**ITEM 10**

# Report – Culture Heritage and Libraries Committee

# Cultural Strategy

*To be presented on Thursday, 8th October 2026*

*To the Right Honourable The Lady Mayor, Aldermen and Commons of the City of London in Common Council assembled.*

## SUMMARY

Your Culture Heritage & Libraries Committee recommends approval of the Cultural Strategy for the City of London. This Strategy brings together the City of London Corporation, cultural institutions and partners across the Square Mile and sets the foundation for a collaborative delivery model. On approval the Cultural Strategy, Delivery Toolkit and Audience Playbook will be published and implementation will commence.

## RECOMMENDATION

This Honourable Court is asked to:

- Approve the Cultural Strategy and its publication.
- Approve the Delivery Toolkit and Audience Playbook and their publication, as supporting information for delivering the Cultural Strategy.
    - In doing so, note that any operational updates to the Delivery Toolkit and Audience Playbook will be made by the Head of Profession for Culture and any major changes will be made in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee.

## MAIN REPORT

### Background

1. In April 2024, Members of the Policy and Resources (P&R) Committee and the Culture, Heritage and Libraries (CHL) Committee endorsed the 14 recommendations from the Destination City – Independent Review 2024, led by Paul Martin. In May 2024, the Court of Common Council agreed two recommendations in terms of culture, that are:
    - *[To] request the Town Clerk/Chief Executive to consider options for the future Head of Profession for Culture as described and make an appropriate appointment to progress the cultural strategy.*
    - *[To] align the new culture strategy with the Destination City vision in an approach that is collaborative, develops new partnerships and sets its sights on the City of London as an international cultural and heritage destination.*

2. Following the appointment of the Head of Profession for Culture (August 2024), the Policy Initiatives Fund allocated £45k to develop the Cultural Strategy (November 2024) and CHL agreed the Terms of Reference (December 2024).

3. Throughout 2025, the CHL Committee received progress updates on the Cultural Strategy. This period involved significant research as well as internal and external consultation with stakeholders.

4. The P&R away day on 30 January 2026 considered how the City Corporation's five key priorities align and how major strategies should connect to those priorities. As part of this discussion, Members expressed support for the importance of a robust Cultural Strategy, while emphasising the need for as strong as alignment as possible at a corporate and institutional level.

5. In March 2026, the CHL Committee was updated on the opportunity to pause and reset the Cultural Strategy to help to ensure closer alignment with the emerging spatial framework, enabling a revised vision that is both ambitious and deliverable.

**Current Position**

6. In May 2026, the CHL Committee considered a draft of the Cultural Strategy for discussion, and comments were considered. As far as practically possible, effort has been made to consider feedback, comments and questions received during this work.

7. A revised version of the Strategy was presented for further discussion at two time-limited working group meetings: first with Senior Officers, and second with Chairs of key committees to ensure collective ownership of the vision and commitments prior to the strategy being finalised.

8. An all-Member session was held on 07 September 2026 during which Members were invited to scrutinise and review the draft Cultural Strategy.

9. The Strategy, Delivery Toolkit and Audience Playbook were approved at your Culture Heritage & Libraries Committee meeting of 20 July 2026, and at your Policy and Resources Committee meeting of 24 September 2026.

10. The **Cultural Strategy** sets out the City Corporation's overarching ambition and vision to recognise the importance of Culture for the Square Mile, its global reach and the need to place Culture at the centre of the City Corporation's activities and responsibilities. It recognises the importance of culture for economic growth and for all those who live, work, and visit the Square Mile. It sets out the commitments and priorities to achieve this overarching ambition and vision.

11. The **Delivery Toolkit** provides practical guidance and tools for working through operational decision-making in line with the Strategy, from shaping activity in specific places, to aligning investment, finding funding and evaluating outcomes.

12. The **Audience Playbook** sets out a detailed understanding of who City cultural audiences are, and who they could be. The Audience Playbook summarises from a culture point of view who interacts with the City, for what, why and how.

**Next steps**

13. Upon approval of the Cultural Strategy at the Court of Common Council, the proposed next steps include to:

    a. Publish the **Cultural Strategy** – share the final version with all stakeholders that have contributed to the development and publish into the public domain.

    b. **Establish the Cultural Strategy Delivery Group** (CSDG) – This is a working-level operational delivery group comprised of organisations that intend to deliver culture in the Square Mile. The CSDG will include representation from the City Corporation, cultural institutions and a range of external partners. The CSDG's Terms of Reference (including governance) will be proposed as part of the next steps. The governance would need to consider any recommendations from the Governance Efficiencies and Prioritisation review.

    c. **Align resources to implement the Cultural Strategy** – Once the Strategy is approved, the Culture Team will need to consider how to best organise its resource base to manage business-as-usual activity, planned work and build in capacity for new commitments. Resource for new commitments would be established through reprioritisation. This would enable progress against commitments like, for example, collate data from delivery partners and the wider cultural sector to establish a KPI baseline and set future targets.

    d. **Agree a communications plan** – Establish the overall approach to communications for the Cultural Strategy. Specifically, this would include an approach for continuing our dialogue with the culture sector. This dialogue was established during the strategy development process and will play a key part in successful delivery. Further, the Cultural Strategy will be able to leverage the consolidated OneCity website and digital platforms to promote the City of London as a place and to promote activities hosted by the City Corporation, our partners and organisations within the Square Mile.

