


LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE Themed Debate - Camden Invests in Culture - Culture Strategy	
REPORT OF The Leader of the Council	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Council	DATE 21 st July 2025
SUMMARY OF REPORT <p>This report provides background information to Full Council for a themed debate on 21st July 2025 on Camden's approach to supporting the culture sector, grass roots artists and business to unlock cultural opportunities which benefit our residents and communities.</p> <p>The Full Council debate will explore how the council has invested in culture which has been the catalyst for the development of a new cultural strategy for 2026–2031. Contributions from residents, cultural organisations, artists, and young people have provided insights to guide the cultural strategy</p> <p>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information</p> <p>No documents that require listing were used in the preparation of this report.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Zerritha Brown – Head Of Culture Supporting Communities 5 Pancras Square N1C 4AG Zerritha.brown@camden.gov.uk </p>	
RECOMMENDATIONS The Council is asked to consider the report.	

Signed: 

David Burns, Director of Economy, regeneration & Investment

Date: 10th July 2025

1. Background

- 1.1 Camden is globally recognised as a centre of culture. The borough is home to national and international cultural institutions such as the Roundhouse, the British Museum, Hampstead Theatre and the British Library, alongside creative businesses and grassroots artists. Camden Market and Camden Lock attract over 28 million visitors each year¹.
- 1.2 Camden plays a pivotal role within the local and national cultural ecosystem, through strategic support and collaboration, contributing to the growth and sustainability of the sector. Key highlights include:
 - 31 Arts Council England National Organisations
 - 4th most population film location in London
 - 6th Highest Evening and Nighttime Economy (ENTE) in the UK
 - Cultural and creative businesses account for 18.8% Gross Value Added (GVA), higher than national average of 6.9%²
 - Local authorities remain the largest funders of culture despite up to 40% cuts in funding³
- 1.3 The creative and cultural industries have been identified as a key growth sector within the London Growth Plan, contributing approximately £52 billion to London's economy each year⁴. With one in six jobs now based in the creative economy, the sector plays a vital role in driving innovation, employment, and economic development. This aligns closely with the Council's strategic ambition to promote inclusive and sustainable growth and our commitment to harnessing the potential of this sector to deliver meaningful benefits for communities across the borough.
- 1.4 Camden is a diverse and international borough with its artists, cultural organisations and creative industries choosing it as a place to live, study and work. The borough's population of 274,000 inhabitants is ethnically diverse, with over 140 languages and dialects spoken daily. In 2021, 40.5% of residents were from Asian, Black and other ethnic/cultural groups. According to the 2021 Census ethnic group categorisation, Black African form the largest minority ethnic group in seven Camden wards; Bangladeshi the largest minority in six, Chinese in one and Indian in one ward. Camden's largest communities with a distinctive cultural identity are the Bangladeshi, Indian, Chinese, Somali and Arab. Overall, in Camden, 21% of people aged 3+ did not speak English as their main language.
- 1.4 Camden is a relatively young borough, with its large population of students and young people living in the area: 43% of residents are aged under 30, with the median age of 37.2 years. 15.2% are reported as being disabled under the definition of the Equalities Act (2010), meaning that they assessed their day-to-

¹ *Camden Market*

² *ONS data as in Culture and Place Data Explorer, Camden, September 2024*

³ *Cornerstone Of Culture – Local Government Association 2024*

⁴ *Greater London Authority 2023*

day activities as limited by long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses. Camden also has a diverse LGBTQIA+ community, with 17% identifying as LGBTQIA+, higher than the national average of 14%.

2. Camden's Commitment to Culture

2.1 Culture plays a vital role in embracing the vibrancy and identities that come together to make our borough. Culture is also at the heart of our We Make Camden ambitions, serving as a tool we can use to deliver on the missions and challenges we have identified in collaboration with our residents, particularly around youth, diversity, social isolation and inclusive growth.

