

The Culture Strategy: Progress and priorities

Purpose of this document

This document aims to offer a concise overview of the current trajectory of our cultural strategy and provide members with a clear understanding of our progress in developing this strategy. Additionally, it will provide a summary of the key elements that will comprise the final document.

Members will also gain an insight into how we have incorporated some of the overarching principles of the Administration's 2022 manifesto into the strategy.

Why develop a new culture strategy?

We are in the process of developing a comprehensive five-year cultural strategy, aimed at the celebration, support and enrichment of Barnet's cultural landscape and creative economy. Our goal is to enhance the cultural experiences available to our residents.

This strategy is also being driven by the need to provide support to our creative industries and simultaneously shine a spotlight on the exceptional artists, innovators and cultural talent flourishing in our borough. It doesn't merely acknowledge the intrinsic value and enjoyment offered by the creative sectors but also underscores their far-reaching contributions to society, encompassing economic, social and health aspects. The strategy will also look to enhance Barnet's landscape, by incorporating creative placemaking, such as public art into our town centres and open spaces. Furthermore, the strategy will look to address and tackle the challenges and issues that currently beset the creative industries in Barnet.

The Culture Strategy also looks to celebrate diversity, foster inclusion and recognise the crucial contribution that diversity makes to Barnet's identity. We want this strategy to inspire through learning, by encouraging our communities to showcase their unique cultures. For example, promoting the diverse cuisines that are in the borough. We also want to bring different communities together, enhancing our societal strength in the process. It is also important to showcase the best of Barnet, and the key aspects of Barnet's heritage, from our greenspaces to our museums.

This strategy is for everyone; it is our collective narrative.

Our Plan for Barnet 2023-2026

Our Plan for Barnet 2023 -2026 - Caring for Our Places.

This strategy sits under the Culture, Leisure, Arts & Sports portfolio, held by Councillor Ammar Naqvi.

The corporate vision underlying Our Plan for Barnet 2023 – 2026 is “*Caring for people, our places and the planet*”. A key component within this area is the transformation agenda within the local authority, which looks to get all service areas working together to make life better for local people, improve the quality of local places and enhance overall community well-being. The Culture Strategy will enable this transformation agenda to achieve its ambition by identifying ways of celebrating Barnet as both a community and a destination, with a focus on providing new opportunities for individuals to engage in and enjoy a diverse array of activities within the borough.

The transformation agenda consists of three primary components that will serve as a foundation for the Culture Strategy. In the context of this strategy these are:

1- Destination Barnet

This seeks to make the borough an attractive location for creative industries, and for culturally relevant / significant venues.

2- Discover Barnet

This workstream, showcases existing cultural capital as well as broadcasts the rich heritage of our borough.

3- Barnet Dreams

This is a commitment to ensure that we have the tools, opportunities, and advice services available locally to ensure every resident unlocks their potential.

The Community Participation Strategy

Another significant element of Our Plan for Barnet is to embrace collaborative development of our strategies and initiatives in conjunction with our local communities. The Community Participation Strategy published in 2022, describes essential principles for accomplishing this goal and plays a substantial role in shaping the development of our Culture Strategy.

We have been committed to actively involving our local community in every stage of the Culture Strategy’s development, including its creation and design. Our approach prioritises working in partnership with our residents rather than seeking mere approval of our outputs.

One example of how we worked in partnership with our local community, was when developing up a definition of culture. Recognising that culture holds diverse meanings for different individuals, the Council deliberately refrained from providing a specific definition. Instead, we worked with our local community and external steering group to shape what culture was defined as.

- Barnet and Southgate College
- Barnet Borough Arts Council
- Art Against Knives
- Notting Hill Genesis
- Fresh Arts
- A distinguished architect

So far, the external steering group has played a key role in influencing:

- The ambitions of the Culture Strategy
- The timeline of delivery
- The consultation and engagement programme
- The specific priorities that will go into the strategic document.
- The London Borough of Culture Bid.
- The way we work as a group (influencing the principles of co-production).

