

Bradford District Joint Cultural Needs Assessment

June 2026

Informing the refresh of *Culture is Our Plan 2021–2031*

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Executive summary

Bradford District is entering a decisive post-City of Culture period. Since the 2020 Joint Cultural Needs Assessment, culture has moved from being a valued civic asset to a more visible driver for regeneration, skills, visitor economy, place identity and growth.

This shift aligns across national, regional and local strategy. Culture is increasingly connected to devolution, creative industries growth, health, education, heritage, tourism, climate responsibility and inclusive regeneration. Locally, the Bradford District Strategy 2025–2035¹ and *Built Different: Bradford 2025–2035 Regeneration and Growth Plan*² position culture as part of the District’s growth and regeneration story, not as an optional enhancement.

Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture has provided the strongest evidence to date of what cultural investment can achieve. More than 5,000 events took place across all 30 wards, reaching audiences of more than three million and involving over 100,000 active participants. The programme involved more than 800 organisations and over 2,000 creative practitioners, more than half of whom were based in Bradford³. It supported skills, volunteering, audience development, cultural participation, national visibility and a stronger sense of civic pride.

This does not mean culture is fully embedded in delivery - yet. In many places the connections are still aspirational, fragmented or in early development. But the language has changed. Culture is increasingly understood as a contributor to outcomes that matter across the District.

Bradford 2025 should also not be treated as a normal baseline. It was an extraordinary year, supported by exceptional investment, visibility, staffing and partnership energy – much from existing arts and cultural partners who have been working across the District and with its residents for many years. Its value is that it proves what is possible when culture is planned and resourced at scale. The next phase must now decide what can realistically be sustained, embedded and adapted within a more constrained financial and organisational context.

The central finding of this JCNA is that Bradford’s next cultural need is not simply more activity. It is about building a stronger, more equitable and better-connected cultural system. The District now needs to move from cultural momentum to cultural system-building.

That means protecting the methods that have worked: hyper-local delivery, community co-creation, artistic ambition, access considerations, practical support for artists, stronger youth pathways, evidence-led planning, visible cultural infrastructure investment and confident place storytelling. It also means being more selective. With reduced resources, Bradford cannot pursue every opportunity with equal intensity.

Bradford 2025 has demonstrated the district’s cultural capability, ambition and collective potential. The task now is not simply to preserve the legacy of a single year, but to use that

¹ <https://bradford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s53462/Appendix%20A%20District%20strategy.pdf>

² <https://bradford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s55018/Regeneration%20and%20Growth%20Plan.pdf>

³ Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture, *Interim Evaluation Report*, April 2026.

year as evidence of what Bradford can achieve when artists, communities, cultural organisations, funders and civic partners work together with shared purpose. The next phase must therefore be rooted in the delivery of *Culture is Our Plan*⁴, ensuring that the confidence, participation and visibility generated through 2025 are translated into a long-term, district-wide cultural approach that continues to support creativity, opportunity, pride and inclusive growth.

This ambition must also be understood in the context of increasing sector fragility.

Across the UK, cultural organisations are navigating rising operating costs, pressure on local authority budgets, reduced reserves, short-term project funding and intense competition for diminishing resources. Analysis from Equity and the Autonomy Institute⁵ found that local government arts funding across Britain fell by 55% between 2010 and 2024–25, with England seeing a 61% fall, while wider sector commentary has highlighted persistent regional inequalities in cultural funding and access.

The recent announcement that Bradford Producing Hub is entering a period of pause, following severe funding pressures and unsuccessful bids, highlights a critical risk to the cultural infrastructure that has supported artists and creative companies across the district. Since the first draft of this document, this new development shows how fragile the cultural infrastructure is in Bradford and this now requires urgent attention. Stabilising and sustaining infrastructure organisations such as Bradford Producing Hub should be treated as a top priority if Bradford is to build on the success of 2025, retain talent and support independent practitioners. For Bradford, this means that the legacy of 2025 will not be secured by momentum alone; it will depend on sustained investment, shared leadership and the protection of the cultural infrastructure needed to deliver *Culture is Our Plan* over the long term.

The purpose of this JCNA is therefore to move from strategic recognition of culture to practical prioritisation. It asks: given what Bradford has learned through the last six years, and particularly through Bradford 2025, what should the District now focus on? What needs to be protected? What needs to be strengthened? What needs to change? And how should cultural investment be directed over the next five years so that it supports the lives of Bradford's residents as well as the District's wider regeneration and growth ambitions?

The report is also intended to inform the refresh of *Culture is Our Plan*. This is significant because the strategy is now halfway through its ten-year life. The next phase should not rewrite the ambition, but should bring it into sharper focus. By 2031, the strategy focuses on achieving three main outcomes:

⁴ <https://www.cultureisourplan.co.uk/>

⁵ https://www.equity.org.uk/news/2026/cut-in-funding-by-british-councils-threatens-arts-access?utm_source=chatgpt.com

- **Health and Wellbeing:** Enabling people to live happier, healthier lives with better mental health, new skills, and longer life expectancy.
- **Economic Growth:** Fostering successful, sustainable creative businesses that bring jobs, visitors, and economic investment into the district.
- **Exceptional Place-making:** Positioning the Bradford District as a top destination of choice for residents and visitors to experience and create exceptional art and culture.

The evidence suggests that the strategy's core principles remain sound, but the delivery environment has changed. Bradford now has stronger evidence, more capital infrastructure, a larger network of cultural relationships, a more visible creative sector and greater external recognition.

It also has a more challenging financial context, a changing political environment and a need to make harder choices about where limited resource can have the greatest impact. It is against this backdrop that the new priorities and action plan for culture needs to contextualise itself. This assessment details where there has been success in these areas – alongside potential areas for focus moving forward.

The refreshed *Culture is Our Plan* should therefore be practical, focused and ambitious. It should retain the original strategy's vision, but translate it into a realistic 2026–2031 delivery framework that reflects Bradford 2025 learning, devolution, regional creative industries opportunities, financial constraint, and the need for stronger local governance.

Headline recommendations from this JCNA

Recommendation 1: Refresh *Culture is Our Plan* as a five-year delivery framework

Refocus the existing strategy for 2026–2031 around Bradford 2025 learning, reduced resources, devolution, creative industries growth and clearer delivery ownership.

Recommendation 2: Establish 2026–27 as the realistic post-City of Culture baseline

Use 2026–27 to understand what participation, partnerships, workforce capacity, volunteering, schools engagement, creative health and visitor activity can be sustained beyond 2025.

Recommendation 3: Create a cultural compact or equivalent partnership structure

Establish a shared mechanism to hold priorities, connect networks, coordinate evidence, develop investment propositions and represent Bradford coherently at local, regional and national levels.

Recommendation 4: Protect and invest in hyper-local cultural infrastructure

Treat Our Patch, The Beacon, Place Partners, community connectors and neighbourhood-led models as core cultural infrastructure, not short-term programme activity.

Recommendation 5: Re-centre artists, artforms and artistic quality

Ensure the refreshed strategy explicitly supports artists, producers, making, commissioning, rehearsal, experimentation, quality and ambition.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen cultural workforce development

Recognise Bradford Producing Hub and other sector networks such as The Bradford Way as workforce infrastructure, with paid coordination or “instigator” models supporting priority artforms and underrepresented practitioners.

Recommendation 7: Build a joined-up youth creative pathway

Support BCEP, Bradford Made, Bradford College, BRIT School North, SkillsHouse, BPH, libraries, schools, home educators and cultural partners to connect more strongly to create a clear route from participation to paid work.

Recommendation 8: Develop a district-wide cultural spaces and assets plan

Map cultural spaces and underused assets across the District, identifying gaps and opportunities for rehearsal, making, youth, community, digital, heritage and workspace use.

Recommendation 9: Focus artform investment where Bradford has distinctiveness and growth potential

Prioritise heritage, visual arts, digital /immersive /media practice and music, including South Asian music, while maintaining practical support for wider artform and community-led networks.

Recommendation 10: Develop a practical creative health and wellbeing approach

Build clearer referral routes, commissioning models, safeguarding, practitioner support and evaluation for creative health and wellbeing activity.

Recommendation 11: Strengthen cultural destination development

Encourage a joined-up approach to visitor economy, tourism product, international links and external PR, connecting areas such as venues, heritage, screen, public realm and transport.

Recommendation 12: Create a shared cultural outcomes dashboard

Track a small number of agreed indicators using Bradford 2025 evaluation, JCNA evidence, household surveys, audience data, workforce data, It's On In Bradford and community insight.

SECTION 1. Purpose, scope and evidence base

1.1 What is a Joint Cultural Needs Assessment?

A Joint Cultural Needs Assessment⁶ is a way for cultural organisations, cultural partnerships and strategic partners to use the best available evidence to understand the role culture can play in a place. It supports decision-making by identifying cultural needs, assets, gaps, opportunities and priorities.

It should help partners answer practical questions such as:

- What cultural assets and strengths does Bradford already have?
- Who benefits from culture now, and who does not?
- What cultural infrastructure needs protecting or strengthening?
- How can culture contribute to wider place priorities?
- What should be prioritised when resources are limited?
- What needs to be measured, learned from and adapted over time?

This JCNA is not a delivery plan in itself. Its role is to inform the next stage of planning, including the refresh of *Culture is Our Plan* and any future JCNA action plan. Final outcomes, targets and delivery commitments should be agreed through partnership planning with the organisations and communities who will be responsible for delivery.

1.2 Why this JCNA is timely

This assessment comes at the mid-point of *Culture is Our Plan*, Bradford's ten-year cultural strategy for 2021–2031. The strategy's original ambition remains relevant: to establish Bradford District as a globally renowned incubator for creativity, where culture is celebrated across communities and contributes to wellbeing, economic opportunity and exceptional place-making.

However, the delivery context has changed significantly since 2021. Bradford now has: the evidence and profile generated by Bradford 2025; new and improved cultural infrastructure; stronger community-led delivery models; deeper cultural sector networks; more visible creative workforce needs; stronger links to regional creative industries agendas; increased recognition of culture in regeneration, health, education and tourism strategies; a more constrained public funding environment; political change and ongoing financial pressure within local government.

The refresh of *Culture is Our Plan* therefore needs to be more focused, delivery-oriented and realistic. It should not dilute ambition, but it should make harder choices about what can be

⁶ <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-09/UoW%20JCNA%20Guidelines.pdf>

achieved, who should lead, what should be measured and where investment will have the greatest impact.

1.3 The Bradford Way

The Bradford Way is an Arts Council England-funded Place Partnership programme designed to build a more sustainable, inclusive and collaborative cultural ecosystem in Bradford District. It brings together Bradford Producing Hub, The Leap, Cultural Voice Forum and Bradford Council. The partnership has commissioned this JCNA.

The Partnership supports sector development, community-led practice, networking, sustainability planning, festival funding and cultural toolkits.

1.4 Evidence base

This report draws on⁷:

- national, regional and local strategy review;
- 121 interviews with senior leaders in culture and related sectors (Appendix 2)
- Bradford 2025 Interim Evaluation evidence;
- YemeTech Bradford Cultural Baseline Analysis⁸ - Adoption of neighbourhood and community-focused research;
- Bradford Producing Hub reports, artist survey findings and Future Focus session notes;
- Cultural Voice Forum sub-network reports - sector research into dance, music, digital arts, craft and making, young people and access;
- Bradford Cultural Education Partnership consensus workshops;
- evidence from programmes including Our Patch, The Beacon, Bradford Made, SENDiVERSE, Bradford Digital Creatives, Dying Matters and Common/Wealth's care-centred practice.

The strategy review is particularly important. It shows that culture is now referenced across a much wider set of civic priorities than in 2020. It appears in regeneration and growth plans, heritage planning, skills frameworks, tourism strategies, health and wellbeing agendas, children and young people's strategies, equality and inclusion plans, digital strategy, social value policy, climate planning, active travel and public realm development.

However, this does not mean culture is fully embedded in delivery. In many places the connections are still aspirational or early-stage. But the language has changed. Culture is increasingly understood as a contributor to outcomes that matter across the District: confidence, pride, wellbeing, social connection, youth aspiration, creative skills, employment, city centre renewal, tourism, inclusion and place identity.

