

Children, Education & Communities Policy & Scrutiny Committee

This report provides an update on the culture sector in York and on the implementation and delivery of the city's Culture Strategy, York's Creative Future, 2020 – 25.

Make It York Business Plan

Our first Make It York business plan, published in March 2022, sets out a clear and commercially viable plan, which at the same time accepts the commercial risk associated with focusing more closely on cultural and eco-tourism, as well as including more resident-focused activity in our marketing and event plans.

The business plan has a strong focus on culture, and in particular outlines our culture-specific priorities, in line with our SLA with City of York Council.

We will:

- Develop, promote and manage the City's Culture Strategy, York's Creative Future, 2020 - 25. by working with partners to deliver an ambitious and cohesive range of programmes. Promoting the culture and creative sector through media channels, policy work, networking opportunities, working groups and forums.
- Develop an Events Framework for the Culture Strategy that enables the City to proactively identify events it wishes to host and attract.
- Promote and maximise York's UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts Status.
- Support cultural events and initiatives, such as the York Mystery Plays.

Read the full business plan here: [MIY-Business-Plan-22-25.pdf](#)
(makeityork.com)

Culture Strategy update

The York Culture Strategy 2020 – 25, York's Creative Future, has inclusion and participation at its core; showcasing the city's commitment

to ensuring culture is relevant and accessible to everybody in York. It places culture at the heart of activities from major capital developments to residents' wellbeing and works to ensure cultural entitlement for every child.

The Culture Strategy launched in December 2020, following extensive consultation across and beyond the creative sector. Find the full strategy here: [Yorks-Creative-Future-York-Culture-Strategy-2020-2025.pdf](https://www.makeityork.com/yorks-creative-future-york-culture-strategy-2020-2025.pdf) ([makeityork.com](https://www.makeityork.com))

The strategy identifies six priority areas:

- Cultural Engagement, Participation and Relevance
- Placemaking
- Children and Young People
- Talent Development and Retention
- Culture and Wellbeing
- York's National and International Profile

Make It York, as the organisation leading the delivery of the strategy, works closely with City of York Council and the culture and creative sector, to prioritise the strategy's implementation and to ensure that its key priorities and delivery remains on track.

Culture Strategy Governance and New Culture Forum

The Culture Strategy's development and its future direction has previously been guided by the Cultural Leaders Group Strategy Steering Group, which fed into the broader Cultural Leaders Group, of c.40 individuals from across the culture and creative sector.

A key priority within the Culture Strategy has been to prioritise reforming the CLG Strategy Steering Group (CLG SSG) and Cultural Leaders Group (CLG) meetings into a more open and inclusive format.

Accordingly, we have prioritised creating new, more democratic and open structures, in agreement with these existing bodies. The governance documents and process for a new Culture Forum and Culture Executive structure were completed and signed off by the CLG Strategy Steering Group in November 2021. This then passed to the CLG and has now been ratified. This included a Terms of Reference, a

Person Specification for Exec Group members, and details of how the election process, to form the new Exec Group, will work.

There are two main components of this new structure, as follows:

- The Culture Forum will be a large unincorporated group that is open to everyone working in the cultural and creative sector in York, which enables knowledge sharing, partnership development and network building. Culture Forum members have the opportunity to stand for elections to the Culture Executive: in doing so, York will become the first city with an elected cultural executive group in the UK.
- The Culture Exec will oversee the direction and implementation of the Culture Strategy, being elected to have authority in this by the Forum, as their representatives.

Sign-ups to the York Culture Forum opened in December 2021. The first meeting of the Culture Forum took place on zoom in January 2022 (replacing the previous York Cultural Leaders Group meetings), followed by a second in-person meeting this March.

It is anticipated that this change will enable a broader and more diverse group of representatives to contribute to future direction of the Culture Strategy, and to enable knowledge sharing, partnership development and network building.

