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| Committee(s): Culture, Heritage and Libraries – For Information | Dated: 7 July 2025 |
| Subject: Developing the Cultural Strategy – Progress update April to May 2025 | Public report: For Information |
| This proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivers on Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse Engaged Communities • Vibrant Thriving Destination • Flourishing Public Spaces • Providing Excellent Services. |
| Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending? | No |
| If so, how much? | N/A |
| What is the source of Funding? | N/A |
| Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department? | N/A |
| Report of: | Gregory Moore, Deputy Town Clerk |
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Summary

This report provides an update on activity between April and May 2025 on the development of the Cultural Strategy and outlines next immediate steps.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to receive the content of this report for information.

Main Report

Background

1. In May 2025, Members of Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee (CHL) received an [update report](#) on Cultural Strategy progress between February and April 2025. The report also contained a forward look on the development process to the launch of the strategy in early 2026.

Current Position

2. This report provides an update on continued activity between April and May 2025 as outlined in the forward look. Focusing on the delivery of the Consultation Plan. A detailed Consultations Findings Report is available in Appendix 1.
3. Consultation and stakeholder engagement started in March. With a strong and inclusive process at the core of the work to capture insights from those who engage with culture in the City. Gathering input from a diverse range of voices, ensuring the strategy is co-created with the people and organisations it will serve. It has been designed to be accessible, engaging and representative, using a combination of creative engagement, structured dialogue and collaborative workshops.
4. Activity to date includes engaging with:
 - 178 participants through 10 themed focus groups
 - 741 responses to a public survey
 - 19 stakeholder conversations at a City, London and National level
 - 40 City residents and community members taking part in creative workshops
 - 45 street life interviews with the public
 - Culture City Question Time with 100 residents.
5. The outcome of this work is detailed below.

Public Creative Consultation

6. Creative consultation with the public in the form of two artist residencies (creative workshops and street life interviews) in the City to 'meet people where they are' and engage in conversation to provide a qualitative snapshot of perceptions of the City cultural provision and aspirations. Findings and results to come.

Public Cultural Strategy Survey

7. A public Cultural Strategy Survey with 741 responses. This short, light touch survey asked 13 questions providing quantitative and qualitative details of respondent's demographics; affiliation to the City; current levels of engagement in cultural activity in the City; feelings about the current City identity and cultural offer; and preferences for future cultural activity.
8. The survey was distributed through City Corporation and partner digital channels and networks of 500k+ subscribers including the Corporation's Corporate and visitor facing channels, City resident channels (newsletters, WhatsApp, City Living), City business networks (City Belonging/BIDS/SBREC/CHARN), and pan London partners (London and Partners). Printed copies distributed to City venues and attractions (CIC, Guildhall Art Gallery, City Libraries, community centres, housing estates etc).

9. Details of who responded to the survey including City affiliation, age, gender, ethnicity and cultural attitudes and where the survey was distributed can be found Appendix 1.

10. From respondent's answers a summary of learnings has been developed:

- **Frequency of engagement** – 55% engaged in cultural activity in the City at least once per month suggesting high frequency of engagement.
- **Current cultural experiences** – Exhibitions (71% of respondents), Theatre/Ballet/Opera (53%), Film (46%) and Live Music (45%) were the most common artforms people access in the City.
- **What people want more of** – Live Music (53%), Exhibitions (50%), Theatre/Ballet/Opera (48%), Arts Festivals (45%) and Literature Events (35%) were the most common artforms requested.
- **Gaps in provision** – A comparison between the cultural activities people said they access in the City and the activities they'd like to see suggests the biggest gaps in current provision are live music, street art events, comedy and fashion events.
- **Barriers to access** – Lack of awareness (51%), Timing (45%) and Cost (36%) were the most common stated barriers to engaging in culture in the City.
- **Importance of culture** – 57% of respondents agreed culture is very important to the identity of the City. 52% also agreed culture is very important to the economic future of the City.
- **Identity of the City** – Words associated with the City reflected a strong lean towards history, heritage and tradition. Terms like corporate, business and finance highlight the central role of commerce to the City's identity. Barbican was a common response emphasising its central cultural role. Common negative associations included expensive/elitist/exclusive; confused/unclear; hidden; and dull/boring/staid. More positive terms included diverse/varied; rich; interesting; and vibrant.