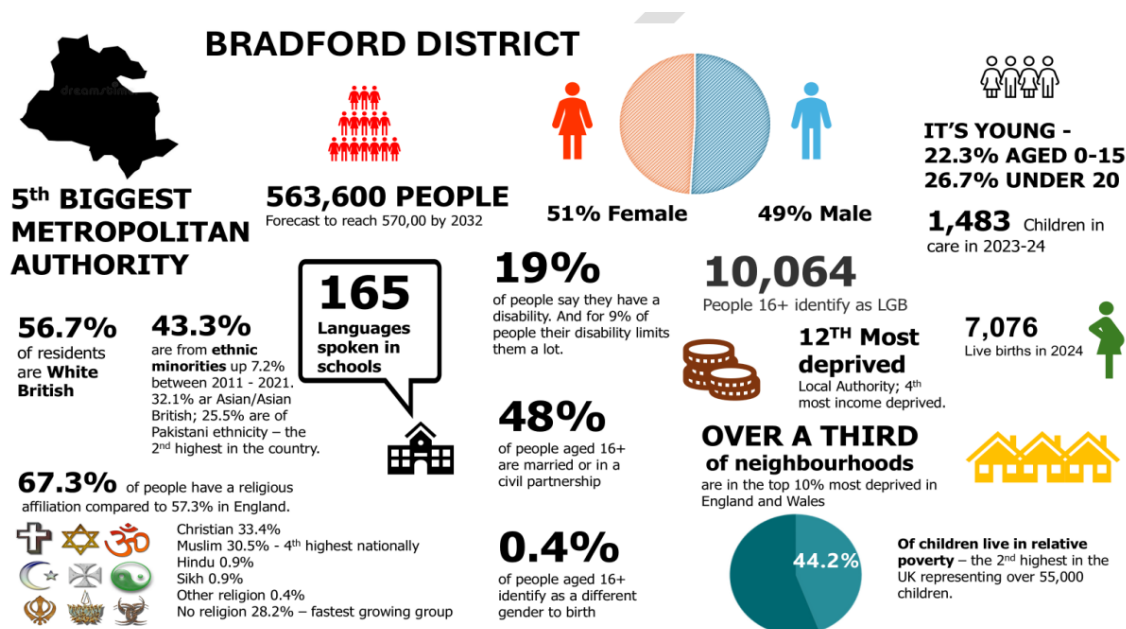
⁷ See Appendix 1 for a fuller list of sources and references

⁸ Specially commissioned geospatial analysis of communities, activity and assets data as part of BD2025 Evaluation approach

The purpose of this JCNA is therefore to move from strategic recognition to practical prioritisation.

Section 2. Bradford’s place narrative: what is distinctive?

Bradford’s cultural distinctiveness lies in the relationship between its people, its places and its stories. The District is young, diverse, creative, complex and geographically varied. The Bradford District Strategy describes a place of around 563,600 people, with 28% of residents under 20, 165 languages spoken in schools, a large Pakistani heritage population, significant global majority communities, and a geography that spans city neighbourhoods, towns, villages, moorland, industrial heritage, faith spaces, parks, mills and rural landscapes.



This creates a cultural offer that cannot be reduced to a single narrative. Bradford is a district of many identities. It is a place of migration, faith, food, music, textiles, film, literature, manufacturing, making, landscape, sport, and community traditions. It is also a place of structural inequalities, including poverty, low pay, poor connectivity, educational barriers, health inequalities and uneven access to opportunity.

This complexity is not a weakness. It is part of Bradford’s cultural strength. The District’s future cultural narrative should not try to smooth out difference. It should create enough shared

⁹ Infographic taken from Bradford Council Plan Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Cross Cutting Mission 2026 – 2030 OFFICIAL Sources: ONS 2021 Census; ONS 2024 Mid-Year Population Estimates; ONS National Birth Statistics; DHSC Public Health Profile; DWP/HMRC; Bradford Schools Census; Index of Multiple Deprivation 2025.

purpose for investment and delivery while allowing the many stories of Bradford to remain visible.

The evidence reviewed for this JCNA suggests that Bradford's strongest cultural proposition is not simply that it has diverse communities, nor simply that it has major cultural assets. Its strongest proposition is that it can connect community-rooted creativity with ambitious place transformation. Bradford is at its best when local voice and artistic ambition work together.

2.1 Placing cultural activity where it mattered to residents

This was visible during Bradford 2025. The City of Culture year did not only bring audiences into major events. It also placed cultural activity in parks, streets, schools, community centres, neighbourhoods, heritage spaces, faith settings, galleries and everyday places. Programmes such as Our Patch and The Beacon helped shift the relationship between culture and geography by reducing reliance on city-centre access and bringing activity closer to communities.

It presented events and activities across the whole of Bradford: more than 5,000 events across all 30 wards in Bradford District, which were enjoyed by over three million audience members and more than 100,000 active participants from communities and educational settings.¹⁰

The programme was delivered with the help of more than 800 organisations and 2,000 creative practitioners (over half from Bradford), while the Bradford 2025 youth training and skills programme benefited more than 2,500 young people aged 16–25.

Audiences also gave Bradford 2025 an average rating of 8.9 (out of 10) for producing an inclusive UK City of Culture experience.

This matters in a district where transport, cost and confidence remain significant barriers to participation.

More analysis on ticketing, audience and community participation data will be undertaken by the BD evaluation team to explore changes in cultural engagement and participation among Bradford residents explore audience demographics, socioeconomic status, protected characteristics, accessibility and targeted engagement.

2.2 Building the Profile of Bradford

At the same time, Bradford 2025 raised the District's national and international profile. The hosting of the Turner Prize at Cartwright Hall, the reopening and animation of cultural venues such as the National Science and Media Museum and Bradford Live, national media coverage, major partnerships and high-profile events helped challenge older external narratives of Bradford as marginal, deprived or overlooked. The City of Culture Interim Evaluation indicates that the proportion of UK adults surveyed who had heard anything about Bradford increased

¹⁰ BD25 interim evaluation

from 51% in 2024 to 60% in 2025, and positive perceptions of the District improved during the year.¹¹

2.3 Pride

This change in external perception is important, but the internal shift is arguably more significant. Resident pride rose during 2025, and more residents identified arts and cultural facilities as something that made them proud of Bradford.

The Bradford 2024 and 2025 Household Surveys showed that:

- 86% of Bradford residents in 2025 said they were proud to live in their local area, up from 75% in 2024;
- 65% of residents agreed that arts and cultural facilities, groups, events and activities made them feel proud of their local area, up from 45% in 2024.
- 63% were satisfied with the range of cultural activities in Bradford, up from 39% in 2024.
- 63% agreed that they were satisfied with the quality of cultural activities in Bradford, up from 41% in 2024.
- 56% agreed that ‘culture in Bradford represents me and my life’, up from 37% in 2024.
- 95% of Bradford 2025 participants were interested in taking part in a Bradford 2025 event again.

Interview evidence also points to a stronger sense that Bradford “can now host and attract”, and that the District has more confidence in its ability to deliver ambitious cultural work. This confidence should be treated as an asset in its own right. And potentially inform some continuing ‘wow’ moments in the cultural calendar.

2.4 Continuous Improvement

However, Bradford’s place narrative must also be honest. Pride is not evenly distributed. Cultural confidence is not the same as structural change. Many residents still face barriers to participation. Some communities remain underrepresented in leadership (white working class, South Asian artists and black communities have all been referenced in various reports/ interviews), programming, commissioning and paid cultural work. Some artists still lack access to space, networks and sustainable income. Some young people still do not see a realistic creative future in the District. The next cultural strategy therefore needs to hold pride and inequality together: celebrating what has changed while focusing clearly on who has not yet benefited enough.

Making Impact Matter, a monitoring and evaluation consultancy, is currently conducting a ‘deep dive’ assessment into the social value of capital investment projects as part of our Economic and Social Value Impact Assessment (ESVIA).

¹¹ P.4 - <https://bradfordculture.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Bradford-2025-Interim-Report-April-2026.pdf>

The assessment is due to be completed in November 2026 and should also feed into the focus for culture around areas of focus that could inform the next cultural delivery plan and its priorities.

2.4 Arts and Culture – the language we use

A further issue emerging from the interviews is the need to retain clarity around the arts within a broad cultural strategy. Bradford’s inclusive definition of culture is a strength. It allows the District to recognise cultural references as broad as food and faith, to sport and language. But several contributors also identified a risk that “culture” becomes so broad that the specific contribution of artists, artforms and artistic practice becomes diluted and can impact the importance of ‘artistic excellence and expertise’ in programming high quality arts experiences across the District.

The next phase should therefore use both languages deliberately. It should value culture in its broadest sense, while also making a clear commitment to arts development, artistic quality, production, experimentation and professional creative practice.

This distinction matters because the District’s ambitions depend on both. Participation, community voice and everyday culture are essential. But so too are the skilled workforce that makes it happen: artists, producers, curators, technicians, musicians, performers, writers, creative technologists, dancers, designers and cultural organisations – all capable of making work that has quality, risk, ambition and reach. Bradford’s strongest future will come from connecting these agendas, not choosing between them.

Section 3. The strategic context: culture as a energizer of regeneration and change

The strategy review shows a notable convergence between local, regional and national agendas. Culture is increasingly connected to economic growth, skills, health, wellbeing, inclusion, climate, digital innovation, tourism and place-making.

At national level, as this JCNA is being finalised Arts Council England have announced that they will be replacing the Let's Create strategy with a new strategic framework focused on artistic excellence and quality¹². Arts Professional reports that *“ACE has called the Strategic Framework a “practical, interim guide” explaining how it will prioritise its work, design its services, and make investment decisions. The framework will eventually be replaced by a ratified, wholesale strategy. It bases ACE’s investment in organisations on three overarching considerations: to support excellence, “deliver for everybody”, and “reach everywhere”.*

It is also worth acknowledging here the impact that the delayed cycle of National Portfolio funding is having on organisations not currently receiving funding from ACE. Bradford Producing Hub is notable as an organisation that has benefited from significant investment from ACE as part of the ‘Producing Hub’ pilot (£1.5 million investment for activity in 2019-2021) and subsequent project grants – but now is now in fragile situation – and entering a period of ‘pause’ due to this delayed opportunity to enter the portfolio.

The City of Culture’s Workforce Study¹³ authored in 2020 to support the bid highlighted Bradford Producing Hub as a vital part of the cultural infrastructure. It noted: *“Taking into account the urgent need for support structures and systems it is recommended that the City of Culture team explore the opportunity to build on the existing Hub model being delivered by Bradford Producing Hub. Already delivering innovative and creative ways to develop talent in the District for live performance BPH and its approach to workforce development would provide a strong ‘convening’ hub for bringing together the CCI sector and driving forward a joint and centralised strategy and point for delivery of the needs outlined.”*

The future of BPH is therefore cited as a priority for partners to consider.

The Heritage Fund’s *Heritage 2033* strategy is also important because Bradford has such a strong heritage base. Its priorities around saving heritage, protecting the environment, organisational sustainability, and inclusion, access and participation align closely with Bradford’s Heritage Action Plan and the opportunity to use heritage not as nostalgia, but as a living tool for identity, skills, wellbeing and regeneration.

¹² <https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/ace-replaces-lets-create-and-vows-to-fund-on-basis-of-quality>

¹³ Bradford Creative and Cultural Industries Workforce Study, November 2020 / Research Team: Anna Franks, Dr Madeleine Irwin, Susan Ingham

The devolution agenda creates a new context. Culture being brought into the English devolution framework as a formal area of competence means that cultural and creative sectors can be more directly connected to regional decision-making, investment and place-shaping. For Bradford, this is an opportunity, but only if the District can set out clear priorities and investable propositions. It will need to be able to show how culture contributes to transport, skills, housing, regeneration, health, town centres and economic development, rather than arguing for culture in isolation.

At West Yorkshire level, the Creative Industries Cluster Action Plan¹⁴ gives Bradford a strong platform to show it can contribute to cultural success at a regional level. The Plan identifies the creative industries as a major growth opportunity and highlights barriers that are very familiar from Bradford’s local evidence: lack of affordable workspace, skills gaps, business support needs, access to finance, digital and AI skills, innovation and R&D access, and lack of visible networks. These are not abstract regional barriers. They are the same issues raised by Bradford artists, young creatives, digital practitioners, music stakeholders, makers and grassroots organisations.

The West Yorkshire Destination Management Plan¹⁵ also matters. It positions West Yorkshire as “Yorkshire’s cultural and vibrant heart” and identifies Bradford’s cultural assets, including the UNESCO World Heritage Site at Saltaire, UNESCO City of Film status, Haworth, Ilkley, Bradford Literature Festival and Bradford Science Festival. It also identifies continuing challenges around place perception, critical mass, connectivity and limited hotel capacity. This mirrors Bradford’s own challenge: the cultural offer is strong, but the visitor experience, transport, accommodation, communications and packaging need further development if culture is to generate sustained tourism benefit.

Locally, the alignment is particularly strong. The Bradford District Strategy 2025–2035¹⁶ strategy is intended to guide collaborative action over the next decade, maximising the district’s assets and opportunities while addressing structural challenges.

