and transformative knowledge.

The Three Sisters:

“mutual flourishing”

‘Three sisters’ companion planting originated with the indigenous peoples of the Americas. It refers to growing corn, beans and squash together. The corn grows upwards and provides a natural pole for the beans to climb. The beans then provide nitrogen to the soil and help fertilise the corn. The squash grows downwards and provides a natural, living mulch which helps the soil retain moisture and suppresses weeds. The cultural ecosystem in the West of England will function in the same interconnected and mutually supportive way, reflecting the interdependencies across places and parts of the sector. Our policies will support all parts to thrive.

We know there is a lot of invisible work and effort that happens to put on a theatre production or deliver a community arts project. While the ‘thing’ that becomes the end result is important, there is a whole host of other activity and people involved that make the ‘thing’ possible: rehearsal time and space, studio space, equipment hire, volunteers, babysitters, lift-givers, use of social media and local networks for promotion, and so on. This behind-the-scenes and often intangible value needs to be recognised in everything we commit to.

The three sisters are a foundational element of permaculture, a type of food growing that is sustainable and selfsufficient, following natural cycles. Margins are important because they represent high biodiversity, are where different ecosystems meet or overlap, function as windbreaks, and facilitate movement between parts of the system. They are often overlooked but are designed into permaculture because of these benefits. The margins of the West of England (demographic, geographical) have historically been overlooked in UK cultural policy, yet they are places of high diversity, creativity and innovation. Our policies now bring them into the centre.

To guide our decision-making, we will ask ourselves:

- Does the infrastructure, policy, funding and support we offer the creative sector recognise the interconnectedness of the system and support all parts to thrive?
- Are we sufficiently compensating for invisible work and helping cultural organisations and individuals to value this work financially?
- What 'companion' policies (e.g. health, public transport) might we need to ensure all parts of the ecosystem thrive and work together?
- Does this support, centre, utilise or overlook the 'margins'?

"if you think about a community's wellbeing, how do you measure a community's health, and creativity and culture being part of that?"

The Tortoise:

“sustainability through slow growth”

The tortoise famously won the race against the hare for being ‘slow and steady’. We envision a creative sector that can make long-term decisions because their financial situation and the support they receive is stable. ‘Slow growth’ is the new normal, recognising that creatives will feel more secure if they are able to employ or be employed within a steady team and receive a steady income. Our policies are forward-looking, favouring continuity which better enables ‘creative growth’ within the sector – where ‘growth’ is understood as ideas development and more thoughtful, measured business decisions.

The tortoise is also a symbol of ancient wisdom, intuition and ancestral memory in some cultures. Our cultural policies will respect and embed the established, indigenous community wisdom and cultures already present in the West of England and support and build on these. We do this through embracing community leaders – whether “elders” or young people – through grassroots methods of cultural decision-making.

To guide our decision-making, we will ask ourselves:

- Does this support the sector to build financial stability?
- Does this acknowledge and strengthen the existing cultural ecosystem?
- Have we sought to understand, represent and respond to the desires, heritage and knowledge of diverse communities in the region?

“you could go to community elders, in its most broad sense, so we were talking about wisdom holders or cultural representatives.”

The Open Hearth:

“community stewardship”

In our vision, artists and culture-makers function as storytellers: their job is to transmit, transform, and translate. Historically, storytellers shared local news and important information, supporting the civic life of local places.

Artists and culture-makers connect with their communities and neighbourhoods; they speak for them in places of power; they build and create public spaces, spaces of human connection, of democracy, belonging and dialogue. They are vital communicators, reflecting back complex ideas with new perspectives and bringing them to the hearth.

To guide our decision-making, we will ask ourselves:

- How can we grow a network of neighbourhood cultural ‘storytellers’ who build open hearths in communities through our policies?
- Are we effectively and meaningfully bringing this network of neighbourhood cultural ‘storytellers’ into our decision-making, opening up our own hearth?
- Where can public and civic spaces be created, supported and strengthened through engaging neighbourhood storytellers?
- Are our creative and cultural agendas centring belonging, connection and dialogue?