11. The Consultation Findings Report in Appendix 1 breaks down the results and learnings in more detail for City workers, residents and visitors.

12. Providing a set of key takeaways from the survey results:

- **Culture Matters** – People in the City place a high value on culture in their lives and sense of identity.
- **Tapestry of Audiences** – Despite being united by a high interest in culture, there is no single audience type for culture in the City. The cultural identity of the City needs to be fluid enough to allow it to be many things for many people.
- **Generational shifts** – Age appears to be a defining factor of cultural attitudes within City audiences. It will be important to ensure the City's cultural offer evolves to cater for these shifting tastes.

- **Communicating with audiences** – The main barrier for audiences appears to be knowing what is going on. Building familiarity and loyalty over time appears to be key, not relying on one-off marketing pushes.
- **Broadening the definition of culture** – There is a desire for greater diversity in the cultural offer. Achieving this could combat the more negative perceptions of the City as dull, boring and staid.
- **Cultural creators not just consumers** – There is an audience of highly creative people. Tapping into this latent creativity can enhance the cultural life of the City and give it distinctiveness without always needing to ‘put on’ culture or buy it in.

Themed Focus Groups

13. Ten themed focus groups with 178 participants designed to engage targeted sector groups (including residents; City workers; young people; place, leisure and tourism; global exchange; creative enterprise; culture; heritage; cultural investment; and property development) in structured discussions to gather detailed information, test emerging themes and recommendations and build relationships with partners.
14. The Consultation Findings Report in Appendix 1 details the questions asked, the participants and key findings from each group.
15. A summary of the key findings from the Focus Group are:
 - **People want culture that feels relevant to them** – Cultural experiences that feel personal, relatable, and connected to their lives. People want to feel part of the story, not just observers of it.
 - **People want ‘in’** – More space, more visibility and more opportunities to shape the City’s cultural life. Culture isn’t just something you go and see – it’s something you do.
 - **The Corporation should enable, not control** – Communities and creators want ownership and permission to lead, with support.
 - **Make room for the messy, the bold and the unexpected** – The City can be overly cautious, polished, and risk-averse – leaving little room for spontaneity or experimentation. Be brave enough to try, fail, and try again.
 - **Culture must feel safe, accessible and human** – Cultural spaces should be designed with affordability, physical access, inclusive environments and safety at the heart.
 - **Reframe heritage for today** – Bring the City’s extraordinary heritage to life in ways that are honest, relevant and resonant today.
 - **People want to celebrate what’s already here** – The City is full of cultural life, but it is not well known. People don’t just want new things, they want to value and elevate what’s already happening and working.
 - **Communication is a major barrier** – Improved marketing and communications with simpler ways to find out what’s on would unlock a huge untapped audience already here.

- **Culture should be visible in the everyday** – cultural experiences in public spaces embedded into the everyday life of the City are key to making the City feel alive and welcoming.
- **The rhythm of working life has changed** – timing is a crucial factor to how people engage with culture. A culture offer needs to fit into people's lives and schedules in a way that works for them.
- **The weekend gap is real** – There is opportunity to rethink how public space is used across the full week to invite a more diverse audience into the City.
- **The cultural identity is unclear** – The offer feels fragmented and hard to define. The City should embrace its contradictions of old and new. Serious and Playful. Global and hyperlocal. It can be all of these at once if the story is told well and with conviction.

One to One Conversations

16. A series of one-to-one conversations with 19 cultural sector professionals including funders, programmers, educators, civic leaders and changemakers based in and outside of the City.
17. The Consultation Findings Report in Appendix 1 details the organisations spoken to so far.
18. From the conversations key takeaways have been drawn from what was heard:
 - **Tell a people-first story** – The City has a rich cultural identity, but it often gets told through architecture, heritage and status. The story of the City should centre the people who've shaped it. A more inclusive narrative would help the City feel relevant, relatable and rooted in lived experience.
 - **Celebrate what already exists** – Celebrate and amplify what already exists. Rather than building new, the opportunity lies in connecting, curating and activating what's already here.
 - **Make it easy to be part of** – There are barriers to getting involved currently, complicated and unclear processes which make the City feel difficult to navigate. Simple access to space, more visible points of contact, clearer routes into commissioning would help people to deliver their own cultural activities. Supporting culture isn't just about funding, attitude and structure is also important.
 - **From audiences to collaborators** – Move away from passive cultural experiences to ones where people have been active in shaping them. Establish platforms that empower local voices, ensuring that programme designed is informed by those who experience culture in the City.
 - **Real partnership means co-authorship** – The strategy should be built from the ground up, with ongoing involvement from all sectors.
 - **Use tech to open doors** – There is huge potential for the City to use digital tools more meaningfully. Better digital infrastructure could make the City's cultural life easier to navigate and easier to belong to.