Within this framework, culture and the creative industries are positioned as key drivers of regeneration, economic growth and community wellbeing. UK City of Culture 2025 was highlighted as a pivotal opportunity to raise Bradford’s national and international profile, attract new audiences and investment, and build long-term participation in cultural activity. It also identifies culture as contributing to broader ambitions for a global, knowledge-based economy by 2035, drawing on Bradford’s youthful and diverse population, its creative sector, and its entrepreneurial strengths. Alongside sectors such as clean energy, advanced

¹⁴ <https://westyorkshire.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s42613/Item10BackgroundDocWYCreativeIndustriesClusterActionPlan.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://bradford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s46011/Doc%20U%20Appendix%20-%20West%20Yorkshire%20Destination%20Management%20Plan%20FINAL%20161023%202610.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://bradford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s53462/Appendix%20A%20District%20strategy.pdf>

manufacturing and smart technology, the creative industries are expected to support the development of better jobs, greener places and shared prosperity across communities.

The key here is how the District builds on this now to create a new delivery plan for culture.

Built Different makes the clearest regeneration argument, stating that 2025 marked a shift in how Bradford was experienced and understood. It argues that when Bradford invests in streets, public spaces, culture and everyday activity, behaviour changes: footfall increases, confidence follows, and people make different decisions about where to spend their time, money and energy.

This is a powerful statement for the JCNA. It means culture is being understood as part of the operating system of place. It contributes to the way streets feel, how local centres are used, whether people stay longer, whether residents feel pride, whether visitors return, whether businesses invest, and whether young people can imagine a future in Bradford.

The challenge is that strategic alignment does not automatically create delivery alignment. Culture is now mentioned in many strategies, but the mechanisms for joint planning, funding, delivery and evaluation are still uneven. This is why the refreshed *Culture is Our Plan* needs to act as a bridge. It should connect the cultural sector's ambitions with the wider District Strategy, *Built Different*, BCEP, creative health, skills, tourism, digital, heritage, equality and devolution agendas. It should also make clear what culture can realistically deliver (it cannot fix or improve everything!), what it needs from other systems, and what cannot be achieved without investment.

Section 4: Bradford 2025: proof of potential, not a normal baseline

Bradford 2025 has changed the evidence base for culture in the District. It provided a large-scale test of cultural investment and demonstrated that culture can function as both economic and social infrastructure. The programme generated tangible outcomes, including £51m investment across 5,000+ events, increased museum attendance, enhanced transport links, and capital improvements to venues¹⁷.

4.1 Making an Impact through culture

The Bradford 2025 “in numbers” summary¹⁸ records:

- more than 5,500 people benefiting from training, skills, artist development, mentoring or paid work placements,
- more than 160 schools and education settings involved, and
- more than 2,500 volunteers contributing over 60,000 hours.
- More than 30 cultural organisations benefited from capital investment to improve buildings and facilities.
- More than 110 grassroots community groups received grants for creative activity.
- Impressions Gallery and Cartwright Hall Art Gallery seeing visitor numbers double.
- A significant increase in tourism was recorded, including: 29% increase in journeys between Bradford District and London and the South East on London North Eastern Railway services.
- City centre footfall up by over 25% compared with previous years.
- Over 80% of surveyed participants reporting that Bradford 2025 had a positive impact on their wellbeing.
- Eight in ten residents said the programme made them feel proud of where they live.
- More than 70% of residents said the programme made them feel more connected to their community.
- Over 65% of suppliers working on the programme being Yorkshire-based.
- Cultural infrastructure improvements included:
 - Installation of the first visitor toilets at the Brontë Parsonage Museum.
 - Relocation of the Peace Museum to a larger venue, increasing annual visitors from 3,000 to over 50,000.
 - Installation of a lift at Ilkley Playhouse to improve accessibility.
- The impact evidence is also important.

¹⁷ The Guardian, 2025 - The Guardian. (2025, Dec 29). ‘It was empowering’: Bradford considers the legacy of its City of Culture year. [Link](#)

¹⁸ <https://bradford2025.co.uk/press-and-media/press-releases/bradford-2025-uk-city-of-culture-comes-to-a-close/>

- More than 94% of City of Culture audience survey respondents rated the event they attended as excellent or good.
- More than 80% reported a positive impact on wellbeing.
- More than 70% said the event made them feel more connected to their community.
- More than 80% said it made them feel proud of where they live.

Bradford 2025 demonstrated that culture can act as a driver of long-term civic, social, and economic development. Bradford has shifted; energy and confidence are growing.

Legacy will only endure if cultural activity is embedded into the District’s strategy, not treated as a one-off event.¹⁹ And key to this will be leadership and cross sector collaboration. Senior leaders across business, education, local government, and cultural organisations have a role in embedding confidence, investment, and strategic direction. Bradford Breakthrough²⁰ highlights the need for honest dialogue, collective action, and sustained collaboration to transform the momentum of 2025 into long-term delivery.

4.2 A springboard for Capital Investment

Between 2026 and 2029, Bradford’s cultural infrastructure will expand significantly through a combination of new venue openings, capital refurbishment, and strategic redevelopment. This growth strengthens the District’s capacity for cultural production, audience development, skills progression, and sector sustainability.

Key developments include:

- **Bradford Live**, recently opened under Trafalgar Entertainment, re-establishes a large-scale performance venue in the city centre, attracting national touring acts while creating opportunities for local supply chains and creative practitioners.
- **Loading Bay**, developed as a meanwhile-use mid-scale theatre and gallery space during the City of Culture year, provides flexible production and presentation space, with programming planned beyond 2025.
- **Bradford Arts Centre** (formerly Kala Sangam), opened in late 2025 with two theatres and five dance studios and significantly expands city-centre rehearsal, performance and participation capacity.

¹⁹ Higgins, T. (2026, Feb). *Bradford after City of Culture: Momentum, Legacy — and What Comes Next*. LinkedIn. [Link](#)

²⁰ [Bradford Breakthrough](#) is a membership-based organisation, funded by subscriptions, that connects senior leaders from over 40 public and private organizations to improve Bradford's image, connectivity, and economic prospects. Trevor Higgins is CEO.

- Refurbished venues including **Bradford Playhouse** and **The 1 in 12 Club** have improved accessibility and usability following City of Culture-linked investment.
- **Bradford Resource Centre**, recently bought by People’s Property Portfolio²¹, will strengthen provision for community-led creative organisations. It has raised £100,000 so far from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture, Bradford Council, Architectural Heritage Fund, Cooperatives UK and Bradford Producing Hub to develop the building into a social enterprise space and for cultural activity.
- **Keighley Creative** is moving into a new purpose-built visual arts space in 2026, expanding cultural infrastructure in the wider District beyond the city centre.
- **BRIT School North**, opening in 2027, will extend regional creative education pathways, strengthening progression routes into music and creative industries careers.
- **Peace Museum** and its move to a larger space.
- **Impressions Gallery** – exploring options for a new permanent gallery space in Bradford.

These developments collectively start to address some of the ‘space’ issues identified by artist, cultural organisation and community groups across the District. They:

- Increase production and presentation capacity across scales (although mid-scale space is still lacking);
- Strengthen pathways from education into employment;
- Expand access with development of more accessible and inclusive creative spaces;
- Support city-centre regeneration and night-time economy activity; and
- Distribute infrastructure beyond the city core into the wider district.

The scale of Bradford 2025 also matters because it reached beyond the city centre. Events took place across all wards and in diverse spaces. This is important in a district where geography can easily lend to inequality. Cultural participation cannot depend solely on people being able to travel into the city centre, especially given cost, time, public transport and confidence barriers.

All of these developments and evidence from BD25 supports several important conclusions.

- First, Bradford has significant latent cultural demand. When activity is visible, accessible, well-communicated and locally relevant, residents respond.
- Second, cultural participation can produce social outcomes that matter to the District, particularly pride, wellbeing and connection.
- Third, ambitious cultural programming does not have to be separated from community engagement. Bradford 2025 showed that large-scale events, neighbourhood activity,

²¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c74jgvnx17o>

schools work, artist development and community-led programmes can reinforce each other when planned as part of a shared story.

4.3 Developing partnerships

The programme also demonstrated the value of national and international partnerships. Major institutions and partners including the British Council, British Museum, British Library, Royal Ballet and Opera, BBC, Channel 4, British Film Institute, Historic England, Natural England, Penguin Books, PRS Foundation and Tate were connected to the District through Bradford 2025 activity. A British Council partnership connected Bradford with creatives and organisations in over 30 countries across six continents. These relationships should be understood as part of the legacy infrastructure, not simply as programme credits.

The question now is how to maintain and develop these partnerships into long-term cultural relationships for arts organisations and Bradford residents.

4.4 Harnessing volunteers

There is also a question around what happens to the 2,700 volunteers involved in the City of Culture – what cultural knowledge do they retain and how can they continue to contribute to the cultural life of the District post City of Culture?

4.5 Creating a new baseline

However, the JCNA must be careful in how it uses Bradford 2025 data. The year was extraordinary. It had exceptional investment, national status, dedicated delivery teams, high communications spend, concentrated partnership energy, major institutional support and extensive media attention. It would be unrealistic and potentially damaging to set future annual targets against the same level of activity.

The more useful approach is to treat Bradford 2025 as a proof of potential. It shows what the District can achieve when culture is given serious strategic weight. The next question is what should be embedded. The answer is not “everything”. The methods, relationships and infrastructure that can continue to produce value after the exceptional funding has gone need to be interrogated.

The JCNA therefore recommends that 2026–27 becomes the realistic post-City of Culture baseline. This period will show which audiences continue to engage, which community partnerships endure, which artists remain active, which venues become part of everyday cultural life, which volunteers continue, which schools maintain relationships, which health and wellbeing partnerships deepen, and where the most significant gaps appear. The Bradford 2025 final evaluation, due at the end of 2026, should then be used to refine this baseline and adjust the refreshed cultural strategy.

Section 5. Cultural participation: from audiences to cultural agency

The strongest opportunity for Bradford is to move from a participation model based on “bringing people in” to one based on building cultural agency. This means residents and communities should be able to see themselves not only as audiences, but as hosts, makers, curators, volunteers, researchers, storytellers, cultural leaders and decision-makers.

One of the clearest shifts since the last JCNA is the move towards a more participatory and hyper-local model of cultural delivery – mainly through the scale of investment through BD25. Participation in Bradford now means more than attendance at events. It includes residents shaping what happens in their own place.

This is a major strength. Programmes such as Our Patch, The Beacon, The Leap’s community development model and Cultural Voice Forum activity have shown how culture can reach people through trusted relationships and local infrastructure. The Leap is one of the largest supporter’s of community-led culture in Bradford District in terms of grant funding and direct support outside BDMC. These models matter because Bradford is a large and unevenly connected district. Transport, cost, confidence, cultural relevance, childcare, caring responsibilities, shift work, disability, and language all continue to shape whether people can take part.

The Leap’s 2024 evaluation²² provides useful evidence of this model in practice. Across April 2023 to March 2024, The Leap supported 70 activities, over 100 award winners, 78,024 audience members and more than 79,000 engagements, with over £728,000 distributed through its awards programmes. Its Creative Place Partners model is particularly important because it grows cultural capacity through trusted local organisations, combining delegated funding, skills development, infrastructure support and local decision-making in areas where access to arts and culture has historically been more limited.

The evidence suggests that many people are not disengaged from culture itself. They are disengaged from the systems, spaces, information and assumptions through which formal culture is often organised. Bradford’s participation challenge is therefore not simply to persuade more people to attend. It is to remove the practical, social and structural barriers that stop people from shaping, leading and benefiting from cultural activity.

The Cultural Voice Forum sub-network evidence is particularly important here. Although the needs differ by artform and community, the repeated themes are consistent:

- dance artists need coordination, mentoring and rehearsal space;
- South Asian music practitioners identify talent and heritage but lack infrastructure and visibility;

²² <https://www.the-leap.org.uk/our-impact>

- Black-led arts practitioners want regular networking, funding guidance and meaningful spaces;
- women in digital arts need access to equipment, mentoring, workshops and institutional relationships;
- young people want paid entry points, youth-run spaces, fair pay, visible pathways and transport support;
- craft makers identify the need for networks, markets, business development and greater visibility for Bradford's making heritage.

These findings should not be treated as separate special-interest reports. They reveal a common infrastructure gap. Bradford has cultural energy, but many communities and artforms lack the connectivity that allows passion and artistic ambition to become sustained practice. The recurring needs are practical: paid coordination, accessible spaces, small grants, promotion, mentoring, technical access, producer support, routes to audiences and influence over decisions.

Bradford Producing Hub's "Instigator" model offers one useful approach. By appointing specialists with knowledge of a specific artform or community area, the model can help convene networks, identify needs, develop ambition and connect artists into wider opportunities. The risk is that this type of role is vulnerable when funding is short-term. The loss of the Visual Arts Instigator role (May 2026) due to lack of funding (and subsequent 'pause' of all Bradford Producing Hub operations) illustrates the fragility of the very infrastructure that helps participation and sector development become sustained.