Over the coming months the group will help shape:

- The written content of the strategy
- The graphic design and look of the strategic document.
- How we communicate and market the strategy

The Culture Strategy and The London Borough of Culture Bid

We have submitted a bid to become the London Borough of Culture for the year 2027. The London Borough of Culture (LBOC) is a year-long celebration of culture, that is integrated into the heart of our communities. It will showcase the best of Barnet through an enjoyable program that highlights the diverse culture our borough has to offer.

The Culture Strategy will play an important role in ensuring we have a clear plan to deliver the best possible LBOC programme for our residents should we win the bid. The Culture Strategy and LBOC bid are closely interconnected. If we are awarded the LBOC, the strategy will guide us in the years leading up to the LBOC to enhance our cultural offerings in preparation for 2027.

Consultation and engagement programme

Over the last few months, we have made significant progress in the development of our strategy. The three key strands of engagement and research that have shaped the strategy are:

- 1- The Audience Agency Research
- 2- External Culture Strategy Steering Group Workshop
- 3- Hemingway Designs Consultation and Engagement Programme

The Audience Agency research

One of the components contributing to the formulation of this strategy is the research conducted by the Audience Agency. They were tasked with producing a foundational dataset of information and insights concerning culture and creativity within the borough. This has been scoped from the perspective of cultural organisations within Barnet. Looking at the challenges they face and their interactions with residents.

The report prepared by The Audience Agency has been appended for you to review.

The Culture Strategy External Steering Group Workshop

We conducted two distinct workshops in collaboration with our external steering group. For these sessions, the group identified four overarching priorities they deemed crucial to address in the strategy. These were:

- 1- Capacity building in the cultural sector
- 2- Placemaking and Cultural Infrastructure
- 3- Culture as a connector (focus on our communities and identity)
- 4- Barnet as a cultural destination (the aspects that make Barnet unique)

The group subsequently undertook the task of highlighting all the significant issues that the borough is confronting in relation to these overarching priorities. This undertaking was of great significance due to the composition of our external steering group, comprising of cultural experts deeply rooted in Barnet's local community. They possess knowledge of the cultural challenges prevailing within the borough.

Hemingway Design Consultation and Engagement Programme

Hemingway Design conducted a consultation and engagement programme to provide valuable input for both the cultural strategy and our London Borough of Culture bid. At the core of this engagement was a survey designed to understand the community's perspective on culture in Barnet. Additionally, a series of workshops were conducted to ensure comprehensive representation from across the borough.

It was conducted in two strands:

1- Adults survey

This survey was responded to by 694 people.

2- Schools survey

This survey was responded to by 732 people.

Meaning overall our surveys reached 1,426 people. This is without taking into account the individual workshops held that also contributed to the strategy.

This engagement was instrumental in establishing an evidence base that either corroborated, questioned or supplemented the findings of the external steering group and previous research. Upon a comprehensive review of this engagement, it not only affirmed the insights derived from our prior research but also enriched our evidence base by highlighting aspects that had been overlooked in other research methods. One such notable aspect was the importance of fostering participation, and the importance of Barnet's "place brand".

The Culture Strategy priorities

The priorities outlined below will serve as the focal points for the Culture Strategy. While the essence of each priority will remain consistent, the wording of individual priorities may undergo changes as we progress through the process.

The external steering group played a key role in identifying what the problems were and how we go about tackling them. They have crafted the priorities in partnership with the council and have had a major say on the content of each overarching priority.

1- Building Capacity and Participation in the Cultural Sector (title to be renamed)

This priority aims to enhance the cultural landscape in the borough by supporting institutions that host cultural activities and fostering increased participation. Survey results indicate an interest (89%) in engaging more in cultural activities, with only 7% feeling they have sufficient opportunities. The need for support was also emphasised by our Audience Agency Research with nearly 50% of organisations surveyed by AA wanting more support with fundraising, advocacy, and organisational development. The external steering group also felt that this was a key issue within the borough.