“the biggest thing right off the bat is that creativity and culture is just not included as its own target or goal. It’s merely tacked on as an enabler for everything else, and that’s despite the fact that creativity and culture is such a huge contributor to civic life, and it can contribute to all of the different targets that they’ve identified”

The Flowing Stream:

“emotion and connection”

Individuals and communities experience culture, arts, and creativity in multiple ways, some of which are hard to ‘pin down’: to exactly describe, measure rigorously and put a price on. This ‘intangible value’ is usually non-transactional and relational, related to how something makes people feel or connect with each other. Skills related to this like collaboration and diplomacy are often unrecognised or undervalued.

Artists and culture-makers are ‘empathy facilitators’. Our vision recognises that culture has the power to connect people, to increase their understanding and empathy towards those different from themselves, to make you feel something emotionally or spiritually (spirituality or faith is part of many people’s culture) or to provide a heightened experience outside of your normal emotions. We call this ‘cultural sustenance’ because it nourishes you, makes you feel good, and gives you ideas and energy. It can contribute to feelings of wellbeing and community, reducing loneliness and creating shared identities. These benefits can take time to come into effect and may be difficult to attribute solely to arts and culture.

“...the reason why we actually engage with culture, you know, you don’t go to a show thinking, I’m really excited to engage with a key cultural asset. Like, I want to be moved, I want to connect with other people, and I want to like, either see my experience reflected in art, or have my thoughts challenged”

To guide our decision-making, we will ask ourselves:

- Do our funding and policies support cultural organisations to prioritise emotion, connection and spiritual experiences?
- Do our existing approaches support communities to make visible, articulate, and highlight their embedded cultural assets, creative skills, and practices in ways that strengthen them? Do we need new approaches?
- In what ways can we support cultural organisations and community groups to develop measures of success and ways of reporting their value more aligned to what is important to them and their audiences? How can we build credibility and importance around non-monetary factors?

The Compass:

“navigating change with strength and flexibility”

The compass is an emblem of our willingness to voyage and change. It represents exploration of the new and learning through better understanding of our places and communities. This does not mean that we do not value generational knowledge and our history; it simply means that we will ask ourselves whether we are choosing the same pathways and repeating the same mistakes. It means we are willing to try new ways and new things, including lesser chosen routes.

In our Vision, our arts, culture and creativity policies and initiatives always have fact-finding missions at their core, centring neighbourhoods, cultural diversity and civic life. The compass also helps us choose our direction in relation to our “true” or “due North”. In our vision, we will be steadfast to our purpose and underpin our decisions according to the values and priorities identified in this plan. We will support the West of England’s communities to sustain and foster their direction, using arts, culture and creativity to connect to cultural community and belonging.

“So, that could be a youth representative, or it could be a librarian, or somebody from Citizens Advice, or somebody from community centre, somebody who might have eyes and ears on the ground who could give you, from their perspective, what they feel the community is sort of saying and doing at that time. Or you could train and pay members of the community to act as community consultants”

To guide our decision-making, we will ask ourselves:

- Is this initiative or policy replicating a well-trodden path or traversing new terrain?
- Are we staying true to our direction: our purpose, values and commitment to cultural and community belonging?
- How can we build in fact-finding missions, to increase our knowledge, understanding and the opportunities we provide for the plural and multifaceted neighbourhoods and communities in the West of England?

The Jester:

“play and provocation”

In our Vision, the artist, creative facilitator or culture-maker fills two roles represented by the Jester.

The first is that of playfulness, joy, humour, freedom, beginnings, opportunity, adventurousness, and risk-taking. These are essential parts of a fulfilling human existence which arts, culture and creativity can encapsulate, foster and re-invigorate within us. Play gives us permission to let go, to step outside of our everyday worries and stresses, or to imagine worlds we wouldn't normally think possible.

The second is the capacity to speak truth to power, challenging authority and perceptions through the guise of humour, play and imagination. They are subversive and disruptive, even anarchic. In Europe, the court jester was an essential part of royal courts, entertaining through comedy, music, acrobatics and storytelling. They acted as a political commentator, criticising or offering a common-sense response to current events through satire. Arts, culture and creativity have this capacity for social commentary, truth-telling and transformative knowledge.

To guide our decision-making, we will ask ourselves:

- Are we challenging existing power structures or reinforcing them?
- Does this create space for joy, imagination, and experimentation?
- Does this sufficiently support artists to be free to say the awkward things, or do the difficult things, without fear of being punished, censored, or defunded?
- Are we supporting creative risk-taking equally across communities, or are some voices given more permission to be playful, experimental, or provocative than others?