- **A strategy shouldn't sit on a shelf** – The strategy should be a living document, practical and adaptable – something partners can use, shape, and see reflected in action.
- **Experimentation builds trust, not risk** – Try things, test ideas and show workings. This invites others in and shows that culture in the City is something that is being built in partnership.
- **Culture is a way of working** – Culture is often seen as a separate strand of policy. However, a tool for improving health, strengthening local identity, tackling inequality and driving regeneration and growth. It should be embedded across education, planning, public realm and healthcare.

19. In addition to the above a Culture special City Question Time took place in May, where residents heard an update on the progress of the Cultural Strategy and key findings from the resident focus group were shared. There was an opportunity for residents to ask questions, leave their suggestions, complete the survey and sign up for future engagement opportunities.

Aligning with Emerging Themes

20. The consultation has provided the opportunity to test, challenge and deepen understanding of the seven emerging themes from the Insights and Research phase. Alignment with the themes is detailed in Appendix 1, highlights include:

- **Where Culture Means Business** – Culture is seen as part of the City's appeal to talent and investment – but only if it is visual, accessible and relevant. Work patterns, generational shifts, diversity of workforce need to be considered, and cultural offer needs to adapt.
- **Seeding a Creative Ecosystem** – Make space for emerging creative talent, enabling cultural creators and contributors not observers. Balance the cultural landscape by supporting the new and the existing. Don't be afraid to try new things to develop the cultural offer.
- **City of Firsts** – Support young people's creative development through skills development from childhood to early adulthood, with consistent engagement, that activity involves them, not just one-off presented experiences.
- **Old City, New Stories** – History is the most potent attraction for visitors, but they don't know how to access it and do not feel it is relevant to them. People want to hear about hidden narratives, lesser-known histories, marginalised voices and overlooked places with a human narrative. The City should embrace its complexity with old and new and not be afraid to experiment and take risks.
- **The World in One Square Mile** – Strong international partnerships with a wider range of voices, representing stories from all over the world, creating a bold, distinctive and open offer that matches the City's global status is called for.
- **Building for the Next Century** – Critical mass in key cultural focus areas should be the focus. Creating flexible public realm space at ground level that brings culture on to the streets and into everyday life. It's not all about big new buildings, it is critical to better use and support what already exists.

- **Culture that Cares** – The City is a high pressured and paced place and culture is a tool for connection, joy and mental health for all City communities.

21. This alignment provides a clear narrative, helping to build the evidence base and acting as the foundation to establish the key priorities of the Cultural Strategy in the next phase of work.

Audience Insights

22. Following on from the Phase 1 insights findings which were presented to CHL in May. The Audience Agency have developed a proposal for Phase 2 primary research based on the following analysis.