The following objectives have been formulated from all of the engagement and research conducted and have been approved by our external steering group:

- Enhance council processes and information accessibility for individuals and organisations looking to host a community or art event.
- Assist our cultural organisations with building funding opportunities and increase support for the institutions where cultural activities take place.
- Work alongside our partners to increase network building in the cultural sector.
- Create a long-term group with Barnet Council representatives and external stakeholders to help guide the future of culture in Barnet.
- Partner with the cultural and creative sector to provide more chances for people to enjoy cultural activities in the borough, including attending events and participating in them.
- Collaborate with the cultural and creative sector to establish additional career pathways and support skill development in Barnet's cultural sector.
- Promote unconventional approaches and innovative arts and cultural practices that go beyond traditional creative fields.
- Work with cultural partners to explore options for making cultural activities accessible to all, irrespective of individual financial circumstances.

2- Developing Placemaking and Cultural Infrastructure

This priority aims to create new spaces for cultural activities, providing quality venues for creatives to perform and practice in. Additionally, it seeks to use creativity to shape the surrounding landscape. The idea of integrating creative placemaking into both Barnet's town centres and greenspaces was emphasised by the external steering group and echoed in our survey responses. With our external steering group firmly emphasising the need for new spaces for cultural activities to take place, it was felt that there is a shortage in Barnet, and this is holding back individuals from engaging with culture in Barnet.

The following objectives have been formulated from the engagement and research conducted, and have been approved by our external steering group:

- Facilitate the creation and promotion of high-quality public art to enhance the public realm.
- Continue to promote the development of creative placemaking projects in our town centres to enhance their vibrancy.
- Work to explore opportunities for establishing new spaces dedicated to cultural activities.
- Collaborate with stakeholders to identify alternative venues for creative activities, allowing artists to showcase their work in spaces not traditionally utilised for such purposes.
- Work with partners to ensure current cultural venues are utilised to the maximum of their potential.
- Strategically enhance the use of green spaces in the borough to support creative, community and leisure activities.
- Work towards ensuring our cultural venues are accessible to all.

3- Mobilising The Potential of Culture as a Connector (Title to be renamed)

This priority covers multiple facets. Firstly, it aims to cultivate connections among our diverse communities. Utilising events and building networks to unify different cultures, faiths, and beliefs. Thus, fostering sustained social cohesion. Despite advancements in this area, ongoing efforts are required to ensure Barnet is recognised as an inclusive borough that celebrates diversity (52% of respondents agreed that we currently are seen as inclusive).

The second aspect of this priority looks to ensure cultural activities are available in all parts of the borough. With the aim of establishing a unified cultural landscape in Barnet. Our research highlights disparities, revealing variations in cultural provisions across different areas of Barnet.

The following objectives have been formulated from all of the engagement and research conducted, and have been approved by our external steering group:

- Improve the equitable distribution of cultural activities and events throughout the borough.
- Continue to promote initiatives that encourage individuals to participate in volunteering opportunities.
- Enhance awareness of cultural festivals and events celebrating our diverse communities in the borough, with the goal of increasing participation.
- Utilise cultural events, such as music, dance and food-based gatherings, as a means to bring together diverse cultures.
- Hold more intergenerational events and activities that connect people from different ages.
- Promote increased utilisation of libraries for events, allowing them to be used as neutral spaces that bring together diverse cultures.
- Work with partners to increase the number of individuals participating in interfaith/interculture based work and networks that help facilitate community cohesion.
- Ensure our cultural activities are tailored to resonate with what Barnet residents from a variety of backgrounds want to take part in.

4- Accelerating Barnet's Identity as a Cultural Destination (title to be renamed)

This priority seeks to position Barnet as a cultural hub by improving the promotion of our cultural assets and activities in the borough. According to our adult survey, 54% of respondents expressed a lack of sufficient information about things to do in Barnet. Additionally, 45% of respondents indicated they did not know a lot about Barnet's history. Addressing this information gap is a key part of this priority. While this priority also seeks to establish Barnet's brand association with a diverse cultural offering.