2.2. Through our continued commitment, the Council leverages culture to support our residents, creatives and businesses through the following:

- Celebrating our diverse heritage through cultural programmes which increase community cohesion, connectedness and pride,
- Promoting health and wellbeing by tackling loneliness, isolation, and mental health challenges from the pandemic,
- Stimulating the local economy through local procurement and jobs creation, cultural events and activations on our high streets and in the public realm and activities which support the evening and night time economy,
- Supporting grassroots and early career artists and creatives through leveraging affordable creative spaces, commissioning and networking opportunities,
- Empowering young people through creative learning opportunities which develop skills and pathways to employment and training,
- Contributing to place shaping, using cultural activations to improve public spaces which encourage social interaction and create welcoming, safe and vibrant environments.

2.3 The Council has invested in Culture through a dedicated Culture Service who act as connectors and collaborators between cultural organisations, residents, artists and neighbourhoods to ensure that all communities have access to produce and consume cultural experiences. The development of a new 5-year Cultural Strategy for the borough to cover the period of 2026-2031 is further commitment to culture for Camden's residents.

- 2.4 In a national context where local authorities remain the largest public funders of culture⁵, the Council's proactive approach to cultural development—particularly through unlocking additional investment via Section 106 agreements, as well as strategic and local Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds, positions us as a leader in driving cultural engagement, resilience and growth.
- 2.5 More specifically, culture helps us deliver inclusive growth throughout the borough and supports the ambitions of We Make Camden and our missions. Delivering on our diversity and youth missions, culture is the means through which we are:
- Strengthening the local economy by creating the conditions for the arts and cultural sector to be resilient, sustainable and enable sector-wide growth and creating employment,
 - Unlocking skills development and leadership opportunities, through the provision of internships, placements, mentoring, work experience and other learning and training opportunities across Camden's creative economy for students, graduates and residents from underrepresented backgrounds,
 - Creating the conditions for the next generation of creatives to thrive, ensuring development, capacity and long-term sustainability of the sector.
- 2.6 Culture is also key to our estate's missions, as it helps us build stronger and more connected communities through inclusive and accessible creative health cultural experiences on our estates and in neighbourhoods. Culture as we see it reflects the shared history and diversity of our residents, and our estates are places where this can be celebrated and from where people who make Camden can access the arts and culture.

3. Benefits Leveraged from Culture:

- 3.1 As a council, Camden has taken the position that it can unlock further benefits of culture for our citizens through our formal levers and forming strategic partnerships.
- 3.2 Some key examples include:

Economic Growth
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Camden Film Office - Film Fixer lead the film service on behalf of the Council. Following on from the impact of the writers strikes on filming, Camden continues to be one of the busiest boroughs in London in 2024 with 700 shoot days.

⁵ Cornerstone Of Culture – Local Government Association 2024

The borough hosted key shoots such as the new Bridget Jones sequel that filmed across Hampstead in Vale of Health and Haverstock Hill, Apple TV series *Slow Horses* featuring Gary Oldman using such locations as Red Lion Square, Chalcot Crescent in Primrose Hill, Lincoln's Inn Fields and Kentish Town and hosted 10 commercials and 10 stills shoots for brands like Dominos Pizza, Knight Frank, Costa, National Express, Disney, NME, Abercrombie & Fitch, Asda, Jo Malone and others. The Film Office generates significant economic benefits for the borough.

- **Commercial Events** - The Culture Service continues to attract commercial clients to the borough which included the Devil Wears Prada red carpet event at the Dominion Theatre. A total of 200 commercial events were supported by the service in 2024 across the indoor and outdoor portfolio which returns economic benefit for the borough.

Training and Employment

- **Set Ready** – Delivered by Film Fixer, Set Ready is an initiative where they leverage their position as Camden's film service provider to secure paid work placements on shoots in the borough. The course is entirely free and provides entry-level opportunities to those aged 19 - 54 who want to get into the film industry. Between 2021 and 2025, a total of 47 local participants have taken part in the programme, gaining valuable skills and industry exposure.
- **Work Experience** - The Culture Service has worked with Camden Learning and Camden Spark since 2021 to develop a STEAM Work Experience (STEAM WEX) programme for Camden Year-12 students, to find out more about accessing careers in the cultural and creative industries. Taking an innovative approach with our cultural partners via a 'carousel' model, students spend a week visiting a range of organisations, meeting experienced professionals and gaining hands on experience with a variety of roles. 70 students have enrolled in previous years, accessing organisations including Universal Music, Ambassador Theatre Group, Roundhouse, Camden Art Centre, Donmar Warehouse, Central Saint Martins, London Film School, October Gallery, Bloomsbury Festival, Celebro Media, Lauderdale House. Feedback from 2024 was positive with 59% of students feeling more confident about entering the world of work having completed work experience. In 2025 we will welcome 30 more students on to the programme.
- **Culture Service Apprentices** - The Culture Service appointed two apprentices to provide business support to the events and arts services. Both apprentices are born and raised Camden residents aged between 20 –25 year-old. This is their first step into the local government arts and culture sector; and are positively contributing to the delivery of the cultural programmes and administration of the service.