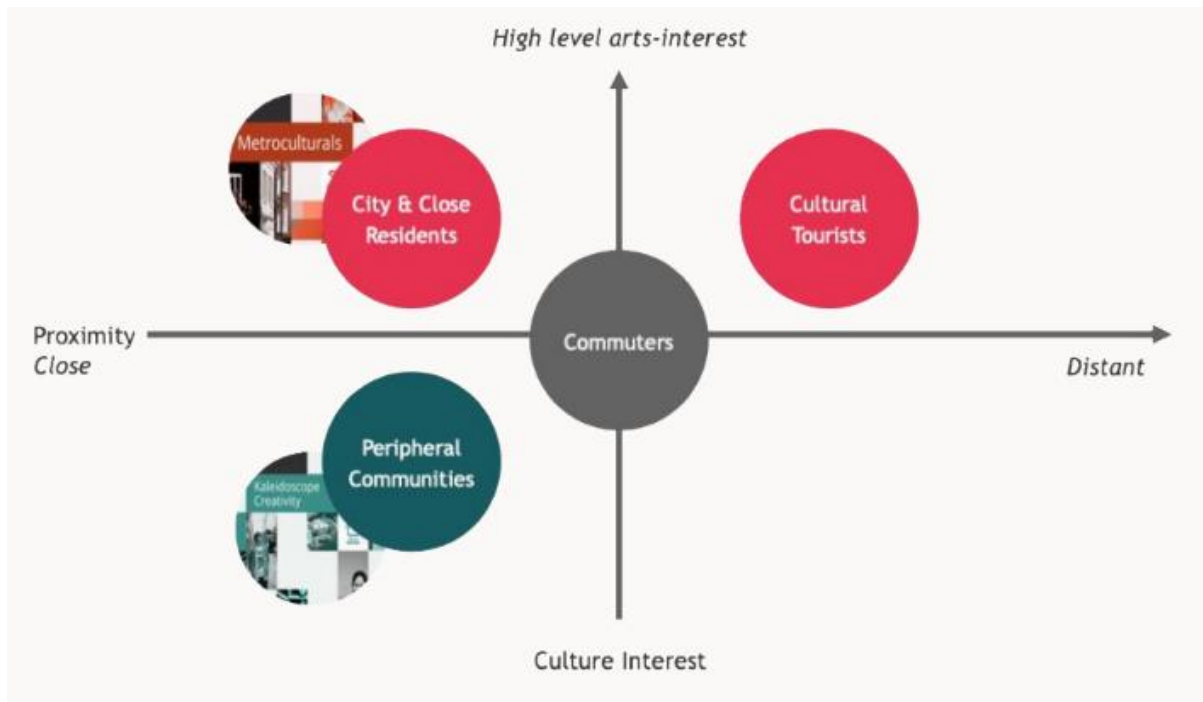
23. Meta-analysis of previous research suggests the City attracts a largely London/ home counties audience, though with a significant number of overseas audiences.

24. City workers do make use of the cultural offer, though there is limited understanding of how and when.

25. Demographically, audiences are mixed but look much like those for venues and activities all over London.

26. Surveys suggest that an increased cultural offer has potential, both in terms of driving visits and changing perceptions of the City, and more likely to have these positive benefits than retail or an expansion of the food and drink offer. In fact, significant proportions of survey respondents think that more culture and events would make the City a better destination. One factor that does stand out was the appeal of the City's unique heritage – in some surveys, nearly half the audience cited this as a factor.

27. Phase 1 research backs up a working hypothetical segmentation, based on proximity and level of cultural interest. This proposes 4 high-level audience groups as the basis of an audience strategy (see diagram below) and remains a key framing for the research.



28. **City & Close Arts-engaged Residents** - Analysis demonstrates the importance of this available audience of arts-interested audiences with eclectic tastes in and around the City area. This large group is the dominant market for the existing offer and likely to be critical to the success of the cultural strategy. The challenge will be to get the City and its new cultural offer on the “map” for busy, active [Metroculturals](#) who participate across London.
29. **Cultural Tourists** – The City attracts day and other visitors – from the South/East of England and internationally. Other research suggests that tourists interested in culture are frequently looking for offers which specifically relate to the place they are exploring – in terms of content or their iconic associations.
30. **Peripheral Less-Engaged Communities** – Analysis shows that average 16% of cultural users are from local, less engaged communities around the outside of the City, especially those in the [Kaleidoscope Creatives](#) segment.
31. **City Workers & Commuters** – Analysis suggests that City workers do engage with the cultural offer – though little is known about their preferences, interests and behaviours, nor about how this relates to commuting habits, or how times of the day and week might affect interest.
32. The phase one report identified several key gaps in understanding important to the development of the Strategy overall. Much of the Strategy looks to transform perceptions of the City and its cultural offer and build on its existing strengths – whether that be in the minds of prospective businesses, employers, creatives, investors, local audiences or visitors from further afield. In this context, it will be useful to understand more about audience’s current perceptions, habits and opportunities to understand how far the dial would need to shift to encourage engagement. There are also overall questions relating to all four audience groups:

- Quantification of potential market size
- Perceptions of the City as a place for leisure, culture, tourism
- The significance of different aspects of City's cultural offer in those perceptions
- Competition: where/ what else do people turn
- Relevance of and interest in the City as a place for cultural engagement
- An exploration of creative risk-taking/ risk-aversion and the interplay with audiences
- Impact of cultural institution flagship moments i.e. re-opening of London Museum, Barbican Renewal and Migration Museum on attention and perceptions

33. From the gap analysis and identification of four key audience groups, Phase 2 of the audience insights work is proposing two primary research areas.

