

Meeting:	Executive Member Decision Session
Meeting date:	3 March 2026
Report of:	Garry Taylor, Director of City Development
Portfolio of:	Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economy and Culture

Decision Report: York Cultural Strategy

Subject of Report

1. The York Cultural Strategy sets a clear direction for arts, heritage and cultural development, placing culture at the heart of York's economic, social and civic future. It describes how culture shapes how the city functions, how people create and engage with it, and how York's culture attracts talent and investment to benefit residents across all our communities.
2. In addition, it sets the clear ambition that York will be the first city to achieve cultural entitlement for all children and young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
3. This report invites the Executive Member for Economy and Culture to adopt the strategy on behalf of the city.

Benefits and Challenges

4. The benefits of the Cultural Strategy are to provide a direction for culture in York to ensure culture is integral to the city's growth and offer to residents.
5. It will ensure York continues to be internationally recognised as a city with outstanding culture, heritage and arts, driving the successful visitor economy and providing a rich and vibrant city for residents to enjoy and benefit from.

6. The Cultural Strategy has been reviewed by different organisations representing the sector and is designed to help attract additional investment into the city, strengthening the cultural sector during a challenging operating environment and setting out the steps to deliver its ambitions.
7. The challenge of adopting the Cultural Strategy is that it creates an expectation the council will be able to provide much needed investment. Although the council is no longer funded to support culture, the strategy provides an ambitious and bold step forward, designed to support the council use its convening power, and relationship with regional and national bodies to continue to raise the incredible value and opportunities culture brings to the city.

Policy Basis for Decision

8. The national *Industrial Strategy* has developed a *Creative Industries* sector plan that aims to create a pipeline of talent that continues to shine a light on the global significance of culture in the UK.
9. The creative and cultural industries are recognised as one of five competitive advantages in the *York and North Yorkshire Local Growth Plan*.
10. *York 2032*, the city's 10-year plan, sets out a City Partnership economic growth action to embed the culture offer and place culture at the heart of placemaking, raising York's profile nationally and internationally. Supporting the 10-year ambition, *York's Prospectus – Going for Growth with Innovation, Culture and Heritage at its heart*, sets out a series of projects to unlock York's untapped potential. This includes projects designed to strengthen York's cultural offer.
11. The Cultural Strategy presented continues the ambition set out in *York's Creative Future Cultural Strategy 2020-2025* which was adopted by Executive in February 2021.

Financial Strategy Implications

12. The Council is facing a significant financial challenge over the next 3 years, with an annual budget gap of c£10m. As a result, it is vital to ensure that any Council spending is focussed on delivering

value for residents and that we continue to seek external funding where possible.

Recommendation and Reasons

13. The Executive Member is asked to commit the council to adopt the York Cultural Strategy

Reason:

- York continues to be internationally recognised for its exceptional heritage and unique arts offer.
- Residents and businesses in York benefit from York's unique cultural offer, improving life outcomes and health and wellbeing.
- The cultural offer fuels our economy, supporting growth and regeneration.
- All residents will be able to participate and engage in culture, with a focus on inclusive and relevant activities.

Background

14. York is a living, breathing city, where centuries of stories and world-class heritage are dynamically combined with contemporary arts, technology, and community spirit, to create a unique cultural tapestry woven into the fabric of the city.
15. York's unique culture stems from a rare blend of deep, multi-layered history (Roman, Viking, Medieval) with cutting-edge contemporary creativity, highlighted by the status as the UK's first UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts.
16. Our diverse heritage, vibrant independent arts, numerous festivals, and a strong culinary scene combine history, modern innovation, and an inclusive community spirit are second-to-none, and rightly a source of great pride for residents and businesses alike.
17. To harness all the activities involved in culture, from arts and heritage, combined arts, dance, libraries, museums, music, theatre and the visual arts, as well as residents own' creative participation in culture is what makes the Cultural Strategy so important for the city, the residents and the economy.
18. *York's Creative Future: A Cultural Strategy for York 2020-2025* was launched in the midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic. The

environment in which it was developed and delivered is markedly different from the context for York's cultural offer to thrive today.

