

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE The Cultural Strategy for Camden 2026-2031 (SC/2025/49)	
REPORT OF Cabinet Member for Jobs, Young People and Culture	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee Cabinet	DATE 10 November 2025 12 November 2025
<p>We Make Camden is our shared vision for the borough, developed in collaboration with communities. It identifies the collective ambitions and missions that matter most to our residents — including tackling inequality, supporting young people, improving health and wellbeing, and enabling inclusive economic growth.</p> <p>Culture is central to achieving these ambitions. It reflects the diversity, creativity, and identity of Camden, and provides a powerful tool to address key social and economic challenges through inclusive and collaborative approaches.</p> <p>Through sustained investment and partnership, the Council continues to use culture to support our residents, creative practitioners, and businesses in ways that directly contribute to We Make Camden's missions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrating diversity and strengthening communities Delivering cultural programmes that reflect Camden's diverse heritage, increase social cohesion, and foster a strong sense of place and shared identity. • Promoting health and wellbeing Using creative activities to reduce loneliness, isolation, and mental health challenges, particularly those exacerbated by the pandemic, in line with our Creative Health approach. • Supporting inclusive economic growth Stimulating the local economy by supporting cultural events and activations on our high streets, enabling cultural enterprises to thrive, and contributing to a vibrant public realm and evening economy. • Enabling grassroots talent and equitable access Providing affordable creative space, commissioning, and networking opportunities for early-career artists and underrepresented creatives, ensuring pathways into the sector are open and equitable. • Empowering young people Offering creative learning, training, and skills development 	

opportunities that build confidence, aspiration and routes into education, employment, and enterprise.

- Improving public spaces and shaping place
Using cultural activations to reimagine public spaces, create safer and more welcoming environments, and support vibrant, connected neighbourhoods.

The development of a new Cultural Strategy (2026–2031) reflects our ongoing commitment to We Make Camden by embedding culture at the heart of place-making, wellbeing and inclusive opportunity in Camden.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report presents Camden's Cultural Strategy, setting out a bold vision for cultural development to 2031. It outlines strategic approaches to supporting the cultural sector, grassroots artists, and creative businesses to unlock cultural opportunities that benefit residents and communities. The strategy also seeks to protect and strengthen Camden's identity and global reputation as a leading cultural borough, ensuring culture continues to play a central role in the borough's social and economic life.

The report is coming to the Cabinet for approval and adoption by the Council.

Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information

No documents that require listing were used in the preparation of this report.

Contact Officer:

Zerritha Brown, Head of Culture, 5 Pancras Square, N1C 4AG, Tel: 44 20 7974 4368 email: zerritha.brown@camden.gov.uk

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the report and make any recommendations to the Cabinet.

Having regard to findings from the resident, community led organisations and cultural partner engagement set out in Appendix 2 and the Council's public sector equality duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 the Cabinet is asked to adopt the Cultural Strategy 2026-2031 as set out in Appendix 1.



Signed:

Date: 28.10.25

1. CONTEXT AND 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 organisations and artists.
- 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 Portfolio Organisations
 - Home to a number of Department for Culture, Media and Sport and sponsored organisations
 - 4th most popular film location in London
 - 6th highest evening and night time economy in the UK
 - Cultural and creative businesses account for 18.8% gross value added, higher than national average of 6.9%¹.
- 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 year. 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 Africans 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.

2. PROPOSAL AND REASONS

- 2.1 The key principles and vision for culture in Camden were set out in the Cultural Framework adopted by the Council in April 2019. Since that time, we have experienced unparalleled changes, including but not limited to Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic, extraordinary inflation, and an ongoing cost-of-living crisis, all of which have directly and indirectly impacted the cultural sector, their audiences and those who engage with cultural events in a variety of ways.

¹ ONS data as in Culture and Place Data Explorer, Camden, September 2024.

2.2 With the Cultural Framework set to expire in 2025, and as detailed in paragraph 2.1, this is a timely opportunity to introduce a new Cultural Strategy to strengthen the borough's cultural infrastructure, engage the sector and deepen resident involvement.

2.3 During the summer of 2023, we collaborated with Cultural Camden to host a series of themed *Deliberative Cultural Conversations* with cultural sector organisations and their representatives. These conversations identified three key themes considered vital for the borough's cultural policy and for the sector:

- **Cultural & Creative Economy** – Supporting the sector and expanding the cultural infrastructure and creative economy
- **Learning, Skills and Development** – Nurturing the next generation of makers, producers, and creators by supporting the grassroots creative sector and working with partners to grow the talent pipeline
- **People and Place (Animating the Public Realm)** – Delivering cultural programmes that bring communities together and activate shared public spaces.