The next five years should therefore consider investing in addressing the participation barriers, not only participation activity. This means supporting the conditions that enable people to take part meaningfully: local hosts, community connectors, access support, transport, childcare, equipment, rehearsal space, bursaries, translation, accessible meetings, training, paid time and long-term relationships.

There is also a need to retain ambition. Participation should not be understood only as small-scale local activity. Bradford should continue to develop distinctive, high-quality cultural experiences that are rooted in communities and visible across the District. This could include large-scale participatory events, touring and mobile cultural projects or co-produced youth festivals.

The key question for the refreshed *Culture is Our Plan* is what participation should look like by 2031. The answer should not be measured only by attendance. It should also ask who leads, who is paid, who decides, where activity takes place, whether barriers are reducing, and whether residents feel greater ownership of cultural life in their own place.

The recommended direction is that Bradford protects and invests in the models that build cultural agency: hyper-local delivery, community commissioning, sector sub-networks, youth leadership, accessible cultural spaces, volunteering pathways, local connectors and paid

coordination. This would help sustain engagement beyond Bradford 2025 and ensure that participation becomes a route to long-term cultural change.

Section 6. Cultural workforce, skills and talent retention

Workforce development was identified as a core cultural need in the 2020 JCNA and became an even more urgent issue during the development of the Bradford 2025 bid. The City of Culture workforce research²³ identified a gap between Bradford's cultural ambition and the skills, capacity and infrastructure needed to deliver a successful year at scale. It also highlighted a longstanding risk: without enough paid opportunities, progression routes and creative infrastructure, Bradford loses talent to other places.

Bradford Producing Hub, Bradford 2025, and wider sector partners have made significant progress in addressing this gap. The District now has a more visible and confident creative workforce, stronger producing capacity, more paid opportunities, better networks and a clearer understanding of what local creatives need. However, this progress is fragile. As City of Culture opportunities reduce, the next challenge is not only to develop talent, but to retain it.

The Bradford 2025 Creative Sector Workforce Survey provides a useful picture of today's creative workforce. In 2025:

- 32% of survey respondents described themselves as Asian/Asian British, Black/Black British or 'Other' ethnicity, compared with 24% in 2024.
- 35% of respondents had undertaken informal or on-the-job training in the previous two years,
- 26% had undertaken a specialist short course, and 21% had undertaken no creative training or development.

Creative sector perceptions of Bradford 2025 were largely positive:

- 64% agreed that Bradford 2025 made them feel proud of their local area,
- 60% agreed it helped them feel connected to people in the community, and
- 62% agreed it improved their perception of Bradford as a place to work or do business.

This suggests that Bradford 2025 has helped to shift confidence and perception within the sector itself. It has not only created activity; it has changed how some creatives feel about

²³ Bradford Creative and Cultural Industries Workforce Study, November 2020 / Research Team: Anna Franks, Dr Madeleine Irwin, Susan Ingham

Bradford as a place to work. That is a major asset for the next phase. The risk is that, without continuing opportunities, this confidence dissipates and skilled people move elsewhere.

The needs identified in 2020 remain visible. Artists and creative workers still report fragile income, sporadic work, lack of regular funding, limited rehearsal and making space, weak progression routes, and a need for greater visibility and self-expression. Younger creatives still need clearer routes from cultural interest into creative careers. Many people still do not know how to connect something they enjoy creatively with a viable career. There also remains a risk that power and opportunity become concentrated around larger organisations and existing decision-makers as the sector returns to “business as usual”.

Bradford’s creative workforce includes artists, producers, technicians, community practitioners, youth workers, curators, creative technologists, heritage workers, cultural educators, volunteers, evaluators and cultural leaders. It also includes the freelance and grassroots workforce that often sits between organisations and communities, carrying much of the relational labour that makes participation possible. This workforce is one of Bradford’s most important cultural assets, but it is also one of the least secure.

Bradford Producing Hub has become central to supporting this workforce. 2025 evidence from Bradford Producing Hub shows that 80% of creatives and freelancers benefiting from BPH support are from groups affected by systemic discrimination, with more than 30 early-career creatives progressing into paid roles annually.

Its 2024–25 participant profile included strong representation of disabled, neurodivergent, LGBTQIA+, female, global majority and working-class creatives. Through mentoring, micro-commissions, training, fundraising support, networking, wellbeing programmes and leadership development, BPH has helped artists move from isolated practice into stronger networks and more sustainable opportunities.

At the same time, the evidence shows continuing barriers: lack of affordable studios and rehearsal space, limited venue accessibility, insufficient funding, fragmented networks, difficulty reaching audiences beyond Bradford, need for bid-writing guidance, career support, fair pay, long-term commissions and safer, more accessible spaces. These barriers mirror the West Yorkshire creative industries agenda, which identifies workspace, business support, access to finance, digital skills, networks and innovation capacity as key constraints on creative growth.

The opportunity now is to position Bradford as a place where creative talent can stay, develop and thrive. This means treating workforce development as a critical cultural infrastructure, not as a short-term programme add-on. Bradford should build on the producing, coordination and leadership capacity developed through Bradford 2025 and avoid losing skilled people just as the District needs them most.

A practical next step is to retain and extend models that have worked. The “Instigator” approach, developed through Bradford Producing Hub, offers one route. These roles should be properly resourced, connected to wider governance, and used to retain the producing and coordination skills developed through Bradford 2025.

The Bradford 2025 interim evaluation’s recommendation for further workforce analysis is therefore important. A deeper dive into the diversity and experience of creatives involved in Bradford 2025, further analysis of skills and talent development programmes, and a new Creative Sector Workforce Survey in 2026 should help identify what has changed and what support is still needed. This evidence should not sit separately from strategy. It should directly inform the refresh of *Culture is Our Plan*, future investment propositions, and any district-wide cultural workforce plan.

The recommended direction is that Bradford develops a cultural workforce and talent retention plan for 2026–2031. This should focus on fair pay, paid progression routes, mentoring, producer development, access to space, bid-writing support, business skills, creative technology, leadership pathways, and retention of post-2025 talent. The aim should be clear: Bradford should not only be a place where creative talent is discovered during major cultural moments, but a place where that talent can build sustainable careers.

Section 7. Young people, cultural learning and creative careers

Bradford’s young population is central to its cultural future. The District’s demographic profile is repeatedly identified as a major strength, and Bradford 2025’s success was strongly associated with the energy, creativity and commitment of children and young people. The Children and Young People’s Strategy²⁴ recognises that young people helped drive the City of Culture bid and should continue to shape its legacy.

Since the last JCNA, significant work has taken place across formal and informal education, cultural learning and creative careers. Bradford 2025 engaged more than 160 schools and education settings through specially created projects and organised trips. Its Cultural Learning Team worked not only with mainstream schools, but also with home educators and wider learning networks, helping to broaden access across geography and learning contexts. More than 5,500 people also benefited from training, artist development, mentoring and paid work placements through BPH support and activity.

Other programmes have strengthened this pathway. SENDIVERSE demonstrated how accessibility-first, family-informed cultural programming can support disabled and neurodivergent children and young people. Bradford 2025’s Creative Careers Festival

²⁴ <https://www.bradford.gov.uk/children-young-people-and-families/reports-policies-projects-and-strategies/bradford-district-children-and-young-peoples-strategy-summary/>

connected young people with national industry professionals and employers. Bradford Digital Creatives, Bradford Made and Local Stories for Learners have helped connect local identity, digital skills and creative learning. Bradford College's £600,000 refurbishment of creative arts facilities has strengthened vocational provision, and the planned BRIT School North offers a major opportunity to expand specialist creative education in the city centre from 2028.

Universities and higher education partners also have a role. The University of Bradford, University of Leeds Cultural Institute and wider West Yorkshire higher education networks can support research, evaluation, placements, peer learning, graduate retention, enterprise, digital innovation and access to specialist facilities. Bradford 2025 has already shown how university partnerships can support early-career development through volunteering, curatorial activity, placements and peer learning. This positions Bradford as a regional cultural learning hub, not only a local delivery area.

Some cultural leaders have noted an opportunity to advocate and lobby for a shift in educational focus from Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) to Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics (STEAM). Bradford 2025 has significant data about the impact that creative learning and arts education can play in building aspirations and creative career interest. Education is structurally constrained by curriculum and national policy but a focus in this area could provide Bradford with the opportunity to showcase how a strategic joined up approach locally can develop critical thinking, creativity, and entrepreneurship.

The Bradford Cultural Education Partnership refresh which is taking place May / June 2026 is therefore timely and important. BCEP's visioning work has identified the need to listen and respond to youth voice, overcome practical barriers, strengthen collaboration, advocate for cultural learning, clarify structure and create better communication between educators, cultural organisations and young people. This work should be welcomed and more closely connected to the wider education sector, youth organisations, home educators, SEND networks, colleges, universities, SkillsHouse, Bradford Producing Hub and cultural partners.

The evidence shows that young people still face significant barriers to creative participation and progression. The Cultural Voice Forum youth sub-network findings are clear: young and emerging creatives value Bradford's authenticity, diversity and energy, but identify barriers around paid opportunities, inconsistent work, affordable creative space, transport, money, confidence, class, age, jargon and tokenism. Every respondent reported feeling at some point that they did not belong in a creative space, and all said they would use a dedicated space for young creatives.

The youth sub-network's recommendations are deliberately bold. Young people are asking for youth-run creative spaces, fair pay, visible pathways into creative careers, practical freelance skills, transport support, cultural governance roles, and investment in everyday Bradford

culture. They are not asking only for more events; they are asking for infrastructure, power and opportunity.

The next phase should therefore connect BCEP's strategic work with the direct voice of young people. Bradford needs a clearer pathway from cultural participation to creative confidence, skills, leadership and paid work. This should include schools, home education, SEND settings, youth clubs, libraries, colleges, apprenticeships, traineeships, volunteering, paid placements, mentoring, freelance support and early-career networks.

The ambition should be to move from 'City of Culture' to 'City of Creators'. Success should not be measured only by how many young people attend cultural events, but by how many can gain confidence, develop skills, access paid opportunities, shape decisions and build creative lives in Bradford.

Section 8. Cultural infrastructure, venues and space

Bradford's cultural infrastructure has changed significantly since the 2020 JCNA.

- Bradford Live has reopened as a major city-centre entertainment venue;
- Loading Bay has demonstrated the value of a flexible mid-scale performance, gallery and community space;
- Bradford Arts Centre has expanded performance, rehearsal, dance and participation capacity;
- the Peace Museum's relocation to Salts Mill has transformed its visibility;
- and Keighley Creative is developing new purpose-built visual arts space.

Alongside this, the National Science and Media Museum's *Sound and Vision* project, Bradford Museums and Galleries' ACE portfolio status, and investment in venues such as Bradford Playhouse and The 1 in 12 Club all strengthen the District's cultural infrastructure.

Newer emerging models of community interest such as People's Property Portfolio²⁵ - a Community Benefit Society based in Bradford - are interesting ways that places and spaces are being brought back to life. They are creating a democratic community investment model of local people interested in regenerating heritage buildings to bring them back into use and create vital cultural and social spaces.

This progress matters. Cultural infrastructure is not only about buildings. It shapes what can be made, who can participate, what audiences can experience, what skills can be developed, and how Bradford presents itself as a cultural destination. The new and improved venues give Bradford a stronger platform than it had in 2020.

However, the underlying need has not been solved. The 2020 workforce research identified the fragmentation of assets, the spread-out nature of the District, lack of critical mass, limited

²⁵ <https://peoplespropertyportfolio.co.uk/>

physical visibility and the absence of recognisable creative hubs or clusters as major issues. Bradford Producing Hub's 2025 evidence also notes that, compared with other UK cities, Bradford still lacks some of the frameworks that support creative growth: producing venues, mid-scale spaces, a permanent city-centre art gallery, stronger higher education routes into the arts, and enough places for work to be made, tested and scaled.

Space remains one of the most significant constraints for artists, young people, small organisations and community groups. The needs differ, but the pattern is consistent: affordable studios, rehearsal rooms, meeting space, storage, technical facilities, exhibition space, maker space, co-working, youth space, accessible community venues and creative technology access. Dance artists need studio and rehearsal time. Young people want free or low-cost spaces with a sense of ownership. Digital artists need access to equipment and lab-style facilities. Makers need workshops, markets and shared resources. Community groups need trusted local spaces where cultural activity can happen without excessive bureaucracy or cost.

The next step is therefore not simply more buildings. Bradford needs a cultural spaces and assets plan. This should map what already exists across the District, what is underused, what is inaccessible, and what could be opened up through partnership. The aim should be to understand not only where space exists, but what prevents people from using it.