DESIGNING THIS PLAN: THE WORKSHOPS

Workshop participants were invited to write their individual priorities for arts and culture in the West of England region on post-it notes and stuck them on the wall. We moved the post-its around until we had collated groups of similar themes. We then used 'dotmocracy' as a quick way to decide as a group which priorities best reflected the group. Each participant had four sticky dots to place next to the themes most important to them. They split into groups of four to think in more detail about what the four priority areas identified would look like.

"Putting ourselves in the shoes of West of England decision-makers, we lay out the following plan..."

Priority areas

We propose a Vision for the West of England that encompasses “mutual flourishing” (The Three Sisters), “sustainability through slow growth” (The Tortoise), “community stewardship” (The Open Hearth), “navigating change with strength and flexibility” (The Compass) and fosters “emotion, empathy and connectivity” (The Flowing River) and “play and provocation” (The Jester).

The following four Priority Areas demonstrate the direction we will take within the arts and creative sectors as well as the region’s cultural offer. On the following pages we set out our commitments, how we will enact them, and how we will measure our progress towards achieving them.

The Four Priority Areas are:

1. Financial stability and trust
2. Community wellbeing
3. Inclusive cultural work, experiences and places
4. Risk-taking

Priority Area 1: Financial stability and trust

We commit to:

1. Shifting the narrative for funding the arts away from a scarcity model where limited funding is available and unequally distributed.
2. Exploring financial models that build trust, collaboration, and security in the arts and culture sectors rather than precarity and competition.
3. Financially recognising the huge volume of unpaid labour in the arts and culture sector. We will do this through the following actions:
 1. Adopting Gloucester's Strike a Light model which involves piloting the public funding of five West of England creatives without expectations of outcomes on a two-year rotation over the course of this plan.
 2. Funding five projects each year that communicate the importance and broad contribution of the arts to society.
 3. Recognising, funding, and/or providing additional support for volunteers and community labour contributing to publicly funded arts projects.
 4. Wrapping additional funding for community arts projects and existing hubs into all new applications for cultural infrastructure/projects.

We will measure our progress through:

1. Commissioning artists to conduct a baseline mapping project to cost the total amount of unpaid volunteer and community group activity that props up the profitable flagship aspects of the creative economy in the West of England. This will be updated annually to make visible the reduction in unpaid labour.
2. West of England funded projects/artists will be invited to publicly present their end-of-project evaluations in a way that is meaningful to them and their communities (in recognition that funders' evaluation metrics are often narrowly focused and not widely shared). This will happen at quarterly cultural forums rotated around different locations in the region and will be opportunities to celebrate community through shared events.

Priority Area 2: Community Wellbeing

We commit to:

1. Foregrounding the capacity of all creative projects to positively impact wellbeing, while recognising that artists are not solely responsible for it and that creative projects should not replace fully-funded NHS and social services.
2. Recognising that increasing wellbeing in different communities may require different approaches and understandings of arts/culture.
3. Beginning to build a '15-minute' cultural city region, where everyone has access to free arts and culture within, or only a 15-minute walk from, their neighbourhood.
4. Fostering a new generation of cultural leaders with confidence and agency to support others through creative skills development.

We will do this through the following actions:

1. Devolving cultural/arts funding to selected diverse community hubs/venues at ward/neighbourhood level.
2. Creating a funding pot that enables any publicly funded creative projects to include a meaningful community co-creation phase to build projects addressing local needs/ opportunities/ interests/ cultures, compensating community members for their participation.
3. Funding a mentor scheme for community artists/facilitators to support their wellbeing while they are supporting the wellbeing of a community (recognising the potential emotional toll and personal responsibility inherent in this type of work).
4. Increasing funding for initiatives that put creative opportunities into vulnerable communities - in prisons, in youth groups, in unemployment groups, in mental health groups – to support positive identity and foster new cultural leaders embedded in communities.
5. Facilitating a new 'community cultural leaders' network meeting biannually with cultural decision makers and funders to influence how funding is spent and what type of funding and cultural activity would work best in their community.

6. Supporting creative projects, from within and visiting the region, to be able to tour regional neighbourhoods, providing a new online directory of suitable community spaces and venues beyond the city centre.