2.4 Between July and November 2024, the Culture Service used these themes to carry out an extensive consultation programme. Engagement took place with residents, cultural organisations and partners, schools, higher education institutions, Knowledge Quarter partners, Business Improvement District representatives, young people, the Disability Oversight Panel, Council colleagues, and through an online survey. This wide-ranging engagement generated over 300 responses. The views and ideas gathered have helped shape the draft strategy, including its vision and ambitions.

2.5 Following extensive consultation during the development of the strategy, a draft Cultural Strategy was published on Monday 14 July 2025 for public review. It was shared with residents, artists, cultural organisations and partners, schools, higher education institutions, Knowledge Quarter partners, representatives from the Business Improvement Districts, young people, and Council colleagues, inviting their comments before the strategy is finalised. To support this engagement, the draft was and circulated by email to over 120 cultural organisations, sector networks and wider stakeholders and was made available on Commonplace, an online engagement platform where residents can provide feedback. A total of 135 written responses were received, and a summary of the feedback is provided in Appendix 2.

3. A Cultural Strategy for the Borough

3.1 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. The vision statement for the Cultural Strategy is:

As a global capital of creativity, Camden will harness its world-leading thriving creative economy to uplift every community, spark meaningful connections, and create a vibrant, inspiring borough where everyone can live, learn, work, grow, visit, and invest. Through culture, we will build a joyful, healthy, and enriching environment that strengthens the fabric of Camden for all.

3.2 To deliver this vision, the strategy is built around three overarching themes, underpinned by guiding principles of Equity, Creative Health and Wellbeing, and Sustainability.

- **People and Place**

This theme focuses on supporting cultural activity to flourish within neighbourhoods, including reimagining public spaces through cultural programming. It seeks to foster civic pride, social connection, and community-led creativity that reflects Camden's diversity.

- **Learning and Skills**

This theme prioritises access to learning, skills development, and work experience opportunities across the cultural and creative sector — from early years to adulthood — with a focus on progression, inclusion, and local talent development.

- **Grow and Thrive**

This theme supports the conditions for Camden's cultural and creative industries to develop sustainably, recognising their role in contributing to the local economy, the London-wide cultural ecology, and the national creative industries.

3.3 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 and Inclusivity** – We will provide equitable opportunities for a wider demographic of residents to lead, participate in, and activate arts and cultural programs. We are committed to fostering an inclusive environment where diverse voices, identities, and experiences are welcomed, valued, and empowered to contribute meaningfully.

- **Sustainability** - The Culture Service will work in accordance with the principles, and in a way which actively supports the delivery of the Council's Climate Action Plan 2020-2025 and Clean Air Action Plan 2023-2026. 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.

3.4 The Vision and themes of the new Cultural Strategy provide a clear framework for the Council, its partners, and stakeholders to embed arts, culture and the creative industries as core contributors to the *We Make Camden* ambitions and missions. Delivering on our diversity, youth and estates 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
- Build stronger and more connected communities through inclusive and accessible creative health cultural experiences on our estates and in neighbourhoods.

3.5 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.

3.6 The Cultural Strategy will establish a strategic framework for a cross-sector, place-based approach to the development of arts and culture in Camden through to 2031. It will facilitate collaborative working between the Council, residents, borough-wide partners, cultural stakeholders, and creative professionals. Engagement with these groups has been central to the strategy's development and will be necessary for implementation. A key objective is to promote the effective use of shared assets and resources across sectors, ensuring Camden delivers a high-quality, inclusive cultural offer that reflects and supports the ambitions of *We Make Camden*. The strategy will also provide a foundation for improved cross-departmental work within the Council, ensuring culture is embedded in policymaking and service delivery across areas such as health, education, planning, and economic development.

3.7 Investing in culture is increasingly essential to effectively address the social, economic, and environmental challenges of our time. In a national context

where local authorities remain the largest public funders of culture², 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.

- 3.8 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.
- 3.9 The Council's role in culture is multifaceted with a range of Council services contributing to the positioning and delivery of culture and ensuring that residents benefit from a wide spectrum of Culture. The new strategy will provide a foundation for improved cross-departmental work across Council services, ensuring culture is embedded in policymaking and service delivery within areas such as health, education, planning, and economic development.
- 3.10 The Culture Service will oversee the delivery of the cultural strategy and will provide support to the Equalities, Social Purpose, and Community Partnerships teams in the strategic planning, delivery, and ongoing development of Council and community led faith-based festivals and key inclusion calendar themes and moments

4. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 4.1. The following options were considered in relation to the strategy:

- **Option 1** – Do Nothing
- **Option 2** – Update the Cultural Framework 2019 – 2025
- **Option 3** – A new Cultural Strategy