The following objectives have been formulated from all of the engagement and research conducted, and have been approved by our external steering group:

- Address information gaps by regularly assessing the effectiveness of communications to ensure residents are well-informed about the various activities and events in Barnet.
- Raise awareness and promote Barnet's history and heritage.
- Collaborate with residents to explore and learn about the history and heritage of Barnet directly from them, aiming to gather new insights and information on Barnet's history.
- Promote heightened acknowledgement of our green spaces, underscoring their role in shaping life in Barnet.
- Strengthen Barnet's "place brand", ensuring that Barnet is a place where residents living in the whole borough can connect to.
- Market Barnet as a place where aspiration can be realised.

5- Supporting Cultural Education & Engagement with Young People (title to be renamed)

This priority has been shaped by insights from our school, college, and upper education survey, as well as input from the external steering group. The findings highlighted key areas for focus. For instance, in response to the question "In the last 12 months, which of these activities have you taken part in or visited inside Barnet?" 8 out of 12 options had 6% or less of young people indicating they had engaged in the activity in Barnet. Conversely, for the same activities outside of Barnet, 11 out of 12 had 6% or above, with 9 out of 12 categories having at least 20% of respondents stating they had participated in the activity outside of Barnet.

While our final strategic document will include more insights from our young persons survey, the ultimate goal is to inspire young people to enhance their engagement with cultural activities in Barnet. We also aim to collaborate with partners to contribute towards unlocking the potential of young individuals.

The following objectives have been formulated from all of the engagement and research conducted, and have been approved by our external steering group:

- Work with our partners such as Barnet and Culture for Youth to diversify the cultural activities being offered at schools.
- In collaboration with our partners, reduce the barriers that prevent schools, colleges, and universities from being able to engage with certain cultural activities.
- With our partners, increase the number of young people taking part in cultural activities in Barnet as opposed to leaving the borough.
- Alongside our cultural and creative sector, increase the number of young people leading cultural and creative sessions for their peers and empower them to get involved in co-producing the sessions.
- Evaluate how we communicate and reach young people, ensuring that we engage with them to understand their views and that our messaging is reaching them effectively.

- Work with our educational partners to ensure creative talent is being retained in the borough.
- Ensure there is linkage with the Barnet's 2021 – 2024 Education Strategy, and where priorities align, work collaboratively to achieve them

6- Cultivating Culture to Enrich Society (title to be renamed)

An important consideration in many culture strategies is utilising the influence of culture to bring about broader societal benefits, both for the public and in how Barnet Council functions as an organisation. This theme has been emphasised in both our internal service area workshop and our external steering group, underscoring the importance of using this strategy to generate wider social value for Barnet. This section aims to connect culture with broader aspects outlined in Our Plan for Barnet 2023 – 2026, promoting a coordinated approach within the Council.

- Work with our cultural and voluntary sectors to attain our goal of achieving net zero in Barnet by 2042.
- Increase resident participation from all backgrounds and cultures in the electoral process, combatting residents growing disaffection with democratic institutions.
- Connect with Barnet's public health bodies, ensuring culture plays a role in contributing to the health and wellbeing of our residents.
- Maximise opportunities for attracting inward investment in the borough by strategically utilising cultural events and activities.
- Coordinate with different Council service areas to implement the principles of the Culture Strategy into their own plans.
- Nurture and grow an internal culture network that unites various Barnet Council service areas, fostering collaboration and idea-sharing to contribute to our cultural plans.
- Incorporate the principles and priorities of this strategy into Barnet Council's working environment, ensuring staff understand how this strategy impacts their roles and work practices.

Delivery of the strategy

We will highlight the short-term actions that will help achieve our objectives in the final strategic document, ensuring that residents can see the direct impact of the strategy straight away. We also plan to create a detailed action plan following the publication of the strategy. This plan will highlight specific actions to achieve the objectives outlined in our strategic document. While this approach is still pending formal agreement, it doesn't negate the inclusion of some actions within the main document.

Timeline of delivery for The Culture Strategy

Below, you will find the timeline for delivering this strategy. It delineates the various milestones we must achieve before finalising this strategy. This strategy must be prepared by **21 March** for submission to undergo our internal cabinet approval process.

The Culture Strategy timeline of delivery