The next meeting of the Culture Forum will be an extraordinary meeting in early May, on the Executive Group nominations and election process. Following this, the subsequent meeting of the Culture Forum will begin the election process to the Culture Executive (which replaces the previous CLG Strategy Steering Group).

Culture Sector Meetings

The Cultural Leaders Group met on a monthly basis throughout 2021. This open and continuous communication with the culture sector has allowed us to keep up-to-date on their situations, facilitate collaboration, as well as inviting guest speakers to present. This frequency of meetings was requested by the sector who found the regular updates and ability to share their experiences helpful during the pandemic. We held our first in-person meeting since early 2020, in September 2021.

Meetings of the new Culture Forum now take place on a bi-monthly basis, by agreement with the sector. Meetings of the new Culture Exec

will start to take place on a bi-monthly basis once they have been elected.

Culture Sector Communications

MIY provides a fortnightly Culture e-news update, with latest culture news, funding updates, and MIY news, which we encourage the sector to contribute to, to act as a further information channel. We have now expanded its readership – while previously a resource for CLG members, it is now open to anyone interested in signing up (which can be done via the MIY website). The e-news currently has a readership of 149 people, and growing.

We have now completed the new Culture Hub on the MIY website, which hosts the Culture Strategy and acts as a hub for the city's creative and cultural activity. This features information about the new Culture Forum and how to sign up, as well as pages for each of the Culture Strategy's six Key Priorities – Engagement, Placemaking, Children and Young People, Talent Development, Culture and Wellbeing, and York's National and International Profile – which share information and progress on each area, as well as relating them back to the strategy's recommendations and outcomes.

Action Plan

The MIY Culture, Wellbeing and Events team produced an action plan for the Culture Strategy in early 2021, which takes the form of a RAG report with key actions to achieve the outcomes/ recommendations within the strategy and a quarterly reporting framework.

From this, we also produce a quarterly written update report. We host this quarterly report on the Culture Hub for information on strategy progress. It can be accessed here:

<https://www.makeityork.com/culture/yorks-creative-future-york-culture-strategy-2020-2025/>

The progress across each Key Priority for the strategy has included:

Engagement:

- Building on research and initial meetings, MIY have become established members of engagement focused groups, including 100% Digital York, CYC's Our Big Conversation consultancy group, and the York Multiple Complex Needs network.

- Connections are now being established and built with organisations tackling racism in York and diversity specialists, including Speak Up Diversity. The CLG publicly supported the motion for York to become an anti-racist and inclusive city in October 2021.
- Much engagement work is focused around attracting new participants to the Culture Forum, with over 90 freelancers and new organisations signed up to join so far. MIY ran taster sessions throughout January to introduce the Culture Strategy and Forum to new members.
- Plans for York Trailblazers (formerly known as Makers and Shapers) have progressed with York Civic Trust and partners, with community engagement at the heart of the design process and a legacy project to ensure future engagement. A bid is being prepared to support the programme of events and activities planned for 2022 -24.

Placemaking:

- Monthly Creative Workspace meetings started between Guild of Media Arts, York Creatives, University of York, CYC, York Conservation Trust and MIY representatives in 2021, to consider availability and need of creative workspaces within the city, and to help simplify processes to access these for creatives. These meetings continue and MIY is an active participant.
- Conversations are ongoing with regional and national culture representatives. Links are also being developed across the north as part of MIY's role on the Northern Culture Consortium, which advocates together for the importance of northern culture.
- My City Centre Draft Vision published Sept 2021, with revitalising empty units through experience-based businesses and temporary arts spaces, utilising underused upper floor spaces for SMEs and gaining Purple Flag status as key objectives. Make It York will play a key role in the culture, city-centre and tourism specific objectives for this vision.

Children and Young People:

- MIY are supporting REACH, the Cultural Education Partnership, and have created and update a web page hub for them to showcase cultural and creative activity for children and young people in York, on the Culture hub of the MIY website, as they do not have their own website.