We will measure our progress through:

1. Monitoring repeat attendance (rather than increased attendance) at community embedded initiatives, while protecting people's privacy and getting consent. Whether people return is a strong indicator of how meaningful the activity is to them.
2. Utilising the creative skills of communities and artists/facilitators to co-design imaginative ways to capture the impact of projects/initiatives.
3. Building an online directory of neighbourhood cultural assets and opportunities.
4. Developing mechanisms that embed knowledge sharing in our funded projects.

Priority Area 3: Inclusive cultural work, experiences and places

We commit to:

1. Arts, culture and creativity being by the community for the community.
2. Meeting communities where they are in a way that makes participating easier and more accessible.
3. Empowering cultural practitioners to represent themselves, their people, their histories.
4. Value people's different strengths and communication styles.

We will do this through the following actions:

1. Widening the methods for applying for and evaluating publicly funded arts projects, such as incorporating voice notes, video and face-to-face presentations.
2. Providing clear routes to access support and advice throughout application processes, not just at the point of applying.
3. Creating an additional public fund to platform the rich variety of creative activity in West of England communities and boost work that is already happening in those communities.
4. Establishing a 'Community Art Bank' so that under-represented communities have a more accessible route to philanthropic and private funding opportunities and are given local support with grant application processes/financial set-up.

We will measure our progress through:

1. Publishing our participation data so that it is transparent who we have funded.
2. Partnering with regional cultural hubs and providers to collate and publish anonymised audience/participant data.
3. Creating case studies that make visible stories of cultural diversity/opportunity.
4. Asking communities to decide what success looks like as part of the co-creation phase of our funded projects.

Priority Area 4: Risk-taking

We commit to:

1. Taking more risks with the arts and culture that we fund and support in order to diversify it and create wider opportunities.
2. Better understanding and supporting the risks that the people in the arts and culture sector take to do the work they do, whether that be financial, personal, reputational, or cultural.
3. Acknowledging that creativity and innovation require risks to be taken through the policy and funding decisions we make.
4. Supporting artistic autonomy. We'll let you run off the cliff, but we'll give you a parachute!

We will do this through the following actions:

1. Funding artists residencies within sectors beyond the creative that accommodate risk-taking.
2. Making our funded opportunities process focused rather than output-focused.
3. Establishing an experimental grant opportunity to support early ideas and risk-taking. This experimental grant opportunity will enable us to support developing artists alongside those with an established reputation, providing mentoring, and giving them opportunity to build partnerships.
4. Creating sustained regional cultural partnerships that collectivise and spread risk.

We will measure our progress through:

1. Asking our funded projects to report on failures and learnings from them as well as successes. Both are equally necessary and important to building good work and for shared learning.
2. Create templates to support organisations and artists to consider and monitor risk categories. This means developing contingencies and understanding their risk boundaries, for example, which categories they feel comfortable in taking risks.
3. Metrics that value the benefits to five people as equal to the benefits to five thousand people.
4. Asking communities about the risks they want to take.

DESIGNING THIS PLAN: THE METRICS

The topic of metrics - or ways to measure the impact or success of cultural activity - arose frequently across our seven workshops. Often numbers based measures, where bigger is better, predominate when it comes to evaluating and deciding the value of cultural activity. This is something that those working in the sector find difficult to recognise within their own ways of working and feelings of success. In the sixth workshop, which focused on different types of metrics, from the Thriving Places Index to the Sustainable Development Goals, workshop participants identified that culture was seldom incorporated, or where it was it was framed as an 'enabler' for other wellbeing, economic or community outcomes, rather than a pillar in its own right.

The workshop participants pushed back against the idea of appropriate numerical data that they used or would like to use as evidence to measure their success. They struggled to identify or articulate neat numbers and instead identified case studies and community defined metrics specific to particular projects as more appropriate evaluation tools. We asked workshop participants to create visual icons that summed up their conversations. This is where many of the Vision Emblems emerged from and forms the basis of this Matrix.

Our evaluation framework does several things:

- reflects the Plan's values
- is usable by decision-makers assessing proposed initiatives such as new grants/programmes
- draws on the Vision Emblems and Priority Areas without forcing artificial separations
- offers a distinction from conventional funding evaluation criteria

We have combined it within a matrix to provide clear timeframes and starting points for all activity within our Priority Areas.