This should be directly connected to Bradford's regeneration agenda. The Heritage Action Plan identifies around 245,000sqm of redundant mill space with potential for homes, leisure, employment or community uses. *Built Different* identifies the regeneration pipeline as a main driver of growth. City Village, the new rail station, Southern Gateway, city centre regeneration, and potential heritage trails all create opportunities to embed culture into place development from the start.

The key recommendation is that culture should be planned into regeneration, not added afterwards as an afterthought. Cultural use, activating spaces, affordable workspace, public art, digital interpretation, community programming and creative enterprise should be considered at the design and planning stage of major schemes. This would help Bradford turn its cultural infrastructure gains into a more connected ecosystem: one that supports making as well as presentation, participation as well as audiences, and creative enterprise as well as building pride.

Section 9. Artform and practice-led investment priorities

Bradford's cultural ecosystem has widened and deepened significantly since the last JCNA. The Council's continued RFO grants programme, the use of UKSPF funding to support festivals

and events, Bradford Producing Hub's artist development role, and Bradford 2025's investment in commissions, paid work, skills and participation have all contributed to a more confident and visible sector.

Arts Council England's next National Portfolio round, expected to open towards the end of 2026 for the 2027–2030 portfolio, will also create an important moment for Bradford organisations and partnerships to consider how they position themselves for future investment. Project Grants and Developing Your Creative Practice remain relevant routes for individual artists and smaller organisations, although the sector continues to need support to navigate these systems.

The question for Bradford is therefore not whether more artforms deserve investment. The evidence suggests that many do. The stronger question is where the District can focus additional strategic attention over the next five years to build distinctiveness, resilience and opportunity. Drawing on the strategy review, the 121 interviews, Bradford Producing Hub evidence and recent Cultural Voice Forum sub-network findings, three areas emerge as particularly strong contenders for focused development: heritage, visual arts, and digital/immersive creative practice. These should not be treated as a hierarchy that displaces other artforms. Rather, they are areas where Bradford appears to have a combination of existing assets, strategic fit, public interest, national relevance and unrealised potential.

At the same time, the Cultural Voice Forum sub-network findings show that several artforms and communities need practical investment in networks, paid coordination, space, access, mentoring, funding advice, commissioning and visibility. Dance, South Asian music, Black-led arts, craft and making, women in digital arts, young creatives and access-focused practitioner networks all point to a similar underlying need: Bradford has cultural energy, but it needs stronger support structures to convert that energy into sustained practice and cultural careers. The Bradford Way and its emerging strategy could be the convening answer to support this.

9.1 Heritage: from asset base to stories

Heritage is emerging more strongly than in previous cultural planning as a major opportunity for Bradford. This is not simply because the District has significant heritage assets, although it clearly does. The stronger proposition is that heritage can become a relevant connecting point across communities: a way of supporting pride and belonging. It can create intergenerational connection- and also deployed as a tool in education, tourism, and community-based regeneration.

Bradford's Heritage Action Plan provides a strong basis for this. It recognises the breadth of the District's heritage alongside the importance of people's stories.

The opportunity now is to make heritage more visible and participatory.

- Bradford Made and Local Stories for Learners have already shown how local histories and underrepresented stories can be successfully translated into learning resources for children and young people.
- Bradford Family Album demonstrated how family photographs and oral histories combined with youth curation and community archives can build identity, skills and pride.
- The Peace Museum’s relocation to Salts Mill, Bradford Heritage Connection, Bradford Heritage Festival and the City Centre Heritage Action Zone²⁶ all add to this developing picture.

The need is for Bradford to move beyond a heritage offer that is primarily site-based or preservation-led – this is already a strong asset with a good reputation. There is an opportunity to move towards a heritage ecology that supports communities to tell, interpret and share their own histories.

Heritage should therefore be considered one of Bradford’s strongest future investment propositions. It connects naturally to the District’s wider agendas. It also offers a route for developing skills such as archiving, curation, and digital storytelling.

9.2 Visual arts: a sector with renewed visibility and unrealised potential

Visual arts is emerging as a strong contender for further strategic investment. Bradford has a significant base to build from, including Cartwright Hall, Bradford Museums and Galleries, Impressions Gallery, South Square, Keighley Creative, public art, artist-led practice, the Bradford School of Art legacy, and important South Asian and Black art collections. The Turner Prize at Cartwright Hall during Bradford 2025 has also raised the profile of visual arts in the District.

The opportunity now is to convert this visibility into a stronger year-round visual arts ecology. Bradford should consider how it supports exhibition-making, artist development, graduate retention, visual arts producing, collections access, youth curatorship and artist-led activity. The aim should be to make Bradford a place where visual art is not only visited, but made, discussed, commissioned and developed.

There is also a clear connection to regeneration and identity. Public realm schemes, empty shops, heritage buildings and cultural venues could all provide sites for exhibitions and public engagement. This does not need to rely only on large capital projects. A focused programme of visual arts commissions or civic and heritage-site residencies or a recurring visual arts festival could all help build momentum.

²⁶ <https://www.bradford.gov.uk/environment/heritage-action-zone/heritage-action-zone/>

The need is for coordination and continuity. Visual arts activity exists in Bradford, but it does not yet have the critical mass, visibility or infrastructure to match the District's ambition. Future investment should therefore focus on strengthening the conditions that allow visual artists to stay, develop and show work locally.

Visual arts should be considered a priority where it can contribute to Bradford's external profile, resident pride and artist retention.

9.3 Digital / immersive and screen-based creative practice: a growth opportunity within Bradford's Creative and Cultural Industries offer

Digital / immersive media and screen-based creative practice should be treated as a priority within Bradford's wider Creative and Cultural Industries offer. This is not a niche artform area. It connects directly to Bradford's existing strengths in film, media, digital enterprise and place-based innovation.

The opportunity is strong because Bradford already has credible foundations to build from. UNESCO City of Film status gives the District an internationally recognised screen identity. The National Science and Media Museum provides a major institutional anchor for media, image, screen and technology. Bradford also has a growing film and location offer, independent artists and producers, Bradford College and University of Bradford provision, and proximity to regional creative technology infrastructure such as HELIX Leeds, Production Park and CoSTAR Live Lab.

The strategic opportunity is to connect these assets more deliberately. Bradford's Digital Growth Plan²⁷ sets out important ambitions around connectivity and digital inclusion, but the cultural challenge is broader than infrastructure alone. The Bradford Data Review 2023²⁸ identified skills gaps around digital production and a lack of a clear and distinct identity for cultural production in the District. It also highlighted the potential role of arts organisations and artists in developing programmes that help address digital production gaps, including through spaces where entrepreneurs and young people can share ideas and exchange knowledge.

This aligns with Bradford's wider economic strategy²⁹. *"Evidence on 'Young Urban Residents' shows a growing concentration of highly mobile, qualified 25–34-year-olds in areas extending west from Bradford city centre, Saltaire and Keighley. These residents are often associated with start-up activity, digital and tech enterprise, social communications and business services."* Supporting this group to remain in Bradford, access networks, grow businesses and move from start-up to sustainable employment creation is therefore relevant to the District's

²⁷ <https://bradforddigital.co.uk/>

²⁸ <https://bdproducinghub.co.uk/resource/bradford-data-review/>

²⁹ <https://www.investinbradford.com/media/rc4oqvfl/economic-strategy.pdf>

future economic growth. Culture, peer networks, investors, housing, transport and underused heritage buildings are all identified as part of the conditions needed to support this growth.

There is also a longer-standing Creative and Digital Industries context to build from. The Bradford District Creative and Digital Industries Sector Development report identified more than a decade ago collaboration between creative organisations and smaller digital economy organisations needed to be reinvigorated and extended to include newer digital industries and larger businesses. This remains a live issue. Bradford has assets, but the ecology between artists, media organisations, digital businesses, educational institutions, venues and investors still needs stronger coordination.

Recent activity shows the potential. During the Bradford 2025–2026 period, the Bradford Film Office supported 103 days of film and TV shoots, while partnerships with Screen Yorkshire helped create specialist workshops and the FORGE Shorts programme for local filmmakers. National productions such as *Virdee* have also reinforced Bradford’s visibility as a screen location and source of contemporary stories.

There is also an emerging practitioner base. The Women in Digital Arts (CVF focus group)³⁰ evidence identifies strong appetite for a Bradford-specific digital arts network and highlights a gap between early-stage creative ideas and the next stage of professional development. Artists described having ambition and ideas, but lacking access to equipment, mentoring, producers, institutional relationships, workshops and routes into commissions or funding. This points to a practical access and infrastructure need, not a lack of talent.

Bradford’s advantage is that it does not need to copy the digital and immersive models of Leeds, Manchester or Wakefield. Its strongest proposition may be more distinctive: a community-facing, artist-led and socially engaged model of creative technology rooted in Bradford’s grassroots practice, creativity, and DIY experimentation.

The Digital Lab and Creative Technology Lending Library proposals pitched by the Women in Digital Network offer a realistic way forward. Rather than beginning with a major capital project, Bradford could start by mapping existing equipment, opening up access to underused institutional resources, supporting practical workshops, and testing demand through a low-cost lending library model. This could help artists and young creatives access cameras, audio kits, VR equipment, immersive tools, 3D printers and other creative technologies that are often available somewhere in the system but difficult to reach.

The case for investment also links to skills and inclusion. In a young district with recognised digital skills gaps, this is an area where cultural development and economic development can align.

³⁰ Women in Digital Arts Subnetwork - research papers: A Bradford Community Digital Lab - a proposed model, and recommended next steps / BRADFORD CREATIVE TECHNOLOGY LENDING LIBRARY Proposal for a Community Equipment Access Network / UK DIGITAL LABS LANDSCAPE & Proposal for a Bradford Community Digital Lab - All authored by Helen Hill, Women in Digital Arts Lead — Bradford Cultural Voice Forum March 2026

The suggested focus is therefore practical coordination and access. Bradford should position immersive, digital and screen-based practice as a future-facing Creative and Cultural Industries priority. Initial support could focus on a digital arts network, equipment access, producer and mentor support, skills workshops, small commissions, links to regional labs, and stronger routes into screen and creative technology opportunities.

9.3 Other priority artform areas

The three priority investment contenders above should not obscure the wider Cultural Voice Forum sub-network evidence. In fact, the sub-network findings are one of the strongest pieces of evidence in this JCNA because they show the practical conditions needed for artforms and underrepresented practitioners to thrive.

Music and South Asian music

Music should be recognised more clearly as a priority area within Bradford's cultural development. The District has a rich music ecology, but it has not always been visible enough in district-wide cultural planning. Bradford 2025 created major music moments and participation opportunities, while Bradford Live, Loading Bay, The Beacon and local festivals have expanded the range of performance contexts. Bradford Producing Hub's emerging music strategy work and Music Instigator model suggest that music is now being taken more seriously as a sector development priority.

South Asian music needs specific attention within this wider music agenda. CVF focus group findings identify strong talent, heritage and community relevance, but also gaps in infrastructure, visibility, coordination and leadership. This matters because South Asian music is not only an artform; it is part of Bradford's cultural identity and could connect to festivals, venues, heritage, faith and community settings, youth pathways, tourism and international partnerships. The need is for a more coordinated music development ecology that can support talent, strengthen visibility and build routes into performance, production and commissioning.

Dance

The Dance Network evidence shows a small but committed sector with a need for both informal artist-led connection and more strategic development. Key needs include a Dance Instigator, relationships with producers, access to open studio or standby rehearsal space, and continuing network coordination. Bradford also has strengths in socially engaged dance practice, but freelance artists cannot be expected to coordinate sector development without resource. Dance should therefore be supported through paid coordination, space, mentoring and stronger links to venues and community programmes.

Black-led arts

The Black-led Arts sub-network demonstrates the importance of culturally specific spaces for connection and voice. The network has already brought Black artists together, supported discussion around collaboration, funding, self-promotion and performance, and built a mailing list of 84 people. Participants want this work to continue through performances, awards, trips, guest speakers, training and opportunities to share work.

Craft and making

Craft and making should be recognised as part of Bradford’s cultural identity and creative economy, particularly given the District’s textile, industrial and community making heritage. The evidence points to a need for stronger networks, markets, business development, shared resources and greater visibility for makers. A more coordinated makers’ network could support skills and enterprise development, while connecting contemporary craft to Bradford’s heritage and “Made in Bradford” identity.

Youth-led and access-focused networks

The findings from young creatives, neurodivergent practitioners and other access-focused groups show similar needs across different communities: clearer information, trusted spaces, paid opportunities, mentoring, access support, practical skills and routes into decision-making. These networks should not be treated as marginal or separate from the cultural strategy. They are part of the infrastructure needed to make Bradford’s cultural ecology more representative, accessible and future-facing.