Unlocking Creative Spaces

- **Artist Studios** - The Culture Service and Euston Regeneration Team are working in collaboration with Bow Arts to provide affordable creative workspaces in Regents Park Estate for artists, designers, and makers, with a specific focus on offering affordable workspace to existing residents. Due to the construction disruption caused by the High Speed 2 (HS2) rail project, residents in Cartmel, Coniston and Langdale were moved to homes away from the site. This presented an opportunity to use the vacant blocks in a different way, leading to the creation of creative workspace. Currently 74% of artists who have a studio/creative workspace either live or work in Camden. In 2024 Catherine Chambers, based in Bow Arts Camden was awarded third prize in the National Portrait Gallery global painting prize. The artwork titled 'Lying' was one of three works selected from 1,647 entries across 62 countries, with 50 selected for final display.
- **Museum Of Youth Culture** - Museum of Youth Culture is a museum dedicated to the styles, sounds and social movements innovated by young people over the past 100 years. It opened its doors recently in its new home in the Camden Property Holdings Limited (CPHL), NW1 mixed-use development known as St Pancras Campus. Using the 'affordable workspace' provided through the planning obligation process, CPHL engaged with Camden's Inclusive Economy and Culture teams to provide a permanent 'home' for the museum with the premises being made available at 60% of the market value for annual rents charged for comparable spaces within the local area of the development for the initial 10-year period following occupation. Camden has long been a beacon for youth culture attracting young people from around the country looking for a place to be accepted and belong and the Museum of Youth Culture is a welcome addition to the borough youth scene.
- **2 Prince Of Wales Road** - The Council has secured funding to retrofit the former cinema at 2 Prince of Wales Road to create the borough's first Neighbourhood Space. The site will respond to local needs and voices with a bespoke brief created in partnership with the community to generate a sustainable, creative space that enables social action and an equitable green transition. Working in partnership with Hypha Studios, 13 free artist studio spaces have been created for 9 months to support local creatives.

The artists are providing a free community programme of workshops, talks and exhibitions and have been invited to respond to the 'Civic Action Lab' a space for the local community to test and develop new ideas for the final design of neighbourhood space and to forge new relationships with local people, asking

how art and creativity can encourage new voices to participate in social action and enable a fair transition.

The artists in the collective are a diverse group of creatives with strong ties to Camden and Kentish Town. Whilst some currently reside here, others have connections to global institutions and arts spaces. Many are also University of the Arts London, Central St Martins graduates with local connections through community programmes and have previously worked with spaces such as Old Diorama Arts Centre, Camden People's Theatre and Camden School for Girls. Through the residency, they want to expand on their preexisting dialogues with these spaces and programme events and collaborations that feel connected to the area, whilst bringing together themes from their practices. These themes include identity, memory, inclusion, and sustainability, with impactful ideas such as exhibitions, film screenings, art residencies, cultural dinners, and public programs aimed at democratising art and fostering cultural exchange.

- **Camden High Street Pedestrianisation** - In February 2025, the Council agreed to an 18-month trial pedestrianisation of a section of Camden High Street aimed at creating safer and healthier public places for residents, businesses, and visitors. A key area of the pedestrianisation is a 12-month culture programme which launched in May 2025 with a community focussed street party. Working alongside local artists, communities, and cultural institutions, the programme has been designed to respond to Camden's unique character and heritage from its global influence in music and fashion to its grassroots community spirit. Over the year further cultural activities such as a music event, turning the high street into a sustainable fashion show and further activations which celebrate Camden's rich history, stories, and grassroots culture. These activities aim to bring local residents to the high street and to provide a platform for local talent to perform to an international audience.