Evaluation Matrix

ACTIONS

Priority Area 1: Financial Stability and Trust

1.1. Adopting Gloucester's Strike a Light model and piloting the public funding of five West of England creatives without expectations of outcomes on a two-year rotation over the course of this plan.

TIMELINE / EXAMPLES

Accepting applications from host hubs July 2026. First creative in place by Sept 2026.

ADDITIONAL AREAS 4

EMBLEMS The Tortoise; The Jester

1.2. Funding five projects each year that communicate the importance and broad contribution of the arts to society.

TIMELINE / EXAMPLES

Establish Community Art Bank to oversee new community art funds by March 2027. Projects started by July 2027.

ADDITIONAL AREAS 2, 3

EMBLEMS The Open Hearth; The Flowing Stream; The Jester

1.3. Recognising, funding and/or providing additional support for volunteers and community labour contributing to publicly funded arts projects.

TIMELINE / EXAMPLES

Adjustment to budget template in all funding application forms effective immediately.

ADDITIONAL AREAS 2, 3

EMBLEMS The Three Sisters; The Compass

1.4. Wrapping additional funding for community arts projects and existing hubs into all new applications for cultural infrastructure/projects.

TIMELINE / EXAMPLES

Introduce new policy framework by end 2028. Lobby national government for change in funding stipulations.

ADDITIONAL AREAS 2, 3, 4

EMBLEMS The Tortoise; The Three Sisters; The Compass

Evaluation Matrix

ACTIONS

Priority Area 2: Community Wellbeing

2.1. Devolving cultural/arts funding to selected diverse community hubs/venues at ward/ neighbourhood level.

TIMELINE / EXAMPLES

Online directory commissioned June 2026 and published Dec 2026.

Community Art Bank to devolve funds September 2027.

ADDITIONAL AREAS 1, 3

EMBLEMS The Open Hearth; The Three Sisters; The Jester

2.2. Creating a funding pot that enables any publicly-funded creative projects to include a meaningful community co-creation phase to build projects addressing local needs/ opportunities/ interests/ cultures, compensating community members for their participation.

TIMELINE / EXAMPLES

Introduce new policies by December 2026. Adjustment to budget template in all funding application forms effective January 2027.

ADDITIONAL AREAS 1, 3

EMBLEMS The Open Hearth; The Flowing Stream; The Compass

2.3. Funding a mentor scheme for community artists/facilitators to support their wellbeing while they are supporting the wellbeing of a community (recognising the emotional toll and personal responsibility inherent in this type of work).

TIMELINE / EXAMPLES

Introduce new policies by December 2026. Adjustment to budget template in all funding application forms effective January 2027.

ADDITIONAL AREAS

EMBLEMS The Flowing Stream; The Three Sisters; The Compass

Evaluation Matrix

ACTIONS

Priority Area 2: Community Wellbeing continued

2.4. Increasing funding for initiatives that put creative opportunities into vulnerable communities - in prisons, in youth groups, in unemployment groups, in mental health groups – to support positive identity and foster new cultural leaders embedded in communities.

TIMELINE / EXAMPLES

Partnership arrangements across all Services and with third sector to link and identify opportunities established by July 2028.

ADDITIONAL AREAS 3, 4

EMBLEMS The Open Hearth; The Three Sisters

2.5. Facilitating a new 'community cultural leaders' network meeting biannually with cultural decision makers and funders to influence how funding is spent and what type of funding and cultural activity would work best in their community.

TIMELINE / EXAMPLES

Network established by April 2027. First Network meeting by September 2027.

ADDITIONAL AREAS 3, 4

EMBLEMS The Open Hearth; The Compass

2.6. Supporting creative projects, from within and visiting the region, to be able to tour regional neighbourhoods, providing a new online directory of suitable community spaces and venues beyond the city centre.

TIMELINE / EXAMPLES

Online directory commissioned June 2026 and published December 2026.
Maintained by funding from Community Art Bank post March 2027.

ADDITIONAL AREAS

EMBLEMS The Flowing Stream; The Open Hearth; The Compass

Evaluation Matrix

ACTIONS

Priority Area 3: Inclusive cultural work, experiences and places

3.1. Widening the methods for applying for and evaluating publicly funded arts projects, such as incorporating voice notes, video and face-to-face presentations.

