

# Briefing Note – Cheltenham Culture Board

**Committee name: Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Date: 3 March 2026**

**Responsible officer: Richard Gibson, Head of communities, wellbeing & partnerships**

This note provides information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Cabinet or a committee but where no decisions from Members are needed.

If Members have questions relating to matters shown, they are asked to contact the officer indicated.

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Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee have indicated that they would like to receive an update about the work of Cheltenham Culture Board.

This briefing note updates members about the work of the board.

## **The Cheltenham Culture Board**

Cheltenham Culture Board was set up to connect the cultural sectors together and to take on the role of producing a cultural strategy for Cheltenham.

Since its inception in July 2021, the Culture Board has built a strong alliance across Cheltenham's cultural and creative communities and takes a leading role to advocate that culture and creativity should be central to the economic and social life of Cheltenham.

The aim of the Culture Board is to set and deliver a cultural strategy for Cheltenham which makes demonstrable progress towards the Board's longer-term vision for the town:

The board has developed a representative structure, drawing people together with a diverse range of skills, knowledge and expertise to give their perspective in areas of culture, business, community and academia.

## **The Cheltenham Culture Strategy**

The board has worked to develop [a culture strategy](#) for the town that was endorsed by Cabinet in April 2023.

In producing the strategy, the board consulted widely with cultural partners and key stakeholders across the town all of which endorsed an assessment of Cheltenham as a place with powerful cultural and heritage assets that need to be celebrated and nurtured.

What also emerged from the consultations was the need for a cultural vision that would shift a gear in our approach to developing and deepening the cultural offer; establishing

Cheltenham as a truly innovative creative place and destination; fostering creative expression; alongside much greater community engagement.

**The strategy’s vision is:**

*Cheltenham is a vibrant place and cultural destination where the fusion of arts, digital and heritage innovation fosters creative and inclusive communities where everyone has the chance to thrive*

To meet this cultural vision, the board agreed six objectives that provide the focus for the strategy and the board’s action plan as set out below with a summary of progress against these.

Objective	Progress
Forge partnerships and collaboration across the heritage, cultural and digital sectors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board members collaborated towards a successful Arts Council England bid to host the Holst 150 celebrations that were held in March 2025.</li> <li>• Facilitated engagement and fed in to Golden Valley social value plans.</li> <li>• Cultural organisations report improved networking and relationships. Cheltenham Arts Network has been set up which is a network of primarily visual arts organisations who meet regularly to discuss issues and share best practice.</li> </ul>
Use culture and creativity to improve the life chances of our young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formed a Learning and Participation sub-group to coordinate experiences and participatory opportunities for young people - the work from which has informed the development of the No Child Left Behind youth activity pass – which will be piloted in March 2026.</li> </ul>
Promote equity of opportunity to help build inclusive and creative communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural partners are engaged with No Child Left Behind to improve equitable access to cultural opportunities via the youth pass.</li> <li>• With funding from the council’s health and wellbeing fund Cheltenham Festivals “Connections” scheme provided over 600 free tickets to Jazz, Science, Literature and Music Festivals— for local people and families experiencing hardship.</li> <li>• Inclusion is a core element of the grant funding awarded to cultural organisations by the Council.</li> <li>• Development of a doughnut Toolkit (based on doughnut economics model) as a cultural accessibility framework.</li> </ul>
Celebrate and nurture our community, grass-roots creative talents and ambitions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture board members have committed to supporting emerging talent. This is clearly demonstrated by The Wilson’s We Are Creators programme, supporting emerging visual artists from across Cheltenham and Gloucestershire to develop their practice and build successful careers in the visual arts sector.</li> </ul>
Drive our visitor economy and wider place brand.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cheltenham is known as The Festival Town. Members of the council’s Marketing Cheltenham team are active participants in the Culture Board, ensuring the town’s programme of events and variety of attractions are effectively promoted to</li> </ul>

	visitors and residents via the Visit Cheltenham brand, increasing audiences.
Use culture, creativity and innovation to contribute to the Cheltenham Zero and work collectively to address the climate emergency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members of the board have committed to ensuring climate impact is considered within cultural programming. Cheltenham Festivals, Cheltenham Borough Council, and Cheltenham Trust have all implemented carbon reduction initiatives in their events and cultural venues.</li> <li>The Council is taking the lead in piloting the Green Events Code of Practice which provides a clear, nationally consistent framework that helps event organisers and local authorities improve environmental performance.</li> </ul>

### Refinement of the board's structure

The board has recently undertaken a review of its structure. An independent facilitator was appointed to work with board members.

The facilitator found that the value of the Culture Board was not in question and was clearly articulated during the session. There is commitment and energy to deliver the Culture Board's purpose more efficiently. However, board members indicated that the structure should strike a better balance between networking and more focused strategic sessions. There was also a lack of consensus about the most effective structures and processes for delivering the strategy.

The facilitator's recommendations were that formal board meetings should be replaced with:

#### Monthly open networking sessions:

Focused on sharing ideas and knowledge. These sessions would not be chaired and be hosted by a cultural venue.

#### Quarterly Culture Network meetings;

Designed to foster collaboration and partnership, support cultural development and innovation, enable shared learning, celebrate and promote local culture, and keep the cultural strategy under review. These meetings would be hosted by different organisations, with relevant information shared across the network.

### Progress to date

The monthly social meetings are hosted by The Cheltenham Trust at The Wilson as part of the Wilson Lates programme, taking place on the first Wednesday of every month.

The first meeting of the new Culture Network took place on 4 February 2026, hosted by Cheltenham Festivals. Attendance was good, and discussions included the NCLB youth activity pass, the Cheltenham Heritage Strategy, and Local Government Reorganisation.

A more detailed report on the workings of the new Culture Network will be brought forward once it has had sufficient time to become established.

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