- REACH have a temporary home at York Theatre Royal (as they themselves are unconstituted). This new home has enabled them to unlock £50k of funding from IVE, with £25k of match funding from City of York Council, to develop cultural initiatives for children and young people. Make It York are playing a key role in this, working closely with REACH to develop their online offering, and with the MIY Creative and Cultural Development Manager now sitting on the REACH Steering Group.

Talent Development:

- Ongoing conversations with organisations and higher education providers to help shape the direction of this priority, including meeting with University of York Careers department to discuss changes in talent development during the pandemic and issues facing students in the city.
- Developing relationship with CYC data department to facilitate up-to-date data on the cultural and creative sector, including number of people it now employs in the city.
- SLAP have developed an artist accelerator programme, to support new artists in the city. This is supported by an Arts Council England grant, which MIY wrote in support of and we are providing support in kind.

Culture and Wellbeing

- The Culture Commissioning Partnership (CCP), with Chair and Secretariat by MIY, leads on the Culture and Wellbeing Priority within the Culture Strategy. A new Terms of Reference for the partnership was agreed in July. Following this, two workshops were held for the CCP in late 2021, to create an action plan across communications and engagement, funding, people and strategy, to ensure a joined-up citywide approach to culture and wellbeing for partners.
- Next steps will be to finalise the action plan and start to implement key deliverables, which include a range of activities from site visits, best practice review, to future joint funding bids and building engagement.
- Nineteen York-based charities, social enterprises, voluntary and community groups, received social and Cultural Wellbeing Grants in summer 2021, to the total value of £60k, in a process co-led by Make It York, City of York Council and York CVS, funded through the Better Care Fund. Projects spanned a diverse range of activities, including

fairy trails, youth theatre workshops, excavation projects and creative cafes. Evaluation will begin when the funding period ends at 31 March 2022.

- Case studies from the 2020 round of this grant funding are live on the Culture and Wellbeing page on the Culture hub of the MIY website. We plan to grow this case study resource, to become a qualitative evaluation measure that captures the impact of culture and wellbeing projects, in line with the recommendation for Cultural and Wellbeing evaluation in the Culture Strategy.

York's National and International Profile:

- Make It York have worked alongside CYC and the cultural sector to contribute to a number of significant national policy reports and inquiries on culture, on behalf of the city: including the NP11 Place Strategy, the Northern Culture APPG on Levelling Up Culture, and the recent DCMS inquiry on cultural placemaking.
- The UNESCO Creative City partner packs launched during York Business Week (please see UNESCO section below for full update).
- The cultural leaders have been supporting and inputting into the process for a city-wide cultural listings guide: this will now be hosted on the Visit York website and is currently in development.
- Planning for York Trailblazers (formerly known as Makers and Shapers) has restarted, led by York Civic Trust and Make It York, with support from other partners. Ambition is for this to be a city-wide project from 2022-24, celebrating the anniversaries of past innovators and inspiring those of today and the future and re-introducing the role, reputation and history of York as a cutting-edge city.
- A culture addition to the CYC International Prospectus written and submitted with strong focus on innovation, cultural industries and media arts.

UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts Designation

Mediale are collaborating with fellow UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts, Viborg in Denmark, in creating a hybrid artist residency, running from April – September 2022, for emerging to mid-career artists and studios working in animation, performance and play. This has been made possible through funding by Arts Council England and the Danish Embassy, and has been supported by Make It York, on behalf of the city, and by the Guild of Media Arts.

The UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts working group of the Guild of Media Arts, York Mediale, City of York Council and Make It York, started in early 2021 and meets on a regular basis, to collaboratively work together to profile raise for the city's media arts designation.

As part of this, the group has created a new toolkit and social media assets have been created for York's UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts designation. The packs include key information on York as a UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts, the aims of Creative Cities around creative activity and collaboration, information on key media arts organisations in the city, and how partners can get involved in promoting York as a UNESCO Creative City. This launched in November 2021, as part of a York UNESCO Creative City event at Business Week, organised by MIY and the Guild of Media Arts, which attracted a small, but highly engaged audience of c.25 participants. The packs and event promotion were shared across MIY and partner organisation channels.