Option 1 - While the production of a Cultural Strategy is not a statutory requirement, Camden's cultural and creative sectors are a cornerstone of the borough's economic success and a vital part of its community identity and social fabric. The Council was awarded the Mayor of London – London Borough of Culture Cultural Impact award in 2019 which led to the creation of the 'Camden Alive' cultural programme, bringing together artists, community groups and institutions through a diverse high-quality cultural offer attracting over 1000 residents and 100 artists. The learning and legacy from 'Camden Alive' was the catalyst for the Council's journey to transform the role of arts and cultural life of the borough. In 2022 the Council invested in culture through a dedicated Culture Service which act as a connector and collaborator between cultural organisations, residents, artists and neighbourhoods to ensure that all communities have access to produce and consume cultural

² *Cornerstone Of Culture – Local Government Association 2024.*

experiences. In 2024, the Council engaged over 21,000 people in cultural activities and created 280 paid opportunities for creatives. Developing a Cultural Strategy strengthens the Council's commitment to continued investment in culture for its citizens. Aligned with We Make Camden and the missions, it sets out a bold set of ambitions to ensure that Camden remains a beacon of creativity, innovation and inclusion. For these reasons this option is not recommended.

4.2 **Option 2** - The 2019 – 2025 Cultural Framework created opportunities for the cultural and creative industries, communities, and other stakeholders to collaborate on delivering cultural programmes and supporting sector development. The framework provided a thematic structure to guide and shape cultural development, allowing flexibility and adaptability for cultural organisations and others to align their programmes to its shared vision. However, the pandemic, limited funding, and persistent inequalities in access have significantly impacted the cultural sector. Refreshing the framework would not provide the bold commitment required to address the social, economic, and environmental challenges the sector is facing. For these reasons option two is not recommended.

4.3 **Option 3** - 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. The option to develop a new 5-year Cultural Strategy for 2026–2031 offers the greatest opportunities to:

- Demonstrate the Council's continued investment in culture as a driver for growth, social cohesion and wellbeing.
- Create a shared vision and set of priorities for culture across the borough.
- Reflect the needs, interests, and aspirations of the sector, residents, and communities.
- Deliver benefits and opportunities to the borough, its residents, communities, and the cultural sector.
- Connect cultural activities and programmes with other borough strategies, including We Make Camden, the Evening & Night-time Economy Strategy, the Strategy for Diversity in the Public Realm, Camden Future High Streets, and the three Renewal Missions – Diversity, Estates, and Young People.
- Annually review, measure and update on progress.

4.4 The strategy outlines a clear and focused approach to supporting, strengthening, and safeguarding the borough's cultural infrastructure for both residents and the wider cultural sector. For this reason option 3 is recommended.

5. WHAT ARE THE KEY IMPACTS / RISKS? HOW WILL THEY BE ADDRESSED?

- 5.1 The adoption and implementation of Camden's Cultural Strategy is expected to generate significant and wide-reaching benefits for residents, communities, and the local economy. Key anticipated impacts include:

IMPACTS
<p>Increased Resident Engagement Expanded participation in cultural programmes and activities across Camden's diverse communities, with a focus on inclusion, relevance, and locally led initiatives.</p>
<p>Creative Health and Wellbeing Improved health and wellbeing outcomes using creative activity to support mental health, social connection, and community resilience — particularly in areas experiencing health inequalities and higher levels of isolation or loneliness.</p>
<p>Skills Development and Lifelong Learning Enhanced access to learning, skills, and employment pathways through the cultural and creative sectors — supporting residents of all ages to develop creative, digital and transferable skills through formal education, informal learning, volunteering, and work experience.</p>
<p>Service Innovation and Collaboration More innovative and effective service delivery through strengthened cross-sector partnerships, integrated working, and creative approaches to public service challenges.</p>
<p>Maintaining Camden's Global Cultural Reputation Continued recognition of Camden as a leading centre for culture and creativity, helping to attract investment, talent, and visitors to the borough.</p>
<p>Broader Cultural Ownership and Participation A deeper sense of cultural ownership and pride among residents, ensuring that culture is both shaped by and accessible to all communities across Camden.</p>
<p>Co-Creation with Communities Growth in co-created and community-led cultural activity, with artists and organisations working in partnership with residents to design and deliver locally meaningful projects.</p>
<p>Growth in the Creative Economy A more inclusive and resilient creative industries ecosystem, with increased opportunities for local employment, entrepreneurship, and sector growth.</p>
Economic Impact through Culture and Tourism

Increased cultural tourism, footfall and associated spending, supporting Camden's economy, high streets, and local businesses.

- 5.2 While the Cultural Strategy presents significant opportunities for Camden, it is important to recognise and manage key risks to its successful delivery:

Lack of Stakeholder and Resident Buy-In

Without strong engagement and support from residents, cultural organisations, and partners, the strategy risks failing to gain the necessary legitimacy and momentum. This could limit participation and reduce its overall impact.