Cultural Programmes and Community Connectedness

- **Community Power** - Regent's Park Estate Story Trail is a celebration of the past, present and future of the estate, aiming to promote a sense of community, safety and connection, while amplifying residents' voices and power. It was initiated by residents as part of Community Champions Regent's Park and produced by Old Diorama Arts Centre in partnership with Camden Council Parks and Green Spaces team, University of the Arts London / Central Saint Martins (as part of the EU-funded T-Factor research project), and Fitzrovia Youth in Action.

The process of conceiving and creating the Trail, and now the journey through the art installations, gave residents the opportunity to feel their impact on their area, reconnect with their neighbours and look differently at their estate. As a wellbeing-focused project, the Community Champions and community organisations in the ward created a range of activities and events to tackle social isolation, encourage connection to the community and nature, alongside

delivering positive actions across the estate. They gathered detailed information encompassing personal and historical stories, local aspirations, as well as identifying issues of concern for residents, and their experiences of living and/or working on the estate. More than 1600 residents attended the 60 collaborative workshops and events, and three paid temporary Neighbourhood Curators roles were created. Working with artists, residents' ideas, drawings, portraits, memories and hopes are now visible in the permanent artworks.

- **Schools Engagement** - The Camden Schools Art Biennale (CSAB) is a fine example of the innovative potential that partnerships between the Council, Camden Learning, Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London (CSM/UAL) and schools can bring to young people's lives.

The Biennale project culminated in a week-long exhibition, celebrating art developed by every school and every key stage of learning in Camden – from primary education through to A-Level. Alongside the exhibition, an engagement and events programme provided opportunities for families, young people and teachers to participate in the arts. Prior to the exhibition, a major component of the CSAB initiative was a range of outreach work with schools, particularly those that do not have dedicated art teaching or facilities. This provided opportunities to develop both teacher skills and meaningful links with arts organisations and galleries in Camden to enhance arts education.

Over 1900 young people took part, 350 artworks were presented, and over 5,200 people visited the exhibition, making it one of the Lethaby Gallery's most popular exhibitions since its move to King's Cross in 2012.

- **Little Amal** – In 2023 Little Amal came to Camden to celebrate with members of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities in a year where the festivals of Passover, Easter and Ramadan coincided. Little Amal's Gathering was her first return to London since 2021 and was a welcoming celebration of the London Borough of Camden's multiculturalism and an interfaith celebration. Delivered in collaboration with JW3, The Walk Productions, University of the Arts London, London Irish Centre, the Roundhouse, Argent and residents associations from Somers Town and Alexandra and Ainsworth estates, Little Amal met with 4200 residents throughout the day at JW3, Rowley Way, British Library, Somers Town (procession) and Granary Square. 192 artists were engaged in the design and delivery with 518 residents and community groups engaged in workshops. The event ended with a community Iftar on Granary Square, delivered by the Ramadan Tent project with 1000 people participating.
- **Love Camden Cultural Programme** - The Council's cultural programme celebrates the borough's rich heritage and its vibrant contemporary culture. At its heart, the programme aims to reveal hidden stories and to bring the community together through activations in the public realm, commissioning new work and the development of a future talent pipeline. Our flagship programmes include Windrush, Black History Season, Pride, Inverness Bloc Party, South Asian heritage Month, through to the groundbreaking Representing Bloomsbury which addressed the interpretation of statues and memorials in the public

realm. Light Up Kilburn 2024, was the first edition of a light festival that took place on and around Kilburn High Road and Grange Park, transforming the public realm through light installations and projections.

The Council facilitates over 100 community-led events each year and work with organisations, communities and neighbourhoods to champion arts and culture across the borough.

