

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 25 th September 2025
SUMMARY OF REPORT This report provides an overview of the Full Council themed debate on 21 st July 2025. The report summarises the key points made by the 6 speakers, and the subsequent debate at Full Council. The report highlights the next steps from the discussion and the implementation of a new cultural strategy for 2026–2031. Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information The following reports were used to produce this report: Contact Officer: Zerritha Brown – Head Of Culture Supporting Communities 5 Pancras Square N1C 4AG Zerritha.brown@camden.gov.uk	
RECOMMENDATIONS The Council is asked to note the report.	

Signed: 

David Burns, Executive Director, Investment, Place and Opportunity

Date: 10th September 2025

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 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 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.
- 1.5 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,

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

- 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 nighttime 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.

- 1.6 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.
- 1.7 The report to the Full Council Debate in July detailed the benefits the council has been able to leverage from Culture for Camden citizens, emphasised the important role the council plays in supporting the cultural ecology and set out the council's approach to developing the first cultural strategy for the borough.
- 1.8 The following provides a summary of the debate on this item at the Full Council meeting of 21 July 2025. For the official record please refer to the approved minutes, which take precedence over this summary. It summarises the views of speakers and subsequent debate within the Chamber and provides an update on how Camden, working with culture sector partners, residents and businesses, will respond and continue to ensure that Camden remains a beacon of creativity, innovation and inclusion.
- 1.9 The Council was grateful to have six speakers from across the culture sector join the debate, to speak about the impact and social value benefits of the arts and culture and what Camden should continue to do to grow this:
- Monica Hundal, Director - Innovation and Business Central Saint Martins
 - Eddie Nixon, Artist Director - The Place
 - Marcel Baettig, Chief Executive - Bow Arts
 - Daniel Pitt, Creative Director & Chief Executive - Old Diorama Arts Centre
 - Antonia Attwood, Artistic Director - Creative Health Camden
 - Meklit Tibebu, Culture Service Apprentice – Camden Council

2 SUMMARY OF FULL COUNCIL DEBATE

- 2.1 The debate was introduced by Cllr Sabrina Francis, Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Jobs, Young People and Culture. Cllr Francis opened by emphasizing that culture is central to Camden's identity, community wellbeing, and economic growth and how engagement in arts and creativity enhances mental health, fosters belonging, and transforms spaces. Cllr Francis highlighted how Camden's cultural and creative industries contribute 18.8% of its local economy—above the national average. But despite Camden's rich cultural scene and central London location, not all residents benefit equally, due to barriers like cost, time, and perceived exclusivity.
- 2.2 Cllr Francis articulated that at a time of more regional funding focus the council continues to invest in culture as it recognises the power of cultural activity to change people's lives and to increase economic growth. This investment enables the council to deliver on the Youth, Estates and Diversity Missions and We Make Camden priorities through cultural activation. Examples of projects include the Love Camden cultural programme which celebrates the diversity of the borough through events and activities, training and networking opportunities for the culture sector and distributing community grants to empower residents to deliver activity in their neighbourhoods. The impact of these has engaged over 21,000 people and created 280 paid opportunities. Cllr Francis set out the approach to Camden's first cultural strategy 2026–2031 which will focus on People & Place, Learning & Skills, and Grow & Thrive, with priorities around health, equity, and sustainability. In closing Cllr Francis expressed that 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 existing strengths, continuing to invest to support resilience and addressing inequalities in cultural access, the council can ensure that Camden remains a beacon of creativity, innovation and inclusion.
- 2.3 Monica Hundal spoke about Central Saint Martin's/University of The Arts London (CSM UAL) role in the flagship Camden Schools Art Biennale (CSAB) which was successfully piloted in July 2024. The initiative was inspired by the Venice Biennale and championed by Cllr Angela Mason to celebrate Camden's artistic diversity and to invest in the creative potential of its young residents. It was delivered through a strong partnership between Camden Council, Camden Learning, and CSM UAL. The CSAB featured a week-long curated exhibition at CSM, showcasing 350 artworks from 53 Camden schools—including primary, secondary, specialist, and hospital settings. Over 2,000 young people were directly engaged, with the exhibition attracting 5,200 visitors, making it one of the most well-attended shows at CSM to date. Monica noted that in addition to the exhibition, the programme included artist-led workshops, school outreach, teacher continuing professional development (CPD) and engagement with local galleries. The impact included increased student confidence, enhanced arts provision in schools, and improved awareness of creative education and career pathways particularly benefiting students from disadvantaged backgrounds. CSAB has laid strong foundations

for long-term development. Camden Learning has now appointed an Excellence Lead for Art to support borough-wide arts engagement. Plans are underway to expand CSAB as a recurring biennial event, deepen partnerships with local cultural institutions, and strengthen Camden's cultural education offer in line with the borough's commitment to inclusion, opportunity, and lifelong learning.