Supporting wider artform development

Bradford does not need a large standalone strategy for every artform. It does need a light-touch but resourced framework that allows artform and identity-based networks to contribute actively to the District’s cultural offer. This could include a small annual sub-network fund, shared instigator or coordinator roles, access to rehearsal and meeting space, a common communications platform (committed investment into It’s On in Bradford?), small grants, mentoring and clearer routes into The Bradford Way, Bradford Producing Hub, Cultural Voice Forum, Bradford Arts Centre, Bradford Culture Company, the Council and regional partners.

Section 10. Creative health, wellbeing, civic pride and social impact

Culture is increasingly relevant to Bradford’s wider health, wellbeing and prevention agendas. This aligns with the Bradford District Strategy, the Council Plan, the Children and Young People’s Strategy³¹, the Anti-Poverty Strategy³² and the emerging West Yorkshire Creative

³¹ <https://www.bradford.gov.uk/children-young-people-and-families/reports-policies-projects-and-strategies/bradford-district-children-and-young-peoples-strategy/>

³² <https://www.bradford.gov.uk/your-council/policies/anti-poverty-strategy/>

Health Programme³³, all of which place greater emphasis on prevention, community resilience, mental health, social connection and reducing inequalities.

Bradford already has strong practice to build from. Bradford 2025's creative health and social prescribing work, The Leap's *Dying Matters*³⁴, SENDiVERSE, Common/Wealth's trauma-informed practice³⁵, Dance United Yorkshire's socially engaged work and Bradford Producing Hub's *Series of Care* all show how culture can support people in contexts where trust, care and lived experience matter. These programmes are significant because they reach beyond normal cultural participation. They work with communities and residents who may face barriers to both cultural activity and statutory services and use arts as a way to explore different topics.

The Bradford 2025 interim evaluation strengthens the case for this work.

- More than 80% of audiences agreed that Bradford 2025 events had a positive impact on their wellbeing
- more than 60% of residents agreed that UK City of Culture was improving the health and wellbeing of people living in Bradford.

Household survey findings also showed an increase in residents reporting high levels of happiness, from 71% in 2024 to 81% in 2025, alongside a reduction in those reporting high levels of anxiety, from 20% to 10%.

The evidence also points beyond individual wellbeing. More than 80% of audiences agreed that cultural events in 2025 events made them feel proud of their local area, and volunteer wellbeing scores were generally high. This matters because culture's value in Bradford is not only therapeutic or clinical. It can help people feel connected and more positive about the place they live.

Bradford 2025 also offers practical learning about access. Its creative health work with Bradford District and Craven Health and Care Partnership, Bradford District and Craven Mind, the VCS Alliance and Bradford Council supported more than 30 organisations and community projects. Tailored support, free tickets, free transport and community trips helped people attend who may otherwise have been excluded. This shows that access to cultural wellbeing activity often requires more than publicity; it requires trusted partners, practical support and in some instances accompanying people.

These are not marginal examples. They point to a wider shift in how culture can support public health, prevention and community resilience. Bradford's health and wellbeing context makes this particularly relevant. The Anti-Poverty Strategy identifies deep inequalities in life chances, health, poverty and deprivation. The Children and Young People's Strategy highlights the need

³³ <https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/news/new-programme-to-boost-health-and-back-the-nhs-through-creativity-in-west-yorkshire/>

³⁴ <https://www.the-leap.org.uk/programmes-1/dying-matters>

³⁵ <https://commonwealththeatre.co.uk/shows/publicinterest/>

for more mental health support, safe spaces, youth voice, recognition of identity and race, and opportunities for the arts. The Council Plan identifies libraries, museums, parks and cultural spaces as part of prevention, wellbeing and loneliness reduction.

The West Yorkshire Creative Health Programme³⁶ creates a regional opportunity to build this work further. Its hub-and-spoke model, involving universities, NHS partners, local authorities, cultural organisations and the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance, aims to develop creative health infrastructure across the region. Bradford should position itself strongly within this agenda because it has both need and practice: strong community organisations, diverse lived experience, creative health pilots, social prescribing activity and a cultural sector increasingly aware of care-centred approaches.

However, this agenda needs careful boundaries. Culture cannot be expected to ‘fix’ Bradford’s health inequalities or substitute underfunded health, care or youth services. The most effective creative health work is often small-scale, relational and long-term. It requires proper commissioning, training, safeguarding and, supervision. The aim should be to recognise culture as a valuable contributor to prevention and wellbeing,— not as a replacement for statutory provision.

Section 11. Visitor economy, tourism, international links and external reputation

Bradford 2025 significantly increased Bradford’s visibility and showed that culture can change how the District is experienced, visited and talked about. The year attracted national media attention, major cultural partnerships, broadcast exposure and audiences from outside the District.

The Bradford 2025 Interim Evaluation shows improved UK-wide awareness of Bradford, more positive perceptions of the District, and increased footfall and visitor activity in key locations. The task now is to convert that exceptional year of visibility into sustained visitor economy growth, stronger cultural tourism, deeper international relationships and a more confident external reputation.

Bradford has a strong set of destination assets. The issue is not a lack of culture, heritage, landscape, venues or stories. It is whether these assets are connected clearly enough for residents, visitors and investors to understand Bradford as a cultural destination now that the City of Culture spotlight has moved on.

³⁶ <https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/news/new-programme-to-boost-health-and-back-the-nhs-through-creativity-in-west-yorkshire/>

11.1 Visitor economy: converting footfall into local value

The Bradford 2025 Interim Evaluation provides early evidence that culture can drive visitor behaviour.

- Bradford city centre's pedestrianised area saw a 12.4% increase in footfall, representing more than four million additional visitors.
- The Bradford BID area saw footfall rise by 9.8%, while average dwell time increased by 39%, from 194 minutes in 2024 to 269 minutes in 2025. This matters because dwell time suggests people were not simply passing through; they were staying longer, creating greater potential benefit for hospitality, retail, cultural venues and the evening economy.

Venue and accommodation data strengthens the case.

- Bradford Museums and Galleries saw more than 188,000 visitors, with Cartwright Hall recording a 63% increase from 2024.
- Bradford Live welcomed more than 56,000 people between opening in May 2025 and the end of the year.
- Hotel occupancy from June to September was 5–8% higher than the same period in 2024, with revenue increasing by 10–15%.
- Airbnb activity linked to Bradford 2025 contributed an estimated £12.9 million in direct economic impact.

The next phase should focus on converting this one-year uplift into year-round value. This requires closer working between culture, hotels, hospitality, transport, retail, conference activity and visitor information. Bradford should continue tracking footfall, dwell time, audience origin, overnight stays, visitor spend and repeat visits so cultural investment can be linked more clearly to local economic benefit.

11.2 Tourism product development: making Bradford easier to experience

Bradford's tourism opportunity is not simply about attracting more people. It is about making the District easier to navigate and enjoy. At present, the visitor experience can feel dispersed. People need clearer answers to simple questions: what is on, where should I go, how do I get there, what can I combine in a day, where should I eat, and why should I return?

Bradford therefore needs a stronger cultural tourism product. This should include clear itineraries, trails and bookable or self-guided experiences built around the District's strongest stories, including heritage, textiles, Brontë Country, screen, food, festivals, South Asian culture and moorland.

Screen tourism should be a specific strand. Bradford's UNESCO City of Film status gives the District an established platform for connecting filming locations, screen heritage, and tourism.

Interest in West Yorkshire locations linked to screen productions, including *Wuthering Heights*, shows the visitor potential of film and television exposure. Bradford should now consider how to use its international City of Film status more actively within its wider tourism offer.

A renewed tourism approach also needs practical infrastructure: clearer visitor information, easy-to-use digital listings, stronger transport guidance, and better coordination between It's On In Bradford, Visit Bradford, Bradford BID, cultural venues, hotels and tourism partners.

11.3 International links: sustaining and growing Bradford's global relationships

Bradford's international cultural links did not begin with Bradford 2025. The District already has a globally connected cultural ecology, shaped by migrant communities, UNESCO City of Film status, international festivals, museums and galleries, faith and peace networks, arts organisations and artist-led exchange. Many Bradford artists and organisations already work internationally through touring, exhibitions, publishing, digital collaboration and programming.

Bradford 2025 accelerated this international dimension and made it more visible. It attracted major national and international cultural organisations to the District, and through work with for example the British Council connected Bradford's cultural sector with creatives and organisations in more than 30 countries across six continents. This should now be understood as part of a longer trajectory, not a one-off legacy benefit.

A light-touch international cultural links plan would help Bradford make better use of what already exists. This should map established international relationships, identify the new links created through Bradford 2025, and prioritise a small number of partnerships with future value for local artists, organisations, young people and communities.

11.4 External reputation and PR: sustaining narrative change

Bradford 2025 created an important shift in how Bradford was represented externally. National and regional media increasingly described the District as creative, diverse and culturally alive, challenging longer-standing narratives of post-industrial decline or disadvantage. BBC programming linked to the City of Culture year reached more than 22 million viewers across the UK, extending Bradford's visibility nationally.

This matters because reputation change is fragile. A successful year can open the door, but it will not permanently change the narrative without continued storytelling, programming and media engagement.

Bradford therefore needs a long-term cultural PR and reputation strategy. This should sit alongside tourism marketing but have a wider purpose: keeping Bradford visible, building confidence among partners and investors, and helping cultural organisations tell stronger stories about impact and ambition.

This cannot be carried by the Council alone. It needs coordinated storytelling from Bradford Culture Company, Visit Bradford, Bradford BID, The Bradford Way, Bradford Producing Hub, major venues, artists, museums, festivals, universities and community partners. The next task is to define Bradford's post-2025 story clearly enough that the District continues to be seen, visited and invested in.

Section 12. Access and Inclusion

Access and inclusion are central to Bradford's cultural future. The District is one of the youngest and most diverse local authority areas in the country, with major cultural strengths but also deep inequalities in health, education, income and opportunity. *Culture is Our Plan* sets a clear ambition that by 2031, 50% of Bradford District's cultural leadership should be drawn from people currently underrepresented in the cultural and creative industries. That target remains important, but the evidence suggests Bradford now needs to move beyond representation as an aspiration and make inclusion part of how culture is planned, funded, delivered and evaluated.

For residents, the main need is to reduce the practical and social barriers that prevent participation. Cost, transport, caring responsibilities, disability, neurodivergence, shift work, childcare, language, confidence, class and cultural relevance all affect whether people feel able to take part. Bradford 2025 showed that demand exists when activity is visible, local, and affordable. Free tickets, free transport, community trips, hyper-local programming and partnerships with community organisations helped reach people who may not otherwise have attended. The next phase should protect this learning by treating access as active support, not simply better marketing.

For artists and creative workers, inclusion means fairer access to opportunity. Evidence from Bradford Producing Hub and Cultural Voice Forum sub-networks shows recurring needs around fair pay, mentoring, small grants, bid-writing support, accessible rehearsal and studio space, equipment, producer relationships, networks and clearer routes into commissioning. The needs differ by artform and community, but the underlying issue is shared: Bradford has significant creative talent, but opportunity is not yet evenly distributed. Future investment should support underrepresented artists while also recognising barriers linked to class, income, geography, caring responsibilities, disability, and informal routes into practice.

For arts and cultural organisations, the need is support to improve access and inclusion consistently across the system. This includes inclusive recruitment, diverse boards and panels, accessible meetings, clear access information, physical and sensory access audits, access riders, fair pay, anti-racism, disability and neurodivergence awareness, trauma-informed practice and better data on who is and is not being reached. Many organisations want to improve but lack the staff time, expertise or resources to do this well.

National and regional support should be used where possible. Arts Council England’s **All In** scheme³⁷ is designed to help cultural organisations improve accessibility for D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people. The initial pilot launched in Leeds with Leeds Heritage Theatres, Leeds Museums and Galleries, Leeds Playhouse and Opera North. Bradford organisations should now consider how the wider rollout could support local access standards. Unlimited’s West Yorkshire Accessibility Programme³⁸ also provides a relevant regional model, with Bradford organisations among those receiving support. And of course, Bradford has Mind the Gap, one of England’s leading performance and live arts companies dedicated to learning-disabled and autistic artists with a wealth of experience in the access and inclusion field.

The recommendation is that Bradford develops a district-wide cultural access and inclusion commitment for 2026–2031. This should bring together practical access for residents, fairer opportunity for artists and shared improvement support for organisations. It should help Bradford move beyond inclusion as a principle and embed it into commissioning, venue use, workforce development, community engagement, leadership, evaluation and future investment.

Section 13. Sustainability and environment

Arts and culture have a role to play in supporting Bradford’s climate and sustainability ambitions. This is already reflected in the wider strategy landscape: Bradford’s Climate Action Plan³⁹, the Museums and Galleries Service Plan, West Yorkshire transport and skills strategies, Arts Council England’s investment principles (although potentially changing they will still probably include a reference to working in a sustainable way), and *Culture is Our Plan* all point towards environmental responsibility, sustainable growth and the role of culture in shaping public awareness and behaviour.