34. The first focused on a panel survey for London, peripheral communities and cultural tourists. The target area for the survey is London and the surrounding local authorities from which TAA expect audiences to be drawn. The panel survey will describe the domestic market for the City's cultural offer within those areas which are likely to account for most UK-resident visitors to the City.

35. The total sample size will be 1,000 respondents who are in the market for culture in the City of London, plus up to 500 who are not in the market and will cover:

- Screeners – Demographics; Location; Openness to offer
- Previous engagement with arts/culture in London – What; Where
- Desired outcomes of different arts/leisure activities
- Time-of-activity/day-of-week context
- Testing different City zones, based on preferences
- Existing connection to the City
- Recognition of the current offer
- Testing potential activity types by intended experience and outcome
- Audience Spectrum segment

36. The second focused to be explored is an on-street survey for City workers to determine demographics of the workforce; what makes the cultural offer interesting; how might they be segmented into audience groups; the influence of working patterns on cultural activity and visa versa; and how best to consider inclusiveness and diversity in cultural programming.

37. As this piece of research would be relevant to Destination City and other external partners, Officers are exploring the potential of this being a collaborative shared piece of research.

38. The surveys will explore the overall issues identified and a number of the perception/ competition questions relating to each of the seven cultural strategy themes, including:

- Overall perceptions the city and its offer
- % open to the City as a place for arts/culture?
- What would they consider doing? Programme and style preferences

- When would they consider doing it
 - Blockers and persuaders
39. The samples will be representative of the population as a whole and be demographically representative, ensuring the voices of people from groups often marginalised by mainstream arts are included.
40. It will address a number of the questions relating to each theme and develop the strategic segmentation. Responses will be overlaid on Audience Spectrum Groups to estimate the size of different interest groups and sub-segments based on responses.
41. This work will take place between June and September 2025.

Proposal

42. Officers continue to implement the delivery of the remaining consultation plan and move into the co-creation phase of the strategy.
43. Further consultation includes:
- **Go and See visits** open to anyone who would like to feed into the process, delivered on a first come, first serve basis. Advertised on Eventbrite and distributed through our stakeholder consultation list of 400+ and City Corporation networks including resident newsletters and City Belonging. Participants will have the opportunity to explore a place in the City they would not normally have access to with a tour, followed by a creative session, with strategy presentation and Q&A. Three Go and See Visits will be held in June, July and September.
 - Weeklong **Out and About visits** in June where Things Made Public will engage with stakeholders who have been unable to engage through other methods of consultation but have shown a keen interest to involved.
 - Continued **one to one conversations**.
44. The co-creation phase focuses on turning the insights collected into action and developing the strategy together with a wide range of stakeholders. Building on this shared understanding and continuing to ensure the strategy is shaped by those who know the City best. This will be undertaken in three ways:
- **Cultural Strategy Development Group (CSDG)** bringing together a core group from culture, business, education, heritage, and tourism to co-create and refine the strategy through a series of interactive workshops. To ensure cross-sector collaboration and shared ownership of the strategy, creating a framework that is both ambitious and achievable.
 - City Corporation **Officer workshops** to ensure joined up internal collaboration in both the development and delivery of the strategy and that the ambition of the strategy is realistic, achievable, practical and deliverable.

- City Corporation **Member sessions** (including CHL and the Lead Member for Resident Engagement) outside of the committee forum to update on the development of the strategy and provide feedback with a Q&A session in July and September. To ensure Members are kept informed at key points in the development of the strategy and provide the opportunity to input and feedback.