- 2.4 Eddie Nixon talked about the Place, a renowned centre for dance supported by Arts Council England as a national portfolio organisation and recognised as a world leading specialist dance higher education provider. Whilst they have a national and global reach, they are committed to working with local Camden communities which they do through the Camden Schools Dance Festival. They embrace new collaborations with community partners and deliver free dance events at Corum's Field. Eddie praised Camden's rich cultural scene due to the density of cultural organisations in the borough and welcomed the cultural strategy ambition to activate this resource to make Camden a thriving centre of cultural possibility for all that live here. Eddie noted that growth will be a challenge due to funding challenges but called for greater collaboration that connects culture, education, health, and social care to improve wellbeing and create vibrant neighbourhoods. Eddie shared his belief that Camden can be iconic, becoming a benchmark for national and global leader in cultural innovation by working together across sectors to ensure all residents benefit from creativity.
- 2.5 Marcel Baettig spoke about Bow Arts partnership with Camden Council in revitalising 90 ex-residential flats in Regent's Park Ward. The flats are adjacent to the High Speed 2 site (HS2) and have been converted into affordable studios for 240 early-career artists, 80% of whom are Camden residents. The studios support a wide range of artists, from printers, milliners, fashion designers, writers and performers. In addition, the studios are designed to support Camden's broader community partners and collaborates with local partners like Old Diorama Arts Centre, Camden Black Collective, and independent community workers, offering free space for community use. High-impact creative projects, such as turning a carpark into a catwalk for London Fashion Week showcase and a community photo installation featured on ITV, have emerged from this initiative. Marcel highlighted the urgent issue of affordable creative workspace, warning that without action, London risks losing its emerging talent, especially those from less privileged backgrounds. He emphasised that affordability enables access, and the Bow Arts Studios in Camden is making a significant difference. Marcel thanked council officers for their vital support in delivering this impactful project.
- 2.6 Daniel Pitt spoke about Old Diorama Arts Centre's (ODAC) role in Euston as a London wider arts centre which serves a vibrant neighbourhood of diverse communities including residents, social groups, artists, and vulnerable populations. Over the last few years, ODAC has been reimagining and rebuilding the relationship between their centre and the residents of Regent's Park Estate, where everything there is in the context of the disruption that High HS2 has brought. Daniel described the centre as a welcoming home to a unique mix: from residents, creative social action groups, commercial theatre

and TV hires, members of the homeless-experienced and Camden Council's Honest Grind Coffee youth training programme are residents in their cafe. The centre also focuses on arts-for-social-change and community engagement, notably through projects like the Regent's Park Estate Story Trail, a long-term, resident-driven public art initiative involving over 1,600 participants. ODAC collaborates with Camden Council on cultural and regeneration projects and place emphasis on consistent community involvement and true collaboration despite challenges like short-term funding. An example is working with the Euston Regeneration team on using participatory arts to conduct community research and co-create a housing compact. Residents deeply value ODAC as a cultural anchor that helps address wider social issues. Daniel closed by encouraging the Council to recognise and support community arts centres as vital neighbourhood hubs with strong social impact.

