

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

1. Step one - April – June 2023 – Camden’s Deliberative Cultural Conversations / Reviewing the Cultural Framework

1.1 Camden Council, operating in partnership with Cultural Camden and in collaboration with the wider cultural community, undertook a review of the borough’s Cultural Framework, adopted in April 2019. The framework has provided a thematic structure to guide and shape cultural development, allowing flexibility and adaptability for cultural organisations and others to align their programmes to a shared vision and set of objectives. Since that time, there has been unparalleled changes - withdrawal from the European Union, a pandemic and lockdown/s, extraordinary inflation, and a cost-of-living crisis, all of these directly and indirectly impacted the entirety of the arts, cultural, and creative sector, their audiences and those who engage with cultural events in a variety of ways.

1.2 To give shape to the review of the cultural framework a series of ‘Deliberative Cultural Conversations’ were held. Each conversation focused on one of the following themes:

- Workshop 1 - Navigating financial challenges and the pressures impacting the cultural sector,
- Workshop 2 - How can we continue to grow the cultural and creative economy,
- Workshop 3 - Cultural and creative learning (including Education) and participation,
- Workshop 4 - Cultural vision and ambition for Camden.

1.3 Through the deliberative conversations four themes were identified:

- Diversity and representation at the heart/distribution of power
- Culture and creative economy
- People and place, animating the public realm
- Learning, Skills and development

These emergent themes were used as the basis for consultation with residents, communities, artists, creative/cultural/arts sector and other stakeholders.

2. Step two – July – November 2024 - Consulting residents, communities, artists, creative, cultural and arts sector organisations and wider stakeholders

2.1 From July – November 2024 the culture service, with support from the Supporting Communities Strategy Team, undertook an extensive consultation programme to hear the views and ambitions for culture from residents, the cultural sector, community and business groups. Through a series of events, we engaged with:

- Our team of resident Love Camden Advisors
- 200 residents and young people from diverse backgrounds and from across all areas of the borough, including Camden Youth Council
- 29 cultural partner organisations
- Residents with disabilities through the Council's Disability Oversight Panel
- Representatives from our Business Improvement Districts
- Representatives of Camden Learning, further and higher education providers
- Officers from a wide range of Council services.

2.2 The things we heard most that helped shape the People and Place theme were:

- Arts and cultural programmes in localities and neighbourhoods where they live and bring communities together, address social isolation and contribute to individual and collective health and wellbeing,
- Programmes open to all communities, which celebrate identity, diversity and place,
- Affordable access to borough venues and programmes,
- Cultural spaces that are safe and inclusive for all communities,
- Support for residents to develop and manage their own community-led festivals, events and programmes.

2.3 The things we heard that brought the focus to the Learning and Skills theme were:

- Opportunities for all, both within and beyond the school/institution environment, for learning, personal development and career change/progression,
- More opportunities for residents to access training, work experience and apprenticeships,
- Opportunities to gain transferrable skills through volunteering programmes and other similar initiatives,
- Increased opportunities for artists to develop their skills and ways of working with and in communities,
- Strong interest in training creative health facilitators to build capacity to deliver creative health programmes,
- Networking and sharing good practice to increase borough-wide capacity.

2.4 The things we heard that brought the focus to the Grow and Thrive theme were:

- More affordable work and rehearsal spaces and studios for artists, creatives and small scale/start-up companies,
- More opportunities for the arts and cultural sector to meet, collaborate and support each other to respond to, manage or mitigate the challenges of the time that the sector faces,
- Targeted support to help build sector resilience for grassroots arts and cultural organisations, including audience development, marketing and promotion;
- Support to enable the arts and cultural sector to grow economically and thrive creatively.

3. Step three – Monday 14 July – Thursday 31 July 2025 consultation on the published draft of the Cultural Strategy 2026-2031

- 3.1 Having consulted widely on the development of the strategy, carefully listening to the views and ambitions for culture from residents, the cultural sector, community and business groups a draft Cultural Strategy was published on Monday 14 July for residents, artists, cultural organisations/partners, schools, higher education, Knowledge Quarter partners, representatives from the Business Improvement Districts, young people and colleagues across the Council to review and comment on the draft before it is finalised. To facilitate this process, it was published on Commonplace and sent by e-mail to over 120 Cultural Organisations, sector networks and wider stakeholders. A total of 135 written responses were submitted via Commonplace and Microsoft Forms. We also held a feedback session, attended by three of the Love Camden Advisors. One Love Camden Advisor was unable to attend and submitted their feedback by email.
- 3.2 This stage of consultation comprised of three questions. Via the Commonplace site, residents were asked to organise their feedback in response to the following: i) Do the strategy themes “ People & Place, Grow & Thrive, Learning & Skills” reflect your or your community’s cultural aspirations ii) Is there anything important missing from these themes that you or your community would like to see included?, and iii) How do you or your community see yourselves getting involved with these themes?
- 3.3 82 responses were received from individuals, just under 50% of these identified as Camden residents while 17% work in the borough and just under 10% were visitors. 50% of respondents were aged 65 and over, while less than 1% of respondents were under 34.
- 3.4 To the question, do the themes reflect you or cultural organisation’s aims and objectives, 54% replied yes, while 25% replied no and 21% were unsure. Table 1 below provides a summary of items respondents felt were missing or not sufficiently highlighted in the strategy. This feedback identifies several gaps and