4. Community Participation

- 4.1 Increasing participation by our residents and communities in cultural programmes through co production is essential to delivering cultural experiences that reflect the borough. The Council has achieved this through the following examples.
- 4.2 Ten Love Camden Advisors were recruited in May 2024 from resident communities as a forum to help shape and develop the cultural offer of the borough. All members live in the borough and represent the following neighbourhoods: Highgate, Tufnell Park, Kentish Town, Chalk Farm, Kilburn, Somers Town, Euston, Regents Park, Holborn and Covent Garden, King's Cross, Bloomsbury. The advisors support the Council with, commissioning artworks, development of the culture strategy and delivery of various Love Camden cultural programmes.
- 4.3 The community festivals grant programme provides Camden residents with the opportunity to deliver events within their neighbourhoods. The 2025/26 funding year saw 49 community festivals grants awarded to community organisations to deliver festivals in their neighbourhoods between April – December 2025.
- 4.4 In 2024, the Council engaged over 21,000 people in cultural activities and created 280 paid opportunities for creatives. A key theme that emerged from community feedback was the desire for more public realm activities, events that bring people together to celebrate, connect, and share both familiar and new cultural experiences. This is captured through feedback gathered throughout the Love Camden Cultural Programme, as illustrated by the following quotes:

'Amazing! Every year please. Organisers were brilliant! Give us more events like this! Intergenerational music/outdoors' Resident - Windrush Homecoming Event

'Thank you @lovecamden for putting on this beautiful and social community event! #Lightupkilburn. This is the first time in 3.5 years that I felt a sense of community and warmth while living in the neighbourhood. We really need more of this PLEASE @CamdenCouncil' Resident via X – Light Up Kilburn.

5. Supporting The Cultural Ecology

5.1 The Council uses its role to bring the sector together to develop a shared approach to supporting local culture. Following the Arts Council England Investment programme announcement in 2023 (which saw the redistribution of funding outside of London) along with the cost-of-living crisis, the Culture Service developed a series of interventions aimed to support the sector.

5.2 Key examples include:

- **Cultural Education and Learning Support Fund** – The fund was established in 2023 for a three year period to enable local arts and cultural organisations to deliver free learning programmes for children and young people in the borough. This year marks the final phase of the fund, which has supported 27 organisations across three funding rounds. These include The Donmar Theatre, Camden Arts Centre and English Folk Dance and Song Society, who all received cuts to funding from Arts Council England.

Through this investment, the fund has enabled a wide range of cultural projects that have enriched local communities, fostered creative talent, and expanded access to the arts and culture for young people across the borough.

“A lot of our Y7 students have never experienced live theatre before, so this was such an exciting opportunity for them to see a text they have studied brought to life on stage.” **Teacher from Parliament Hill School**

- **Deliberative Cultural Conversations** - Over the period April to July 23, the Culture Service curated four roundtable conversation to create space for collaborative thinking and ideation around the challenges the sector faces while providing opportunity to shape the development of a new long term collectively owned cultural vision for Camden. Delivered in partnership with Cultural Camden, the sessions looked at how the sector navigates the financial challenges, ways to grow the cultural and creative economy, nurturing skills for the future through participation and cultural and creative learning and exploring what a cultural vision for Camden looks like over the next ten years. Representatives from 47 of the borough’s cultural organisations attended along with thirteen Year 12 students who attended the final session as part of their Science Technology Engineering the Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) Work Experience. These conversations set the foundation for the development of the new cultural strategy.

- **Camden Artist Network** – The network was established in 2023 to connect individual artists and creatives across the borough. The network aims to create meaningful connections and collaborations, support provisional development and enhance access to creative opportunities. Over 200 artists are part of the growing network of creatives who benefit from a range of resources including commissioned work, access to creative spaces, and participation in borough-wide cultural initiatives.

- **Cultural Camden Partnership** – The Cultural Camden partnership was established in 2018 and is, a strategic network of key arts and culture organisations in the borough. The partnership and the Council worked collaboratively to develop the Culture Framework 2018 to 2025 with a vision of a borough shaped and inspired by its culture, where creative industries, arts, culture, heritage, libraries and museums are accessible, engaging and relevant for all. The partnership will continue to have a role in over seeing the implementation of the new cultural strategy.