Insufficient Collaboration and Community Partnership

Failure to embed genuine collaborative working with residents and community groups may result in the strategy being perceived as irrelevant or disconnected from local needs and aspirations. This would undermine its effectiveness in fostering inclusive cultural ownership.

Ineffective Strategy Management and Coordination

Without clear governance, robust project management, and dedicated resources, Camden risks missing critical opportunities to secure investment, develop its cultural offer, and inspire residents and visitors alike.

Resource Constraints and Funding Uncertainty

In a context of competing budget pressures, insufficient financial or staff resources may delay or limit the implementation of key programmes and partnerships outlined in the strategy.

Changing External Conditions

Economic fluctuations, policy shifts, or unforeseen events (such as public health crises) may impact the feasibility and delivery timelines of the strategy's objectives.

Inequitable Access and Participation

If the strategy does not effectively prioritise equity and inclusion, there is a risk that benefits may not reach the full diversity of Camden's communities, worsening existing inequalities.

- 5.3 **Risk Mitigation** - To mitigate these risks, the Council and partners will prioritise ongoing engagement, open communication, and partnership development with communities and stakeholders. Clear governance structures will be established to oversee delivery, monitor progress, and adapt to emerging challenges. Efforts will also focus on securing diversified funding streams and embedding equity at the heart of all programmes.

6. CONSULTATION/ENGAGEMENT

6.1 The Culture Service has undertaken extensive consultation to inform the development of Camden's Cultural Strategy 2026-2031. The engagement process has been comprehensive, inclusive, and borough-wide, involving a range of residents, community groups, cultural organisations, and Council services.

6.2 Consultation Timeline and Activities:

- April – June 2023: Camden's Deliberative Cultural Conversations and review of the existing Cultural Framework
- July – November 2024: Consultation with residents, young people, artists, cultural and creative sector organisations, and wider stakeholders. Key participants included:
 - Love Camden Advisors
 - Approximately 280 residents of which 36 were young people from diverse backgrounds across Camden, including Camden Youth Council, engaged with the consultation to develop the strategy
 - 37 cultural partner organisations
 - Residents with disabilities via the Council's Disability Oversight Panel
 - Representatives from Business Improvement Districts
 - Camden Learning and local education providers
 - Officers across various Council departments
- July 2025: Consultation on the published draft Cultural Strategy between the 14 and 31 July 2025 via the Commonplace platform, with over 120 cultural organisations and sector networks invited to participate. A total of 135 written responses were received through online forms, complemented by a feedback session attended by Love Camden Advisors.

6.3 A summary of the feedback is provided in Appendix 2.

6.4 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed, which details that this strategy aims to increase equality of opportunity and accessibility to culture. The Council will be balanced and sensitive in its approach to implementing the strategy and ensure that decisions are data-driven and that communities are engaged with throughout the delivery of the work. The full Equalities Impact Assessment is attached in Appendix 3.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 In considering the recommendations, the decision maker must also have due regard to the impact those decisions will have upon the Council's statutory duty regarding equalities set out in Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010.

7.2 In summary, these legal obligations require the Council and Cabinet, when exercising its functions, to have 'due regard' to the need to (1) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (2) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a

relevant protected characteristic and those who do not; and (3) foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not (which involves tackling prejudice and promoting understanding).

- 7.3 Under the Duty, the relevant protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation. In respect of (1) only, the protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnership is also relevant.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The report seeks Cabinet approval (Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee) for Camden's new Cultural Strategy for 2026 -2031.
- 8.2 This will be funded from Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (SCIL) at a cost of £1,141,806 to cover financial years 2026/27 and 2027/28 Culture Programme and Service.
- 8.3 The SCIL balance at the date of this report is £5,127,907. This balance is likely to change as other SCIL allocations are made and or when additional levy income is received.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Camden Council has declared a climate and ecological emergency and has committed to do all that it can to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the borough to zero by 2030. The Council has also committed to achieving the World Health Organization air quality standards throughout the borough by 2030, to protect the health of everyone who lives, works and learns in Camden.
- 9.2 Service providers are expected to work in accordance with these principles and in a way which actively supports in the delivery of the Council's Climate Action Plan 2020-2025 and Clean Air Action Plan 2023-2026.
- 9.3 This strategy will guide our work for the next five years and, through the overarching themes guided by the sustainability principle as set out in the document, will help the culture service make a positive contribution to improving the environment in Camden.
- 9.4 It is anticipated that if partners effectively collaborate and share assets, their activities will contribute to improving the environment, for example, by reusing and recycling, hence reducing waste.

10. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 10.1 The action plan for the Cultural Strategy will be delivered over a five-year period 2026 to 2031.

11. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – Cultural Strategy 2026 – 2031

APPENDIX 2 – Consultation and engagement undertaken to develop the
Cultural Strategy 2026-2031

APPENDIX 3 – Equality Impact Assessment

REPORT ENDS