14. There is no proposal to alter existing governance arrangements. The CHL Committee will continue to oversee the delivery of the Cultural Strategy and the Culture Team's progress will continue to be reported to CHL through the City Corporation's annual business planning process.

**Corporate & Strategic Implications**

**Strategic implications**

15. The Cultural Strategy is proposed to sit alongside the City Corporation's Strategic ambitions for Growth; the Square Mile as a Destination (Destination City), its global competitiveness for business (Competitiveness Strategy) and creating the conditions for the physical demand of space in a way that is sustainable and celebrates its heritage (City Plan 2040).

16. Against Destination City Target Outcomes, the Cultural Strategy directly contributes to achieving 'The UK's leading destination to work, driving strong weekday footfall, attracting and welcoming the next generation of talent' and 'A City that stays open, active and alive beyond the working week – supporting a vibrant and thriving weekend economy'.

17. The Cultural Strategy indirectly supports The Global City Competitiveness Strategy by making the Square Mile a desirable place to work and conducive to health and

wellbeing, making it more likely to be the choice for Occupiers who want to attract and retain a talented workforce.

18. The Cultural Strategy supports the City Plan 2040 Economic objectives by contributing directly towards enhancing the City's evening and weekend economies; Creating a new and enhanced culture, leisure and visitor attractions; Ensuring that development plays a significant role in enhancing the life of the Square Mile. It also contributes indirectly to its Social Objectives by creating a more inclusive and healthier City; as well as its environmental objectives to celebrate, protect and enhance the City's unique heritage assets.

19. The Cultural Strategy's position is to be able to take onboard the future recommendations resulting from the Place-Based Investment work that is currently in development.

20. Against the Corporate Plan 2024-2029, the Cultural Strategy contributes directly to Diverse Engaged Communities; Vibrant Thriving Destination; Providing Excellent Services, and indirectly to Dynamic Economic Growth and Flourishing Public Spaces.

**Financial implications**

21. The key upside financial implications are to:

    a) Establish a cultural fund to receive any financial contributions that are negotiated by planning officers in relation to new development having regard to the policies in the City of London Local Plan, the priorities in the Cultural Strategy, and the legal tests concerning planning obligations, as payments in lieu of an onsite cultural contribution. This would not have any additional direct financial implication on the City Fund or City's Estate.

    b) Work collaboratively with cultural institutions and partners across the City on a shared vision will bring resources together. Additionally, the Delivery Toolkit contains a section on 'Finding Funding' which outlines various existing sources of internal and external funding which could be explored should funds need to be raised for specific projects. This guidance is written both for officers and an external audience.

22. Considering ongoing fiscal pressures, the Strategy can be used as a diagnostic tool to manage any financial downside. The Strategy provides the "Cultural North Star", a steer from the P&R away day. It also provides prioritisation through the Commitments in terms of an activity-based and time-based framework. Any subsequent diagnostic and assessment would need to link with other key City Corporation strategies to ensure there is a holistic approach. There is a risk relating to a reduction in the overall financial envelope for Culture and this will need to be mitigated once there is further direction and once any impact has been established. There is no reliance on funding for additional projects from the City Corporation to deliver the Cultural Strategy, and your Policy & Resources Committee noted that any funding commitments for the Strategy would need to pass through the City Corporation's budget-setting process.

**Resource implications**

23. The Cultural Strategy will be delivered in collaboration with the City Corporation. The Cultural Strategy's strength lies in the variety and expert voices that informed

it. Delivery is by those who are already mostly involved in delivering culture in the Square Mile, building on the great cultural uniqueness and attractiveness that exist in the Square Mile.

**Legal implications**

24. None identified.

**Risk implications**

25. As the delivery of the Cultural Strategy relies on organisations outside of the City Corporation's control, officers cannot guarantee commitment and delivery from all parties and stakeholders. This will be mitigated by a governance structure that is conducive to collaborative working, shared benefits and co-delivery to ensure as far as possible, all parties are incentivised and are set up well to deliver.

**Equalities implications**

26. An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) has not been completed at the overarching Cultural Strategy level. Instead, EQIAs will be undertaken at an operational level either for each of the Priorities, Commitments or their underpinning projects. This approach will enable a tailored and meaningful assessment of the specific impacts on different groups as initiatives are developed and implemented, ensuring that equality considerations are effectively embedded in decision-making and design. The intent is for the Cultural Strategy to be more inclusive including for those with protected characteristics

27. Some elements of the Cultural Strategy will potentially be delivered by an external partner, outside of the City Corporation's control. A standard good practice, City Corporation Officers will advocate for partners to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty and to take into consideration the four additional characteristics the City Corporation also seeks to protect.

**Climate implications**

28. None identified.

**Security implications**

29. None identified.

**Conclusion**

30. This report presents a final draft of the Cultural Strategy 2026, developed through extensive research, consultation, collaboration and alignment with the City Corporation's wider strategic priorities. The Strategy establishes a clear, long-term direction for culture as a central component that contributes deeply to the City's success. Intentionally collaborative in design and delivery, it is recognised that successful implementation depends on shared ownership across the City Corporation, cultural institutions and a wide range of partners. The accompanying Delivery Toolkit and Audience Playbook provide the practical framework to support this.

**Appendices**

Appendix 1 – City of London 2026 Cultural Strategy
Appendix 2 – Delivery Toolkit

Appendix 3 – Audience Playbook

All of which we submit to the judgement of this Honourable Court.

DATED this 20th July 2026.

SIGNED on behalf of the Committee.

**Brendan Barns**

Chair, Culture Heritage and Libraries Committee