6. A Cultural Strategy For The Borough

- 6.1 Camden has locational advantages at the heart of a global city, with some of the largest cultural and creative institutions located in the borough. According to data from The Audience Agency (2022), adults aged 16+ in Camden show higher levels of cultural engagement than the Greater London average, although this engagement varies significantly across Camden.
- 6.2 However, residents in the borough also experience significant poverty, inequality and hardship. Within the cultural landscape, more affluent wards demonstrate consistently higher participation, while more deprived areas experience lower levels of cultural activity. Research shows that children growing up in poverty in otherwise wealthy areas experience worse outcomes than children growing up in poverty in more deprived areas – showing that inequality, not just poverty, is critical for councils to tackle. These disparities highlight the need for targeted support and investment in culture to improve access and participation in Camden's most disadvantaged communities.
- 6.3 The Raise Camden Child Health Equity Data Audit identified that children in Camden highly value sustainability in their communities and living environments, youth services, and safe third spaces where they can socialise outside of school and their home such as youth centres, faith buildings, and libraries. Young people stated that they wanted more of these spaces that were fully inclusive. These third spaces play an important role in the mental health of young people by promoting social connectedness. Children in Camden see safety and health in public spaces as a key issue, particularly in parks and public spaces
- 6.4 Investing in culture is increasingly essential to effectively address the social, economic, and environmental challenges of our time. The existing Cultural Framework was developed in 2019 and expires in 2025. This has created the opportunity for the Council to develop the first cultural strategy for the borough cover the period of 2026-2031.
- 6.5 From July – November 2024 the service undertook an extensive consultation programme with residents, cultural organisations/partners, schools, higher education, knowledge quarter partners, representatives from the Business Improvement Districts, young people, the Disability Oversight Panel, colleagues across the Council and via an online survey. The combination of engagement

has generated over 300 responses, their views and ideas have helped to shape the strategy, the vision and ambitions.

6.6 The three themes described below contribute to the ambitions of our cultural strategy:

- **People and Place** - creating opportunities for culture to thrive in neighbourhoods, reimagining public spaces, and fostering a strong sense of community and civic pride.
- **Learning and Skills** - residents of all ages have access to a range of learning, skills and work experience opportunities across Camden cultural and creative sector.
- **Grow and Thrive** - creating the conditions to enable the borough's cultural and creative industries to sustain and contribute to London and the national creative ecology and economies.

6.7 The strategy's ambitions are rooted in actions that will help to meet some of the most critical challenges of our time, detailed below:

- **Creative Health and Wellbeing** - We will embed creative activities and approaches that benefit people's health and wellbeing, particularly in neighbourhoods where there is evidence of health inequalities and higher levels of residents feeling lonely or experiencing isolation.
- **Equity** - We will provide equitable opportunity for a wider demographic of residents to lead, participate and activate arts and cultural programmes.
- **Sustainability** - We will encourage all partner organisations to put environmental responsibility at the centre of how they work and support them to tackle the climate emergency through their operations.

6.8 The strategy is grounded in both identified need and our aspiration to recognise and celebrate the creative lives of all residents across the borough and stands as a clear demonstration of our ongoing commitment to culture. It has been developed through extensive collaboration with citizens, cultural organisations, and key stakeholders which aligns closely with the Council's strategic priorities and missions.

6.9 The consultation period for the draft strategy runs from 14 – 31 July 2025. Residents are invited to provide feedback [Have Your Say Today - - New Cultural Strategy Camden](#). The strategy will be adopted in November 2025.

6.10 Camden's cultural and creative sectors are not only a cornerstone of the borough's economic success, but also a vital part of its community identity and social fabric. By building on our existing strengths, supporting areas of resilience and addressing inequalities in cultural access, we can ensure that Camden remains a beacon of creativity, innovation and inclusion. Camden is

well-positioned to lead the way in growing a creative economy that benefits all its residents.

7. Finance Comments of the Executive Director Corporate Services

- 7.1 This report provides background to the Full Council debate that will explore how the Council will develop a new cultural strategy for 2026–2031. Contributions from residents, cultural organisations, artists, and young people will provide insights to guide the next cultural strategy.
- 7.2 The Council will aim to fund the investment in the new cultural strategy through potentially securing funding via Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (SCIL). As the Council plays a key role within the local and national cultural ecosystem, providing strategic support, collaboration and contributing to the growth and sustainability of the Cultural sector.

8. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

- 8.1 Legal Services have been consulted and their comments are incorporated.

9. Environmental Implications

- 9.1 The proposals in this report have no environment impacts