The next steps for the UNESCO working group include producing an engagement plan and identifying further events and opportunities to take part in, to continue to profile raise for the designation.

The MIY Head of Culture and Wellbeing attends Guild of Media Arts Court Meetings as an Observer.

City Funding Support for Culture and Events

Financial support for some major events and live music venues was announced by City of York Council during the pandemic, with £100K of their ARG funding given to live events and £100K to live music venues, with grants confirmed to York Music Venues, York Design Week, Aesthetica Film Festival, the Ice Trail, and Jorvik Viking Week.

In February 2022, it was approved that a further £50k allocation from the Council's ARG Budget would be provided to Make It York to support a broader range of festivals and events to take place across York this year. The purpose for this grant funding is to support the delivery of events and festivals which would have happened in 2020 and/or 2021, as well as new events and festivals led by York-based organisations who have been negatively impacted by the pandemic and therefore unable to fund the overall costs of such activities themselves. Make It York has developed an open grant application process for the fund, where applicants must demonstrate how their event supports economic

recovery, residents, communities, plus the aims and ambitions of the York Culture Strategy.

Grant funding will be delivered in consultation with the Executive Members for Culture & Communities and Economy & Strategic Planning. This grants fund is currently live on the MIY website here and we will let applicants know if they have been successful by the end of April: [ARG Events and Festivals Grant Scheme now open for applications \(makeityork.com\)](https://www.makeityork.com/arg-events-and-festivals-grant-scheme)

City of York Council has just confirmed a further £45K of ARG funding to Make It York, to support the delivery of local projects designed to improve city centre footfall, support a vibrant city centre, and boost trade and economic recovery. MIY are pleased to receive the ARG funding which will help support an Art Trail in York later this year. We will be working with partners to develop the trail and will unveil the plans over the coming months.

Events and Festivals

MIY's Culture, Wellbeing and Events team oversees a year-round programme of events and festivals, many of which have a strong cultural focus.

We have a number of mechanisms in place to support our events delivery. These include:

- Members of MIY's cross-departmental Events Committee oversee the delivery of MIY's annual calendar of events, review applications for third-party events, raise the profile for events, and ensure a responsive and coordinated internal approach.
- A new Events section is on the MIY website, outlining MIY's role in delivering, attracting and facilitating events and festivals, which explains how to book an event/hire city centre space –along with associated online documents and booking forms.
- Planning on the Events Strategy and Event Framework begins in 2022: the Events Strategy will focus on alignment with both the Culture and Tourism Strategies.
- To help secure value for money and promote fair and transparent procurement, Make It York often uses a tender process to award major contracts to suppliers. Details of our latest advertised tenders, including instructions on how to submit a tender, are published on the MIY website.

- The team continues to build and maintain partnerships for specific initiatives through both our events and cultural work, to ensure engagement with event delivery partners and to advocate for forthcoming cultural events.
- A new and comprehensive events calendar publication is currently in development, to provide a one-stop guide to major events and festivals in the city throughout the year.

Events programme:

Make It York's annual programme of events includes the following cultural events, which we deliver:

Residents Festival

The traditional Residents Festival went ahead across the weekend of 29/30th January 2022, with offers and discounts for residents from attractions and local businesses.

In addition to this, City of York Council are supporting the development of a city centre offer, the York Life Festival, to enhance the impact of the current Residents Festival, which features a programmed stage of mixed acts, curated by the York Venue Network in the city, and an entertainment hub area on Parliament St. This takes place on 2 - 3 April (rather than alongside the traditional offer, due to covid considerations).

York Ice Trail

The York Ice Trail took place on the weekend of 5/6th March 2022 (postponed from February, to ensure a safe and successful event, given uncertainties with Covid and based on guidance from the city's Safety Advisory Group, Public Health and City of York Council). There were over 40 sponsored sculptures across the city, curated to an 'Around the World' theme. Sponsors consisted of retailers, attractions, business services, restaurants and bars. CYC supported the event with a grant which enabled a 'headline' sculpture and evaluation report, helping to secure the viability of the event for future years.