19. In 2022, Full Council approved the Economic Strategy and *York 2032*, the 10-Year City Plan. Co-designed with city partners who articulated an action to embed York's cultural offer: *York's ambitious [Cultural Strategy 2020 to 2025](#) ensures culture is inclusive, relevant and accessible to everybody in York, including children and young people. It supports residents' health and wellbeing throughout their lives, placing culture at the heart of placemaking, ensuring talent development and retention, and raising York's profile nationally and internationally, as both a city renowned for its heritage and for its cutting-edge, contemporary approach to creativity.*
20. In 2023, the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority was established. The election of the Mayor 2024 led to the development of the Local Growth Plan. To align with the national Industrial Strategy, regions were required to identify their key economic sectors that would drive growth and in York and North Yorkshire. The creative industries were selected as one of five key competitively advantageous economic sectors, in part due to the contribution the creative sector makes to the region's GVA, with over 1,500 people working in the industry.
21. York continues to buck trends and attract visitors from across the world. In 2024, 9m visitors experienced York's culture, contributing over £2bn to the regional economy.
22. To refresh York's Creative Futures which expired in 2025, arts, culture and heritage organisations were invited to collaborate on the review, and consider how to strengthen community engagement and inclusivity, support the creative workforce which enhances York's cultural identity and encourage innovative partnerships across the sector.
23. Although the council contributed a small amount of funding from UKSPF, York's Cultural Strategy was developed with a wide variety of cultural stakeholders, facilitated by North Yorkshire Council. The Strategy is from and for the whole city.
24. As a result, York's Cultural Strategy sets out six key priorities with specific ambitions for the city. These are designed to give people a sense of identity and connect individuals to their community, their

heritage and their traditions, helping them understand where they come from and who they are, so culture is accessible to all.

25. The Cultural Strategy was shared with over 250 local, regional and national organisations from culture, business, education and public sector on 22 January 2026, at *Reignite XII* at Yorkshire Museum. The Strategy was well received with case studies and panel discussions focused on the future of culture in the city and nationally and the opportunities that will bring.

Strategic Priorities and delivery plan

26. The Cultural Strategy is focused on six key strategic priorities with specific ambitions for the city. These are:

- I. Culture is inclusive, relevant and accessible to everybody in York, regardless of age, background or postcode.
- II. Culture is fully embedded into local investment and city planning developments, with arts and heritage and cultural wellbeing integral to development processes.
- III. York will be the first city to achieve cultural entitlement for all children and young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and with special education needs and/or disabilities.
- IV. York's creative and cultural sectors thrive and contribute to strengthening and diversifying York's economy: through universities and colleges providing clear routes to skilled employment and creative workspaces attracting and retaining creative talent in the city.
- V. York is recognised nationally for its innovative work in culture for health and wellbeing, including social prescribing, which residents can benefit from throughout their lives.
- VI. York's outstanding arts, culture and heritage and its status as the UK's first UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts are championed and celebrated, raising the city's profile nationally and internationally.

27. The Heritage Programme was approved at Executive Decision Session in November 2025. The Heritage Programme is designed to develop a 10-year Strategic Delivery Plan for the city's heritage estate. Many of these buildings also house museums, libraries, theatres and other cultural experiences.

28. On adoption of the Cultural Strategy, the council will work with the Creative and Cultural Advisory Group and wider sector, to:

- a) Expand the remit of the Heritage Programme to include supporting the cultural and creative sector (this will also provide council governance and oversight to further support the sector).
- b) Develop the business and investment case for the *Creative Catalyst*, one of the projects set out in *York's Prospectus – Going for Growth with Innovation, Culture and Heritage at its heart*.
- c) Develop actions that respond to the Cultural Strategy, which include identifying opportunities delivered through the Local Plan, celebrate the UNESCO city of media arts, focus on wellbeing derived from participation in cultural activities and support children and young people participate in culture.
- d) Work with YNYCA to support more residents work within the creative and culture sector, including through including through Trailblazers year 2 and the Get York and North Yorkshire Working Plan (currently in development).
- e) Explore shared opportunities to strengthen the case for investment in York's cultural sector (both public and private sector funding).

Consultation Analysis

- 29. York's Creative Futures: the cultural strategy 2020-2025 was developed following an extensive engagement and consultation exercise with York's residents, cultural organisations, artists and practitioners. It took on board what matters most to the people who live, work and study in the city. Following this, in 2019 the council's Executive adopted a vision and principles, on behalf of the city, as the basis on which to take the strategy forward.
- 30. The Cultural Strategy is based on a refresh of the previous strategy and was developed in collaboration with arts, culture and heritage organisations across the city.

Options Analysis and Evidential Basis

The Executive Member is invited to adopt the Cultural Strategy on behalf of the city.

Rationale

- 31. The strategy has been developed in close collaboration with different organisations across the city and was publicly launched on 22 January 2026.