Many cultural organisations are already expected to respond to this agenda. Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations report on environmental responsibility, often using models and tools such as Julie’s Bicycle to monitor carbon impact, improve practice and inform organisational planning. Funders are also increasingly asking cultural organisations to evidence how projects will reduce environmental impact, use resources responsibly and support climate awareness.

Bradford has useful local learning to build from. The Bradford Way supported around 30 organisations to develop sustainability plans and provided grants to help 20 organisations take action linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. SAIL’s work with Bradford 2025 has also helped embed circular economy - an economic model designed to minimize waste and

³⁷ <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/developing-creativity-and-culture/diversity/all-in>

³⁸ <https://weareunlimited.org.uk/our-work/change-how-we-change-the-cultural-sector/accessibility-programme/>

³⁹ <https://www.bradford.gov.uk/environment/sustainability/climate-action-plan/>

continually reuse resources - and resource-sharing approaches within parts of the cultural sector. At a delivery level, Bradford Council has begun changing event practice through measures such as reducing single-use plastics, using electric power where possible in City Park, and exploring battery-operated power for future events.

Bradford 2025 provides a useful example of how more sustainable cultural delivery can be achieved when investment, planning capacity and operational support are in place. Its use of renewable energy, reduced reliance on diesel generators, hybrid battery systems at The Beacon, carbon literacy training and local procurement all demonstrate that lower-carbon cultural delivery is possible. The reported savings from The Beacon's hybrid battery system also show that environmental responsibility can reduce costs over time, as well as emissions.

The challenge is that many cultural organisations, especially smaller organisations and freelancers, are operating with limited capacity and fragile finances. While there is strong ambition across the sector to act responsibly, the shift to lower-carbon practice often requires upfront investment, technical knowledge, staff time and access to suitable infrastructure. Without support, sustainability risks becoming another unfunded expectation placed on already stretched organisations.

The refreshed *Culture is Our Plan* should therefore ask what practical role the Council, funders and strategic partners can play in enabling climate-responsible cultural practice. This could include small grants for sustainable equipment, shared access to greener event infrastructure, carbon literacy training, resource-sharing models, support for energy audits, advice on sustainable procurement, and clearer guidance for outdoor events and venue use. A cultural sustainability needs assessment would help identify where support is most needed and how learning from Bradford 2025, The Bradford Way and SAIL can be shared across the wider ecosystem.

Section 14 - Governance and leadership

The evidence points to a clear need for stronger cultural governance in Bradford. The District has many committed organisations, networks and partnerships, but the overall system remains fragmented. This is not a criticism of any one organisation. It reflects a cultural ecosystem that has grown quickly through the build-up to Bradford 2025, the delivery of City of Culture, and the development of new partnerships, programmes and networks.

Bradford now has several important pieces of cultural infrastructure: Bradford Council, Bradford Culture Company, The Bradford Way, Bradford Producing Hub, The Leap, Cultural Voice Forum, Bradford Cultural Education Partnership, major venues, museums, libraries, festivals, community organisations, health partners, education providers, universities and regional agencies. Each has a role, but the relationships between them are not always clear

enough for the next phase. If the ambitions of this JCNA are to be realised, Bradford needs a simpler and more visible governance model that can connect strategy, delivery, evidence, investment and community voice across all of these players.

This is particularly important because Bradford's next cultural phase will be delivered in a more constrained resource environment. The District cannot afford duplication, unclear leadership or fragmented advocacy. Stronger local governance would help partners align activity, share learning, coordinate funding bids, make better use of assets, support artists and communities, and present a clearer case for investment.

A refreshed cultural compact, partnership board or equivalent mechanism should therefore be considered. Its role would not be to replace existing networks, but to connect them. It should hold the shared outcomes framework emerging from this JCNA, convene partners around priorities, review evidence, develop investment propositions, connect local and regional opportunities, and report progress publicly. It should include community and youth voice, not only institutional leadership. It should also create clearer routes for larger organisations, grassroots groups, freelancers and sector networks to influence decision-making.

The partnership make want to look at examples/inspiration from Sunderland Culture, Greater Manchester's cultural partnership ecosystem, and other Arts Council England Cultural Compact models (e.g. Plymouth, Stoke-on-Trent, Wakefield, Swindon) to inform development of a Bradford approach. BoP Cultural Compact report from 2020 is a useful evaluation to consider and position a strong chair as vital to the success of Cultural Compacts⁴⁰

The political context reinforces this need. The change in Council leadership in 2026 means that cultural strategy must be robust enough to operate through political change. It should be owned as a District strategy, not only a Council strategy. The Council remains essential, particularly around assets, planning, regeneration, public health, libraries, museums, education and devolution. However, Bradford's cultural future cannot depend on one political leader, one department or one organisation.

Bradford also needs to connect its local cultural governance more effectively to wider regional and national opportunities. Devolution means that culture, creative industries and heritage are increasingly being discussed alongside transport, skills, housing, economic development and public service reform. West Yorkshire Combined Authority is already investing in creative skills, business support, workspace planning and cultural frameworks. One Creative North is positioning the North's creative sector around skills, connectivity, finance, R&D and collaboration. DCMS and national funders are also placing more emphasis on place-based creative industries growth.

⁴⁰ https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/201102_Compacts_Report%20_031220_0.pdf

Bradford must be able to feed into these agendas as a coherent cultural district, not as a set of disconnected projects. This means agreeing a small number of shared propositions that can be taken into West Yorkshire, One Creative North, Arts Council England, DCMS and other funding conversations. These might include projects around creative workspace, youth creative pathways, music, digital and immersive practice, creative health, Bradford's City of Film and screen offer, and district-wide cultural participation. Whatever the focus positioning the activity as a collective cross-sector activity could be very powerful and play into regional and national agendas and funding opportunities.

Existing partners already provide a strong basis for this potential 'cultural compact'. Bradford Producing Hub has led sector development and has relationships with Bradford Council, The Bradford Way, Cultural Voice Forum, West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership and national creative industries agendas. The Bradford Way brings together BPH, Bradford Council, The Leap and Cultural Voice Forum around skills, engagement and opportunity. Bradford Culture Company has a key role in shaping the post-2025 legacy. Cultural Voice Forum provides an independent route for sector and community voice. BCEP connects culture to children, young people, schools and education. Together, these networks could form the basis of a more coherent local governance and advocacy system.

The recommendation is that Bradford establishes a clearer cultural governance framework for 2026–2031. This should connect existing local networks, finalise and hold the JCNA outcomes, coordinate investment propositions, and create a shared route into West Yorkshire, One Creative North, DCMS and other devolved or national opportunities. Its purpose should be practical: to help Bradford speak with greater clarity, attract investment, avoid duplication, and ensure that cultural strategy remains rooted in community voice as well as institutional leadership.

Section 15. Key areas for consideration in the JCNA action plan

The refreshed *Culture is Our Plan* should retain its existing ambition, but the next phase will need a smaller number of focused priorities that can be translated into realistic action.

Drawing on all the evidence and approaching suggestions logically around successful delivery it is suggested that there are 3 'areas' for consideration:

1. invest in the cultural ecosystem first;
2. create governance and leadership to coordinate that investment;
3. then show how a stronger ecosystem contributes to participation, pride, health, young people, regeneration, visitor economy and climate.

Agreeing final place and cultural outcomes sits beyond the scope of this report and should be taken forward through the next stage of partnership planning. Once outcomes are agreed, partners will need to consider the resources, capacity and delivery mechanisms available. The key question will be: what activities, outputs and outcomes can realistically be afforded by the resources available?

Effective prioritisation will be essential. The evidence suggests that Bradford has many cultural opportunities, but not all can be pursued with equal intensity. The action plan should therefore focus on the conditions that enable culture to contribute to wider place priorities.

1. Investment in artists, cultural organisations and creative infrastructure

The first area for consideration should be the resilience of the people, organisations and spaces that make culture happen. Without sustained investment in artists, freelancers, producers, grassroots organisations, cultural educators, heritage workers, creative businesses, venues and community cultural infrastructure, the wider ambitions of the strategy will be difficult to deliver.

This includes fair pay, development support, mentoring, space, equipment, producing capacity, small grants, access to funding advice, leadership development and routes to sustainable work. It also includes support for emerging organisations and for mid-career creatives who have developed significant skills through Bradford 2025, Bradford Producing Hub and wider local practice, but may not fit neatly into “young talent” categories.

The Leap’s Creative Place Partner network offers a practical example of this kind of infrastructure in action: a hyperlocal place-based model that extends access to funding, skills, support and decision-making through trusted local partners in communities where cultural provision and support are sparse.

1. If Bradford cannot fund everything, which parts of the cultural offer are most essential to protect over the next five years?
2. Are we investing enough in the people who make culture happen, or mainly in the public-facing activity they produce?
3. What’s needed next to ensure Bradford becomes a place where artists and creative workers can build sustainable careers, not just deliver short-term projects?
4. How do we support emerging organisations and mid-career creatives who have grown through Bradford 2025 but may now fall between funding routes?

2. Clearer governance, leadership and shared delivery

A second priority is the governance structure needed to realise the ambitions of the JCNA. Bradford has a rich network of cultural partners, but the next phase requires clearer coordination.

The action plan could consider whether a refreshed cultural compact, partnership board or equivalent mechanism is needed to hold the JCNA outcomes, connect existing networks, coordinate investment propositions, review evidence and create a shared route into West Yorkshire, One Creative North, Arts Council England, DCMS and other opportunities.

- Who is responsible for driving the cultural vision for Bradford now that Bradford 2025 has moved from delivery year to legacy?
- Are Bradford's cultural networks connected enough to act as one voice when major opportunities arise?
- What decisions should be made collectively across the District, and what should remain locally or organisationally led?
- How does Bradford create a clear route into West Yorkshire, One Creative North, Arts Council England and DCMS without losing grassroots voice?

3. More equitable cultural participation and access

Once the ecosystem and governance conditions are in place, the action plan should consider how residents across the District are supported to access, shape and lead cultural activity close to where they live. This would require attention not only to attendance figures – but artistically excellent programming that encourages participation and asks, who leads, where activity takes place, and whether barriers such as cost, transport, disability, and caring responsibilities are being reduced.

- Who is still least likely to benefit from Bradford's cultural offer, and what would it take to change that?
- Are we designing access around the needs of residents, or expecting residents to adapt to existing cultural offers?
- How do we measure cultural participation in a way that values co-creation, volunteering, community leadership and everyday culture, not just attendance?

4. Clearer creative pathways for children and young people

The next phase should consider how Bradford builds a clearer pathway from cultural participation to creative confidence, skills, leadership and employment. This should include schools, home education, SEND provision, youth settings, libraries, colleges, apprenticeships, volunteering, paid placements and early-career networks.

This area links directly to B CEP, Bradford Made, Bradford College, BRIT School North, SkillsHouse, Bradford Producing Hub and the wider creative industries agenda.

- What would a young person in Bradford need to see, access and experience to believe a creative career is possible here?
- Are young people being invited to participate, or being given real power to shape cultural decisions?
- How do we connect schools, home education, youth settings, colleges, cultural organisations and employers into one visible pathway for young people?
- What paid entry points are needed so that creative careers do not remain available only to those who can afford unpaid experience?

5. Stronger pride, belonging and civic confidence

The action plan could consider how Bradford sustains the pride and confidence generated through 2025. This should include residents feeling more positive about where they live, communities seeing their own stories represented, and Bradford continuing to challenge negative external perceptions through culture, heritage, media, tourism and public events.

- How does Bradford sustain the pride generated by 2025 when the scale of cultural programming inevitably reduces?
- Whose stories are still missing or might 'quieten' now BD25 is over from Bradford's public cultural narrative?
- How can culture help residents feel more confident about Bradford without ignoring the real inequalities people experience?

6. Culture contributing to health and wellbeing

Creative health could become a more visible and practical part of Bradford's prevention, wellbeing and community resilience work. Further planning should consider how cultural organisations connect with social prescribing, mental health, loneliness, SEND, trauma-informed practice, end-of-life care and culturally relevant community work.

- What role should culture realistically play in prevention, wellbeing and social connection without becoming an unfunded substitute for health services?
- Which communities could benefit most from creative health approaches, and who already has the trust to reach them?
- What support do artists and cultural organisations need to work safely and ethically in delivery of artistic approaches to health and well being projects?

7. Culture-led regeneration and visitor economy growth

The refreshed strategy could consider how culture supports town and city centre renewal, footfall, dwell time, tourism, public realm, hospitality, evening economy, inward investment and place confidence. This should be measured in both economic and social terms.

This area should connect directly to *Built Different*, the West Yorkshire Destination Management Plan, Bradford 2025 legacy evidence, Bradford Live, Loading Bay, heritage assets, screen tourism and cultural destination development.