York Trailblazers

MIY are working with York Civic Trust on plans for a city-wide celebration of York's heritage spanning 2022-2024. Current partners are a broad coalition of heritage, voluntary and cultural groups, with over twenty organisations and societies, committed to developing and

delivering a programme of events and activities that will celebrate and build links between the past and the present in the city. Our ambition is to make York Trailblazers city-wide in its action and international in its impact and collaboration by utilising existing networks, especially York's UNESCO Creative City status and creating new ones.

To view all the events MIY deliver, please visit: [Make It York Events](#)

Culture Sector Overview

There are at least 94 professional arts and heritage organisations operating in the city and over 750 creative industries businesses, with over 4,400 employees. The sector is worth £33m to the local economy. York's universities and colleges, have also recently invested over £100m in creative facilities and new schools of performance.

York is home to four Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations: York Theatre Royal, Pilot Theatre, York Museums Trust and The National Centre for Early Music. It is also home to many vibrant, leading media arts organisations, events and initiatives – international media arts charity York Mediale, the Guild of Media Arts, the Aesthetica Short Film Festival, and XR Stories.

Culture Sector Pandemic Update

Many arts and heritage organisations operate on charity or not-for profit models and rely on grant funding and commercialising their venues through ticketing and gift shop revenue to sustain their businesses. This model left the cultural sector particularly vulnerable during the covid pandemic as they were forced to close for long periods while needing to maintain heritage buildings and core operations.

Arts Council England provided rounds of emergency grant funding to many York organisations during the pandemic, which alongside the furlough scheme, enabled them to avoid closure. The sector is inherently creative and adaptable; however, many were still forced to make valued employees redundant and many freelancers had to leave the sector to survive. Most adjusted their models during the lockdowns to offer online experiences, outdoor, socially distanced events and bring culture to local communities. The extent to which these pandemic-induced changes will continue is not yet clear.

As spring into summer 2021 saw a gradual phasing out of pandemic restrictions, some venues reported a return to pre-pandemic levels of footfall. Non-socially distanced theatre and music events resumed, with reports of full and new audiences attending events. Others reported bumpier recovery, with cancelled events, low take-up on advance tickets, and difficulties recruiting front-of-house staff. Live music venues have been particularly affected by these challenges.

Some volunteers returned to in-person volunteering, with others choosing to step back all together. Many venues reported increasing reliance on volunteers and freelancers given the reduction in core staff. Recruiting new volunteers and staff is a key focus for many cultural organisations.

York's creative sector has now broadly transitioned from pandemic survival to recovery, bolstered by strong domestic tourism to the city, but uncertainty about the future and further setbacks may cause recovery to be fragile.

Autumn 2021 brought more significant activity in the cultural sector, including the return of York Design Week, Aesthetica Short Film Festival and the Yorkshire Schools Dance Festival. Other highlights included the York performances of Northern Girls, a Pilot Theatre project which invested heavily in a group of female writers, directors, and performers from the city to perform new monologues reflecting on what it means to be a northern girl in 2021. People We Love, Mediale's accessible and moving installation was reinstalled at York Minster after a thwarted run in November 2020. Featuring local people, the installation showed film of individuals looking at an image of a loved one.

The York Museums Trust were finalists for a national award in December 2021 for the #CuratorBattle social media campaign during the lockdowns and announced their partnership with international dementia awareness programme House of Memories during the quarter. The Yorkshire Museum closed from October for planned works on the building and to alleviate pressure on the museum's Covid recovery.

The emergence of a new Covid variant made for a more turbulent Christmas season which particularly affected live events, especially theatre. York Theatre Royal's pantomime was forced to close for several days due to isolation and illness and reported nationally the closure would incur a loss of around £200,000. The Grand Opera House also

closed for two performances, with their stars missing the final shows, and Riding Lights Theatre Company's Christmas schools tour was severely affected by schools cancelling performances and reduced the number of public performances.