Organisational Impact and Implications

- **Financial** There are no direct financial implications to the Council arising from this report.
- **Human Resources (HR)**, There are no direct human resources implications to the Council arising from this report.
- **Legal** There are no direct legal implications to the Council arising from this report.
- **Procurement** There are no direct procurement implications to the Council arising from this report.
- **Health and Wellbeing** The Culture Strategy prioritises the links between culture and wellbeing. Work commissioned by DCMS in 2024 from Frontier Economics shows that across a range of culture and heritage opportunities, culture positively impacts health, with particular evidence around general cultural engagement and improved mental health, engagement in arts and music-based activities and improved self-esteem, well-being and quality of life, and visiting theatres, art galleries, exhibitions or museums and incidence of dementia and depression. Estimates of the economic impact of these health benefits, including healthcare costs avoided and productivity impacts, range from £200 million to £8 billion per year at current levels of cultural engagement'
- **Environment and Climate action** The cultural and creative sector has an important role in responding to the challenge of climate change. Many of our culturally significant assets and creative organisations are energy intensive and challenging to decarbonise. The Council will work with partners to identified opportunities for emissions reductions and sharing best practice. The sector is also particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and we will work in partnership to identify opportunities to build resilience and preserve our cultural heritage
- **Affordability** The Cultural Strategy sets the ambition for culture in York to be inclusive and relevant, with all residents able to engage and participate in culture within their local communities. The council will work with the sector to ensure the rich and varied culture offer remains affordable where possible, attracting investment to help provide subsidies if appropriate.

- **Equalities and Human Rights.** An Equalities Impact Assessment has not been completed because the strategy was developed independently of the council. However, the strategy has equality, diversity and inclusion at its core and actions taken forward will ensure this continues.
- **Data Protection and Privacy** The data protection impact assessment (DPIAs) screening questions were completed for the recommendations and options in this report and as there is no personal, special categories or criminal offence data being processed to set these out, there is no requirement to complete a DPIA at this time. However, this will be reviewed following the approved recommendations and options from this report and a DPIA completed if required.
- **Communications and engagement** will support the outcomes of the strategy, working with partners in the sector and across the city where appropriate. This is likely to be delivered via targeted communication or engagement work to deliver particular outcomes or projects linked to successful funding bids. The focus of the council's communications activity should be around supporting community inclusivity with the strategy, to maximise the benefits back to all residents.
- **Economy** York's cultural offer has an incredible and positive impact on the economy of place. It drives investment, talent and acts as an attractor, with the benefits felt across the city. The council will continue to recognise and celebrate York's cultural offer, taking the steps set out in the report to attract additional investment and support delivery of the strategy.

Risks and Mitigations

Funding: Accessing available funding for the sector is highly competitive, with no local authority funding, and instead bidding processes that are not always successful. By working collectively, and combining with the heritage programme, it is anticipated that York will have a stronger, single voice, representing the sector and attracting investment to distribute across multiple organisations.

Community: Cultural activities take place across the city. In village halls, upstairs of cafes, basement bars, open spaces, and shared public areas, including in shared living accommodation. Culture is not owned

by anyone or contained to the city centre. There is a risk that the Cultural Strategy only focuses on the locations that are more well known and side-lines the activities that take place in the hidden corners and forgotten spaces all across the city. The council's role is to bring the city together and as a result, it's role in supporting delivery of the Cultural Strategy will be focused on all our communities, wherever they are or go.

Diversity: Just as cultural activities take place all over the city, so the appeal is vibrant, diverse, and provides an experience as unique as the people who live in York. What constitutes "good culture" cannot be defined or curtailed and as a result the council's role will be to openly embrace and encourage a truly diverse and inclusive cultural offer for residents and communities to take pride in. This also means exploring ways to access so cultural activities are affordable for all our residents.

Wards Impacted

32. All

Contact details

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Report approved:	Yes
Date:	18 February 2026

Specialist officers

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Background papers

Policy context

- Local Growth Plan [York and North Yorkshire's Local Growth Plan > York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority](#)
- Creative Sector plan [Creative Industries Sector Plan - GOV.UK](#)
- York 2032 [10 Year Plan – York 2032](#)

York's Creative Future: Cultural Strategy for York 2020-2025
[Decision - York's Creative Future: A Culture Strategy for York, 2020-2025](#)

York's Prospectus

[Report Template](#)

[Item 15 - Yorks Prospectus Going for Good Growth with Innovation Culture and Heritage at our hea.pdf](#)

[Annex A EMDSYorkSocialValueReport0126.pdf](#)

The Heritage programme

[EMDS 04.11.25 Heritage Programme initiation 1-0.pdf](#)

[Annex A The Heritage Programme.pptx - Read-Only](#)