opportunities for Camden's Cultural Strategy to become more inclusive, future-facing, and locally grounded. While respondents support Camden's unique cultural identity, they call for greater specificity, representation, innovation, and co-ownership in shaping the borough's cultural future.

3.5 A high-level summary of resident responses, includes:

i) Inclusion & Representation

- Older People Action - reference to older adults as knowledge holders and mentors; promote intergenerational cultural programmes added into action to align with Arts Council England's priority for people over 70.
- Lack of reference to People with Disabilities - references to accessibility, particularly for visually impaired and homebound residents included in the action plan.
- Irish & English Cultures - Camden's Irish heritage (e.g. London Irish Centre, St Patrick's Day) added to the action plan.
- Include a breadth of Art Forms, Literature, theatre and written arts added into the definitions section.

ii) Community & Belonging

- Loneliness & Local Identity included in the thematic actions for People and Place and Creative Health. The Cultural Strategy identifies key actions for hyperlocal events, e.g. street parties, cultural co-ownership, and community pride. References to support for community-led events and festivals strengthened in the action plan.

iii) Public Safety & Accessibility

- Night-Time Safety, action plan includes activity to work with cultural partners to address safety barriers for vulnerable groups engaging in cultural activities.

iv) Digital & Hybrid Culture

- Inclusion through Digital, action to establish a working group to look at meaningful approaches to developing digital and hybrid content included in the action plan.

3.6 120 cultural organisations and stakeholders were invited to review and comment on the draft cultural strategy. They were asked to construct their comments around three questions, i) Do the strategy themes – People & Place, Grow & Thrive, Learning & Skills – reflect your organisation's cultural aims and ambitions?, ii) Is there anything you expected to see in the themes that feels missing or underrepresented? iii) How do you see your organisation supporting the delivery of these themes through your work, programmes, or partnerships? Twenty-five written responses were received. All respondents

strongly supported the three core themes, citing alignment with their own ambitions and aims. Many are already delivering initiatives in these areas.

3.7 A high-level summary of cultural partner responses, includes:

i) Case Studies, consider including a case study to showcase how a major institution can engage a local diverse audience. Beyond the Baseline British Library 2024, case study added to People and Place theme.

ii) Implementation & Resourcing

- Concerns, a lack of clarity on delivery mechanisms and funding and no clear Council commitment to financial support or partnership models. Financial/resource commitments and Council's role (producer, broker, commissioner) clarified in the Cultural Strategy and added to the action plan.

iii) Support for Smaller Organisations & Artists

- Concerns, Freelancers and small organisations are essential but under-supported. Lack of access to permanent, affordable spaces. Support for small orgs/artists strengthened in the action plan and actions to protect, expand and ensure access to creative spaces added.

iv) Role of the Council

- Concerns, a lack clarity on the Council's leadership role and a desire for long-term collaboration and partnership planning. The description of the Council's role with regard to advocacy and brokering strengthened. The Cultural Strategy is underpinned by a collaborative approach to cross-sector partnerships and funding access.

v) Education, Learning & Skills

- Concerns, lack of connection to Camden Learning and Camden Spark. Support to embed culture in schools within the national curriculum added as a key objective under the Learning and Skills theme.
- Need for sustainable career pathways beyond temporary outreach., Commitment to work with the cultural sector to explore and set expectations for institutions to employ, train, and retain local people.

vi) Inclusion & Representation

- Concerns, underrepresentation of Asian, Black, other ethnic groups, older and LGBTQ+ people and people in recovery in the workforce, governance structures and programme. Action plan updated to include a leadership role for the Council to lead by example and work with partner organisations to develop approaches to increase diversity in the workforce.

vii) Health & Wellbeing

- Concerns, underexplored links between culture and health (e.g. loneliness, prevention, social prescribing), lack of definition for "Creative Health". Action to partner with UCL, NHS, and social prescribing initiatives strengthened in the action plan. Creative health definition included.

viii) Public Realm & Placemaking

- Ambiguity in the term "Diversity in the Public Realm". Definition added along with a link to the Strategy for Diversity in the Public Realm.

ix) Libraries

- Concerns, Libraries undervalued in the current strategy. Strengthen the recognition of libraries as inclusive cultural and learning hubs.