- 2.7 Antonia spotlighted the work of Creative Health Camden (CHC) a pioneering charity based in Kentish Town Health Centre, founded 17 years ago by Dr Roy MacGregor to integrate arts and wellbeing into healthcare. The centre was purpose-built to support this vision into the infrastructure with community spaces, exhibition areas, and outdoor environments designed to enhance health through creativity. Once the building was open the charity was set up to provide the wellbeing initiative the health centre housed. CHC operates at the intersection of health, community, and the arts, offering free, creative workshops such as visual arts, singing, gardening, dance for Parkinson's, and youth activities. These are part of a social prescribing model, supporting over 700 patients and seen by more than 2,000 visitors monthly. They also deliver annual exhibitions which explore mental and physical health through art and described creative health as a key a component for supporting culture in Camden. Antonia explained that when the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) were no longer able to provide services in Kentish Town Health Centre, CHC hired a benefits advisor who supports patients with benefits, debt and housing advice. CHCs approach to creative health is thinking creatively about how communities are supported more holistically with non-pharmacological interventions that promote, health and wellbeing through creative community initiatives that medical intervention can no longer support. Antonia called for greater collaboration in putting creative health at the forefront so that collectively the borough can provide underserved communities access to creative activities that ensures a healthier happier Camden.
- 2.8 Meklit Tibebe is a Camden resident and shared how the arts and culture have shaped her personal and professional journey. Meklit described how early exposure to creative activities through school and clubs sparked a lifelong passion but followed a career pathway rooted in sciences, maths and law which led her to initially pursue politics at university. Meklit emphasised the challenges of breaking into the arts industry and highlighted apprenticeships as a crucial way to bridge gaps and create equitable opportunities. Meklit highlighted the how culture fosters community, belonging, and joy and the importance investing in young people. Meklit described her time as an apprentice as gaining valuable experience and insight, contributing meaningfully to Camden's cultural strategy while growing personally and professionally.

- 2.9 The issue of pathways to careers in culture was raised by Cllr Simpson with a focus on how the Council can ensure that every young person in Camden feels that a career in the arts is something they can pursue. Cllr Headlam-Wells highlighted the vital role of music in the borough's cultural life, in particularly the Camden Schools Music Festival at the Royal Albert Hall which has been running since 1998 and involves over 2000 pupils and emphasised the significant economic and employment benefits the music industry brings to Camden and the nation. Cllr Boyland praised the success of the CSAB and confirmed funding for a further two years of the programme.
- 2.10 Comments were raised regarding financial challenges facing the culture sector. Cllr Chung raised the issue of the Pentameters Theatre in Hampstead, which is at risk of closure and called on Camden to help save it. Cllr Dixy raised concerns about funds available for culture from Local Community Infrastructure Levy and raised questions on organisations are made aware of funding streams and how they are supported to access them. Cllr. Thompson raised concerns about the redistribution of funding outside of London and questioned how the council can align other strategies, i.e the Evening and Nighttime Economy to unlock opportunities.
- 2.11 The positive impact of culture in neighbourhoods was raised. Cllr Wright commented on the importance of creative health and wellbeing in supporting communities and building community cohesion. Cllr Wright and Cllr Greenwood and praised the impact that the community grants programme is making in supporting residents to deliver their own events.
- 2.12 Greater representation across the cultural sector was raised by Cllr Madlani who called on the guest speakers for examples of best practice and asked what the councils role could be in facilitating this.

3 NEXT STEPS

- 3.1 On the 4 August 2025 the Executive Director Investment, Place & Opportunity agreed to allocate £1,141,806 of Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (SCIL) funds to cover the 26/27 and 27/28 Culture Programme and Culture Service.
- 3.2 Following extensive consultation during the development of the strategy, a draft Cultural Strategy was published on Monday 14 July to Thursday 31 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 made available on Commonplace and circulated by email to over 120 cultural organisations, sector networks, and wider stakeholders. A total of 135 written responses were received.
- 3.3 The Council is currently reviewing the responses ahead of drafting the final strategy. A report and the final strategy will be considered at the Culture and

Environment Scrutiny Committee on the 10 November and Cabinet on the 12 November 2025, with a view to then adopting should that be the decision taken by Members.

- 3.4 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 of the culture strategy, monitor progress, and adapt to emerging challenges. The council will also focus on securing diversified funding streams and embedding equity at the heart of all programmes.
- 3.5 The Council, residents, and partners will work together to deliver a long-term cultural vision for Camden, based on shared values, shared investment, and a collective ambition to strengthen community resilience, cohesion, and pride of place.
- 3.6 Camden Council is committed to investing in culture and will continue to deliver and develop activities which support our residents, creatives and businesses. By using formal levers and strategic partnerships, the Council will continue to unlock further benefits of culture for our citizens.

4 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. The Borough Solicitor has been consulted and has no legal comments.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This report seeks noting for the planned use of £1,141,806 of the Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (SCIL) funds for the delivery of the 26/27 and 27/28 Culture Programme and Service.
- 5.2 This would leave a SCIL balance of £5,226,684 at the date of this report, with the balance likely to change as other SCIL allocations are made and/or additional levy income is received. The Council would therefore have sufficient Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy to fund this request.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no expected environmental implications.

7 APPENDICES

- 7.1 There are no appendices to the report.

REPORT ENDS