45. These three groups will be involved in the next stages of the strategy's development to:

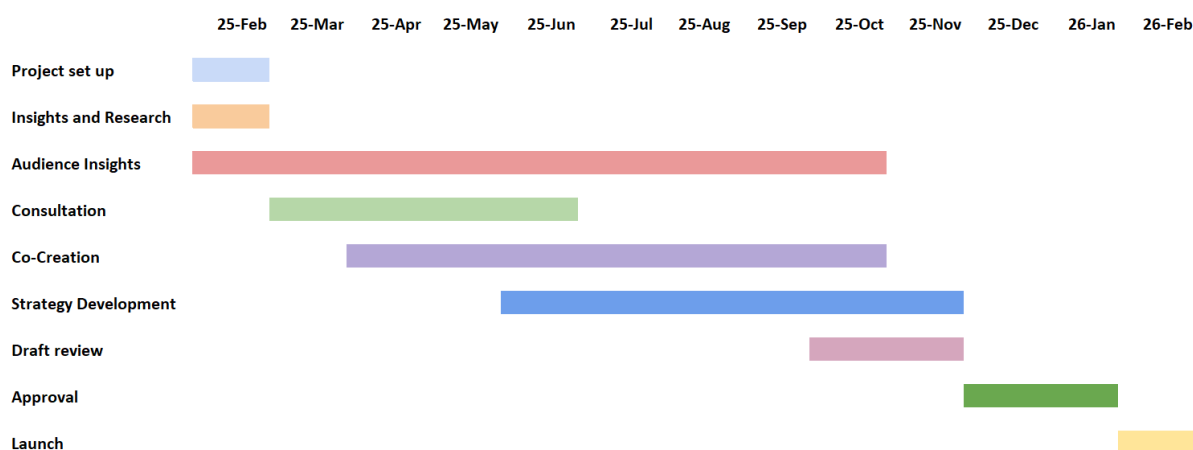
- Establish a definition for Culture in the City of London.
- Develop a manifesto and vision for culture in the City of London.
- Refine and set key priorities for the strategy.
- Create a framework with a set of recommendations to deliver on the priorities.

46. Members will be updated on the above at the next committee meeting in September.

47. All Member engagement sessions are planned for October to provide an opportunity for Members outside of CHL to be briefed on this work and to raise the profile of cultural and heritage activity within the City Corporation and the area which it serves.

48. The overall timeline to develop the strategy is summarised below, with a draft strategy for Members approval in November which will act as the decision point to progress to final approval of the strategy in December, with a public launch in February 2026.

Developing the Cultural Strategy Timeline



Corporate & Strategic Implications

49. As the priorities and recommendations from the strategy emerge the Corporate and Strategic implications will be under constant review:

50. Strategic implications – the Cultural Strategy spans four areas of the Corporate Plan, Diverse, Engaged Communities; Flourishing Public Spaces; Providing Excellent Services and Vibrant Thriving Destination.

51. Financial implications – In November 2024, a bid of £45,000 to the 2024/25 Policy Initiative Fund, categorised as ‘Supporting the development of a Culture Strategy’ and charged to City’s Estate was approved. Any additional budget (for an expanded scope of work or implementation) would be funded from local risk allocations.
52. Resource implications – currently being delivered within existing Culture team resource, supported by two external specialist consultants.
53. Legal implications – None identified.
54. Risk implications – None identified.
55. Equalities implications – None identified. Any emerging work with equalities implications would be handled through the City Corporation’s existing equalities-related groups.
56. Climate implications – None identified.
57. Security implications – None identified.

Conclusion

58. The consultation plan for the Cultural Strategy is well underway with key findings developed that lay the foundation, alongside the earlier research and insights findings, for the development of the strategy.
59. The next phase of work is to take the insights and evidence into the first draft of the strategy, by collaborating with key stakeholders to co-create the document. It will also include delivering phase 2 of the audience insights piece.
60. Next steps include developing a definition for culture, cultural manifesto and vision, a set of key priorities and a framework with recommendations on how to implement them.
61. Members will continue to be part of the process, taking part in facilitated workshops and briefings in July, September and October. As well as being updated at Committee.
62. At the November 2025 CHL Committee meeting, Members will review the draft strategy. This will be a key decision point to confirm progress on the Cultural Strategy development, then to approve the final strategy in December 2025. This will enable the Cultural Strategy to be launched in February 2026.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Consultations Findings Report available as a separate pack or via this link:

[Appendix 1 Consultations Findings Report.pdf](#)

Background Papers

[Developing the cultural strategy - Terms of Reference](#), Cultural, Heritage and Libraries Committee, Monday 9 December 2024

[Developing the Cultural Strategy – Progress update: February to April 2025](#), Cultural, Heritage and Libraries Committee, Friday 9 May 2025

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