Festive attractions and heritage organisations reported much lower levels of impact, with the Bar Convent seeing a 25% increase in footfall compared with 2019. York Archaeology reported around 1% increase on 2019 numbers but decided to postpone the Viking Festival in February 2022 due to uncertainty around the impact on events early in the year. It will now take place in May half term. Many attractions report the worse effect was covering staff absences due to illness/isolation, a trend which has continued into the new year.

Live music reported a busier period as rescheduled shows filled the programme. The frequency of shows meant audiences were more dispersed across events and artist cancellation remained a problem. Though venues are faring well, independent promoters have been hit extremely hard during the recovery period.

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Appendix: Culture, Wellbeing and Events SLA Priorities:

York Culture Strategy, York's Creative Future:

- Drive an ambitious and cohesive programme of cultural development for the city covering the arts, heritage and creative industries.
- Work with the CLG to lead on the development and evaluation of the Culture Strategy, ensuring full engagement with other city strategies and plans, including the Local Plan, Skills,
- Deliver/commission events both for the creative sector and for others, e.g. Culture Awards or equivalent that are profile raising, increase collaboration and demonstrate best practice.
- Convene and support the CLG as the strategy "owners", providing the secretariat and driving the agenda, resourcing the partnership and co-chairing alongside an elected cultural leader.
- Develop a sustainable independent executive structure and constitution for the CLG.
- Receive regular strategic advice from the both the cultural and creative sectors maintaining appropriate liaison arrangements to inform the Make It York board of directors and to steer the company's plans.
- Maintain positive and comprehensive relationships with national and regional strategic support bodies.
- Put together the necessary partnerships to make funding bids to deliver the Culture Strategy.
- Advise and support cultural providers with regard to new initiatives liaising with the council as appropriate.

UNESCO designation:

- Support the Guild of Media Arts as the focal point for UNESCO City of Media Arts designation by facilitating and undertaking activities that maximise the potential benefits of York's UNESCO designation and ensure sustained development in line with the Four Year Monitoring Report and Plan of 2018.
- Work with UNESCO Focal Point – the Guild of Media Arts – and the Council to deliver 2018- 22 UNESCO Creative City objectives.
- Support the focal point to convene wider stakeholder groups in the city to maximise the impact of the designation to the city.
- Communicate regularly with the creative sector e.g. through mailings and social media.
- Promote the creative sector through media channels highlighting York's profile as a Creative city.
- Monitor and evaluate progress leading to the 2022 Report to UNESCO.
- Support the Focal Point to collaborate with UK Creative Cities and other designations, UK UNESCO Commission, Media Arts Network, and Creative Cities Network.
- Promote the designation within the city, e.g. through the BID, Retail and Hospitality Forums.

City Centre Vibrancy:

City Centre:

- Make proposals to the Council for any new ideas for commercial exploitation of the Footstreets, Eye of York and Tower Gardens and Knavesmire.
- Contributing expertise, ideas and experiences to the MyCityCentre project which will set the city centre strategy.
- Contribute to the Council's Retail Strategy, and join with the BID, Retail Forum, Indie York and others to attempt to attract appropriate new retail operators to the city.
- Create a high-profile calendar of city centre festivals, activities and events ensuring that partners such as the BID are enabled to contribute. Identify times when new events would add value to the York experience and work on filling these gaps.
- Promote the events calendar through all appropriate means including through highly visible city centre information.

Glossary:

MIY: Make It York

CYC: City of York Council

CLG SSG: Cultural Leaders Group Strategy Steering Group

CLG: Cultural Leaders Group

CCP: Cultural Commissioning Partnership

ARG: Additional Restrictions Grant

DCMS: Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

SLA: Service Level Agreement

REACH: Reconnecting Education, the Arts, Creativity and Heritage