TIMELINE / EXAMPLES

Adjustment to funding application processes effective immediately.

ADDITIONAL AREAS 1, 2

EMBLEMS The Tortoise; The Three Sisters; The Compass

3.2. Providing clear routes to access support and advice throughout application processes, not just at the point of applying.

TIMELINE / EXAMPLES

Adjustment to funding application processes effective immediately. Additional support offered through Community Art Bank by July 2027.

ADDITIONAL AREAS 1, 2

EMBLEMS The Tortoise; The Three Sisters; The Compass

3.3. Creating an additional public fund to platform the rich variety of creative activity in West of England communities and boost work that is already happening in those communities.

TIMELINE / EXAMPLES

Community Art Bank to establish fund by March 2027. Devolved to neighbourhood funding bodies by September 2027. First funding call by January 2028.

ADDITIONAL AREAS 2, 4

EMBLEMS The Flowing Stream; The Open Hearth; The Jester

Evaluation Matrix

ACTIONS

Priority Area 3: Inclusive cultural work, experiences and places continued

3.4. Establishing a Community Art Bank so that under-represented communities have a more accessible route to philanthropic and private funding opportunities and are given local support with grant application processes/ financial set-up.

TIMELINE / EXAMPLES

Funded through Cultural Tourism Tax, national funding and regional public private, or public-commons partnerships. Community Art Bank to function as new arms-length body to maintain autonomy over regional decision-making. Operates as funder, funding portal and advice centre. Operational by March 2027.

ADDITIONAL AREAS 1, 4

EMBLEMS The Tortoise; The Three Sisters; The Compass

Evaluation Matrix

ACTIONS

Priority Area 4: Risk-taking

4.1. Funding artists residencies within sectors beyond the creative that accommodate risk-taking.

TIMELINE / EXAMPLES

1 year Bristol Royal Infirmary residency started by June 2027. Funded through Community Art Bank.

ADDITIONAL AREAS 2

EMBLEMS The Open Hearth; The Jester

4.2. Making our funded opportunities process-focused rather than output-focused.

TIMELINE / EXAMPLES

Adjustment to funding application processes effective January 2027.

ADDITIONAL AREAS 1

EMBLEMS The Jester; The Compass

4.3. Establishing an experimental grant opportunity to support early ideas and risk-taking. This experimental grant opportunity will enable us to support developing artists alongside those with an established reputation, providing mentoring and giving them opportunity to build partnerships.

TIMELINE / EXAMPLES

Overseen by Community Art Bank. First commissions advertised by June 2027.

ADDITIONAL AREAS 1

EMBLEMS The Three Sisters; The Tortoise; The Jester

Evaluation Matrix

ACTIONS

Priority Area 4: Risk-taking continued

4.4. Creating sustained regional cultural partnerships that collectivise risk..

TIMELINE / EXAMPLES

Partnership arrangements established between organisations within Online Directory and held by Community Art Bank by end 2027.

ADDITIONAL AREAS 1

EMBLEMS The Three Sisters; The Compass; The Jester

Appendix

Reviewing the 2022 Cultural Plan

<https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/West-of-England-Cultural-Plan.pdf>)

Before designing their own priority themes, workshop participants split into four discussion groups to review the current Cultural Plan and to answer the following questions:

- Do the priorities align with yours/make sense to you?
- What agendas are motivating the aims of the Plan?
- What sort of detail do they have around aims, outcomes, monitoring, data, metrics, buy-in/embedding in infrastructure?
- What headline numbers might you prefer to see?

Below are the themes that emerged from their discussions, including responses specific to the four areas of focus in the Cultural Plan.

Accessible language

- Overuse of buzzwords like “equal society”, “net zero” “person-centred”.
- Too much jargon which is alienating if we want to include more people in culture, and get grassroots people involved. The plan felt like it was representing middle-upper-class culture.
- Issues with the language and images not feeling diverse.

Integrity of meaning

- Sometimes the document feels like a word salad which is opaque and vague.
- While it lists 91 different languages and 45 different religions to show diversity it does not evidence fairness of support and opportunity for those communities. It doesn't say how many young people or grassroots groups are supported.
- The plan doesn't engage with how culture makes people feel and why they participate. We don't go to events thinking 'I can't wait to engage with a key cultural asset in the city centre and increase footfall'.

- Some of the objectives are really good but some felt tokenistic. How do we know that that is what people actually want?
- The language has no specificity about it. We need more information about how the objectives are going to connect with what is already happening in the city, of where development is actually going to happen, and the impact that will have. Currently, it doesn't feel like it will make much difference because it is so nebulous.
- Little thought for future generations when talking about young people and schools. To talk about putting culture in the curriculum when it is, in reality, being stripped from the curriculum feels falsely optimistic and as if the plan has been made in a bubble. Measuring what, why and for whom?
- There are no numbers or methods to measure the success of their plans – there are baseline statistics but not targets.
- A lot of the measurements are to do with money rather than any other values like people's wellbeing.
- Focuses on the economy rather than the impact culture has in bringing people together.
- There is no information in the baseline statistics about how much money goes to artists from marginalised backgrounds.
- They only mention financial metrics.

Long-term accountability

- No mention of when the plan would be reviewed which means there is no accountability. It needs a named person to contact about the plan.
- Discrepancy between the funding available (recovery fund) and the ambitions in the plan.
- Compared to expectations on creative practitioners from funders – to provide data, budget, metrics, impact evaluation methods – this doesn't honour that same level of accountability or proof of value.
- It doesn't say the timeframe for the plan.

- Designed post-COVID and so there's a feeling of looking back rather than looking forward. For example, COVID is mentioned seven times in the section about place-making.
- No transparency about where the baseline statistics come from. Some are so high that it is difficult to believe they are real.
- The headline things mentioned were good but not well backed up or clearly laid out how it was going to be achieved. Three years in, we don't know how many of these things have been progressed.
- How much money is going where? To whom exactly and in what way? How the money is given is important. The funding is very targeted to specific siloed initiatives. Does this give more money and recognition to those who already have it?
- Accountability in long-term planning – how will the short-term targeted things affect the future of the region?

Cultural and creative skills

We are investing now in the next generation of disruptors and makers.

Our next great innovation, be it environmental or technological, could come from anywhere, from anyone.

The creativity of every child and young person in the region should be given space to flourish; and that emergent talent should be given every means to succeed.

WE WILL:

- *start where it is most impactful, by ensuring that culture is included across the school curriculum*
- *develop inclusive, ambitious and effective skills pipelines for culture in the region and beyond*
- *promote pathways into the creative and cultural industries*
- *ensure that creativity forms part of the expectations of employers of their staff*

OUR PROPOSED INITIATIVES:

- *Cultural Sector School Twinning and Cultural Curriculum Exemplars*
- *Targeted cultural and creative careers support*
- *Regional Technical Level Qualifications and Apprenticeships Programmes*
- *Music Sector Pathways*

Taken from WECA 2022 Cultural Plan

<https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/West-of-England-Cultural-Plan.pdf>

- No mention of changing mindsets early on, in schools. There is still a priority with Maths and English which carries through into adulthood.
- The cultural skills development and training opportunities listed still privilege particular types of people (with money) and particular types of creativity/culture, which raises the question of what is culture and who is it for?
- The only culture touchpoint for young people identified in the plan is the school curriculum: where are the accessible family cultural events? Accessible arts? Youth theatre? Where is the community? Where are the opportunities for creative young people who are already alienated by the current education system?

Creative Freelancers, Start-ups and SMEs

Creative freelancers, start-ups and SMEs are the beating heart of our cultural economy.

We will prioritise recovery from the impact of Covid-19, but also focus on the need to thrive and prosper in the period ahead.

WE WILL:

- *support the continued growth and post-pandemic recovery of the creative industries in the region*
- *nurture the creative talent that is central to the West of England's distinct cultural and creative ecology in order for it to thrive*
- *attract significant national and international investment to drive future growth and development of the sector*

OUR PROPOSED INITIATIVES:

- *Freelancer Transition Programme*
- *West of England Good Employment Charter*
- *Industry Leading Accelerator Programme*
- *Targeted Inward Investment campaign*
- While creative freelancers are mentioned, it is not clear how the plan is going to help them or what help is available to support people who don't know anything about business to be able to start a business.
- It focuses on SMEs and startups. There is no mention of charities, coops or other models that arts organisations take, as individual freelancers or grassroots groups. Even reference to SMEs is vague and points to things like immersive tech and creative tech. This makes it feel like it hasn't been embedded in the existing creative ecosystem or devised with the people on the ground already making things happen.

Placemaking

Embedding a rich and equitable cultural offer is central to healthy, happy, thriving communities and to building the character and distinctiveness of place that makes people want to visit, work, and live in the West of England.

Investment in culture drives productivity and employment and contributes to the regeneration of areas and revitalisation of our high streets. It helps to bring communities together – opening up new perspectives, encouraging participation in civic life.

WE WILL:

- *place culture at the centre of placemaking, community-making and regeneration strategies*
- *ensure that the value of cultural investment is promoted and understood by local and regional government and business*

OUR PROPOSED INITIATIVES:

- *Cultural Infrastructure Toolkit and Charter, and Cultural Value campaign*
- *Maximising our region's Cultural Hubs and Assets*
- *Regional Sustainable Living Centre¹ and ancillary Sustainable Living Hubs*
- *Immersive Digital Experience*
- *Working with partners to create a coherent and compelling narrative for the West of England*
- *Regional Mega-Event*
- *It makes more difference to residents to be able to walk ten minutes down the road and see live music than to know Bridgerton was filmed in the city. The local music gig improves local wellbeing and the local economy. National film productions increase the regional economy but also a lot of the benefit is external to the region (e.g. crews are brought in rather than hired locally). How does the money get distributed where it is needed in the region?*
- *Placemaking focuses on regeneration of the city centre and high street rather than thinking about what people are looking for in their sense of place/ neighbourhood/community.*

Wellbeing

Culture is an essential part of a life well lived. Arts and culture-based interventions offer new and surprising ways to promote the health and wellbeing of communities and to help them flourish and grow.

Participation in culture is a fundamental human right, as outlined in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The initiatives under this focus area seek to unlock the potential of culture to transform the lives of people on the West of England who are most at risk of social exclusion, as well as wider communities.

WE WILL:

- *ensure that all residents and visitors can access culture and cultural activities for their own wellbeing, development and enrichment*
- *put culture at the heart of happy, thriving, and healthy communities*

OUR PROPOSED INITIATIVES:

- *Strategic support for social prescribing*
- *Arts and Homelessness Civic Plan*
- *Widening access to culture, including:*
 - *Targeting specific barriers for groups and communities*
 - *Disabled Access Support*
 - *Supporting libraries to deliver cultural experiences*
- *The initiatives for wellbeing seemed focused on a fix rather than tackling through prevention, e.g. retrofitting things to make them accessible rather than designing with accessibility from the start.*
- *There is a section about how culture can support community wellbeing, but not about how to increase wellbeing in the culture sector itself.*

Recognising what is already happening (good and bad)

- Investing in young people is a valuable goal in the plan, but the creatives in our workshops (age mid 20s - mid 50s) could not find themselves in the plan or identify how the named initiatives would benefit them.
- The plan demonstrates some awareness of anxiety in the arts about the role of new technologies.
- The focus is on business and the economy, but the business of culture is really about empathy and human connection. How could that be embedded in the plan or measured? This is completely absent from the plan at a time when it feels really necessary because of wider cultural narratives and the rise of the far right.
- Recognition of the strata (scales of activity) of arts and culture in West of England is needed. We can then map how money is spent across the strata.
- There is no recognition of the huge impact of the cost-of-living crisis on accessing the arts anywhere in the language used. Creating a narrative for people to buy into culture requires acknowledging the barriers that actually stop us from participating.
- Artists and organisations in the city are already doing placemaking and well-being. It is already happening; they just need more money and resources to do more.
- Acknowledging that the current system is broken and giving financial handouts makes everybody reliant and creates precarity due to inconsistency of income in the arts and culture sector. How will the plan address a long-term commitment to individuals already doing this amazing work?
- The plan is very risk-averse, whereas inventing new things needs risk, especially in order to learn.

Our workshop participants felt that the 2022 plan had no radical, exciting ideas about how to change things. If they involved artists in the process, then they would be more likely to get something different which builds from the grassroots up. This plan seeks to shape cultural practice in the West of England from this perspective.

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