- Is culture being planned into regeneration from the start, or added afterwards as an animation?
- What are the cultural reasons for visitors to come back to Bradford every year after 2025?
- How do we ensure that visitor economy growth benefits local communities, artists, venues and independent businesses?
- What parts of Bradford's cultural identity are most distinctive enough to build a stronger destination offer around?

8. Environmental and social responsibility

A further area for consideration is how cultural delivery contributes to Bradford's climate agendas. This could include sustainable travel, reuse of buildings, local supply chains, lower-carbon event delivery, environmental programming, digital inclusion and community benefit.

Together, these areas provide a possible framework for the next stage of discussion. They should be tested with partners, communities, artists, funders and strategic agencies before being translated into delivery commitments and KPIs.

- How can Bradford support greener cultural practice without creating another unfunded burden for already stretched organisations?
- What learning from Bradford 2025, The Bradford Way and SAIL should become standard practice across the sector?
- Where could shared infrastructure, such as equipment, transport planning or energy support, help cultural organisations reduce environmental impact?
- How can culture help residents engage with climate responsibility in ways that feel practical, creative and locally relevant?

Section 16. Five-year recommendations

The recommendations below are deliberately focused. They are designed to be realistic in a context where funding and staff capacity are reduced, but where Bradford has significant cultural momentum and strategic opportunity.

Recommendation 1: Refresh *Culture is Our Plan* as a five-year delivery framework

Refocus the existing strategy for 2026–2031 around Bradford 2025 learning, reduced resources, devolution, creative industries growth and clearer delivery ownership.

Recommendation 2: Establish 2026–27 as the realistic post-City of Culture baseline

Use 2026–27 to understand what participation, partnerships, workforce capacity, volunteering, schools engagement, creative health and visitor activity can be sustained beyond 2025.

Recommendation 3: Create a cultural compact or equivalent partnership structure

Establish a shared mechanism to hold priorities, connect networks, coordinate evidence, develop investment propositions and represent Bradford coherently at local, regional and national levels.

Recommendation 4: Protect and invest in hyper-local cultural infrastructure

Treat Our Patch, The Beacon, Place Partners, community connectors and neighbourhood-led models as core cultural infrastructure, not short-term programme activity.

Recommendation 5: Re-centre artists, artforms and artistic quality

Ensure the refreshed strategy explicitly supports artists, producers, making, commissioning, rehearsal, experimentation, quality and ambition.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen cultural workforce development

Recognise Bradford Producing Hub and other sector networks such as The Bradford Way as workforce infrastructure, with paid coordination or “instigator” models supporting priority artforms and underrepresented practitioners.

Recommendation 7: Build a joined-up youth creative pathway

Support BCEP, Bradford Made, Bradford College, BRIT School North, SkillsHouse, BPH, libraries, schools, home educators and cultural partners to connect more strongly to create a clear route from participation to paid work.

Recommendation 8: Develop a district-wide cultural spaces and assets plan

Map cultural spaces and underused assets across the District, identifying gaps and opportunities for rehearsal, making, youth, community, digital, heritage and workspace use.

Recommendation 9: Focus artform investment where Bradford has distinctiveness and growth potential

Prioritise heritage, visual arts, digital/immersive practice and music, including South Asian music, while maintaining practical support for wider artform and community-led networks.

Recommendation 10: Develop a practical creative health and wellbeing approach

Build clearer referral routes, commissioning models, safeguarding, practitioner support and evaluation for creative health and wellbeing activity.

Recommendation 11: Strengthen cultural destination development

Encourage a joined-up approach to visitor economy, tourism product, international links and external PR, connecting areas such as venues, heritage, screen, public realm and transport.

Recommendation 12: Create a shared cultural outcomes dashboard

Track a small number of agreed indicators using Bradford 2025 evaluation, JCNA evidence, household surveys, audience data, workforce data, It's On In Bradford and community insight.

Section 17. Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Bradford now has a much stronger evidence base than it had at the time of the previous JCNA. The Bradford 2025 evaluation has used a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative, qualitative, creative and participatory methods. It includes household surveys, audience surveys, workforce research, organisational data, creative evaluation and community insight, delivered by a core team and a network of partners. This has created a much richer understanding of how culture contributes to participation, pride, wellbeing, place perception, skills, volunteering, visitor economy, sustainability and community connection.

This methodology and evidence should be treated as a vital part of the cultural infrastructure. Evaluation is not only a reporting requirement. It is a way of making better decisions, strengthening funding cases, identifying gaps, showing what works, and building public accountability. The next phase should therefore retain the learning architecture and build on the partnerships developed through Bradford 2025 as far as is realistic, rather than starting again with a new and disconnected framework.

The Bradford 2025 Story of Change provides a useful basis for this. It already links cultural activity to key outcomes. The refreshed *Culture is Our Plan* and any future JCNA action plan should consider how this framework can be adapted for the post-2025 context. Both cultural outputs and cultural outcomes should be linked to a monitoring and evaluation strategy with agreed measures, baselines and targets.

The question is not whether Bradford can maintain the same depth of evaluation as City of Culture. That is unlikely without equivalent resource. The question is which parts of the framework are most useful, affordable and proportionate to retain.

Ownership will be critical. A District JCNA action plan cannot sit with one organisation alone. It will need to be coordinated and owned by a strategic stakeholder, or partnership structure, with the authority, capacity and resources to oversee joint working across outcome areas. Without this ownership, the risk is that evidence is gathered but not used, or that partners measure activity separately without building a shared picture of progress.

The next phase should create a shared cultural outcomes dashboard, owned jointly by the relevant cultural partnership and the Council, and in collaboration with the University of Bradford (strategic partner for Bradford 2025's long-term evaluation). This dashboard should not be overcomplicated. It should track a manageable number of indicators across the agreed priorities. It should be clear enough to guide decisions, support funding bids and communicate progress publicly. This is important for trust. Communities and artists should be able to see what is being measured, what is changing, where investment is going, and how evidence is influencing decisions. Public reporting would also help Bradford show funders and regional partners that cultural investment is being planned, monitored and adapted responsibly.

The next phase should also create regular moments for shared sector learning. The Bradford Way conference in March 2026 provides a useful example of how the sector can be brought together to reflect, share practice and build collective momentum beyond Bradford 2025. Events of this kind should not be treated as one-off convenings. They can become part of the District's learning infrastructure, helping organisations, artists, community partners and strategic agencies understand what is working, where gaps remain, and how future action should be adapted. This kind of peer learning will be particularly important in a reduced-resource environment, where partners need to avoid duplication, share tools and make better use of collective knowledge.

Partnerships have been key to delivering the ambitious evaluation plans for Bradford's year of culture, ensuring University research has been integrated into activities. For example, researchers at the University of Bradford are contributing research into topics including:

- social cohesion and civic pride,
- the wellbeing of the creative sector,
- impacts on small and medium enterprises, as well as development of pioneering methods, including use of digital technology to assess crowd engagement for non-ticketed events,

The University of Leeds has provided Horizon funding for projects and research including impacts on:

- urban nature,

- community wellbeing,
- uncovering hidden histories,
- supporting the iconic Turner Prize in Bradford.

Furthermore, multi-partner projects such as SAIL (exploring sustainability), the Somali Village, and continuing work on Creative Health, are seeing the Universities of Bradford and Leeds collaborating on research and evaluation to support understanding and development, strengthening partnerships in the region. Where possible this multi-partnership approach should be sustained and invested in.

Evaluation should also remain participatory. Bradford's experience with community researchers (through a joint programme with City of Culture and the Universities of Bradford and Southampton, as well as programmes by The LEAP and the Health Determinants Research Collaboration) are showing the value of community involvement and ownership of evaluation. Emerging research around cultural vitality indicators being developed by the Centre for Cultural Value, hosted by the University of Leeds, and through its in collaboration with The Audience Agency, will be valuable. This framework redefines cultural vitality by assessing the everyday creativity, connectivity, and social networks of communities, rather than solely relying on traditional arts attendance and "high culture" metrics.

Finally, the plan should be adaptive. For example, appropriately tailored and jointly resourced data collection activities such as regular household surveys (undertaken in 2024, 2025 and 2026 by the Bradford 2025 evaluation team) and creative sector workforce surveys (undertaken jointly by the Bradford 2025 evaluation team and Bradford Producing Hub in 2024, 2025 and 2026) could be considered by Bradford partners for 2027 onwards. The refreshed strategy should include a commitment to review priorities at agreed intervals, particularly after the Bradford 2025 final evaluation is published. In a reduced-resource environment, Bradford will need to be willing to stop, reshape or scale back activity that does not deliver against agreed outcomes, and to invest more deeply in the approaches that demonstrate value. Evaluation should therefore be used not just to prove impact, but to support honest prioritisation and collective learning.

Section 18. Concluding position

Bradford has changed since the last JCNA. Culture is now more visible, more evidenced, more strategically connected and more confidently understood as part of the District's future. Bradford 2025 has accelerated this shift and given the District a stronger platform.

But the next phase is more difficult. The challenge is no longer to prove that culture matters. It is to decide how culture will be sustained, governed, resourced and embedded when the extraordinary conditions of 2025 have passed.

This ambition must also be understood in the context of increasing sector fragility and a potentially small window to regroup and set out the direction and activity moving forward from Bradford 2025.

Across the UK, cultural organisations are navigating rising operating costs, pressure on local authority budgets, reduced reserves, short-term project funding and intense competition for diminishing resources. Analysis from Equity and the Autonomy Institute⁴¹ found that local government arts funding across Britain fell by 55% between 2010 and 2024–25, with England seeing a 61% fall, while wider sector commentary has highlighted persistent regional inequalities in cultural funding and access.

The refreshed *Culture is Our Plan* should therefore be practical, selective and ambitious. It should protect the community-led methods that worked, invest in artists and cultural workers, create stronger youth pathways, connect culture to regeneration and health, make better use of spaces and heritage assets, improve destination development, and build an evidence system that supports learning and accountability.

Bradford's opportunity is to become a district where culture is not an event-year exception, but part of everyday civic infrastructure. That means culture should help people feel proud, connected, well, skilled, visible and able to shape the place they live. It should support artists and communities to make work of quality and ambition. It should help Bradford tell its own stories with confidence. And it should ensure that the legacy of 2025 is not remembered only as a successful year, but as the moment Bradford changed how it understood and invested in culture.

⁴¹ https://www.equity.org.uk/news/2026/cut-in-funding-by-british-councils-threatens-arts-access?utm_source=chatgpt.com

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Appendix 2 - Contributors and interviewees

- Dan Bates — Executive Director, Bradford Culture Company / Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture
- Shanaz Gulzar — Creative Director, Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture / Bradford Culture Company
- Kersten England — Chair, Bradford Culture Company / Bradford 2025, Former Chief Executive, City of Bradford MDC; Chair, Bradford Culture Company; Co-Director, Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership (YPIP)
- Zulfi Ahmed — Executive Director / Director, The Leap
- Lisa Mallaghan — formerly Executive Director & CEO, Bradford Producing Hub
- Helen Bewsher — Evaluation Director / Head of Evaluation, Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture
- Gail Smith — Evaluation Manager, Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture
- Mark Dobson — Independent cultural consultant/adviser

The Bradford Way Consortium

Bradford Producing Hub Team

All the arts organisation and independent artist who contributed to focus groups and shared reports.

Appendix 3: The Authors



Anna Franks, Lead Consultant

Anna Franks has over 20 years experience of research, marketing and communications. With ten years experience as Director of Research and Consultancy at Audiences Yorkshire Anna now works as a freelance consultant specialising in the arts and cultural sector. Recent clients have included: Creative People and Places project – Creative Scene as a research and audience development associate; Balbir Singh Dance (audience development strategy and digital development); Billingham International Folk Festival (evaluation), Dance Syndrome (Board facilitation on strategy and fundraising) and Leeds Arts University (lecturer in marketing and communications for emerging creative enterprises).

Anna also has significant knowledge of the landscape and agendas of Bradford having been commissioned to review and update the Cultural Strategy for the District in 2014. Anna has also worked with other Bradford based organisations in her career, including Impressions Gallery, Kala Sangam and Cartwright Hall Museum and Art Gallery.



Dr. Madeleine Irwin is an evaluator, researcher, and project manager with over 25 years' experience across education, health, culture, and community settings. She has led and delivered a wide range of national and local cultural initiatives, including coordinating the Royal Ballet and Opera's Cultural Champions programme in Bradford and managing the NLHF-funded *Bradford 2025 Local Stories for Learners* digital education resources for educators. Her evaluation portfolio includes work with organisations such as the British

Library, Bradford Museums & Galleries, 20 Stories High, Forced Entertainment, Artlink West Yorkshire, and Brick Box, covering co-creation, youth engagement, wellbeing, exhibitions, participatory arts, and cultural workforce research. She has held senior leadership roles including Founding Director of Orangebox Young People's Centre, Director of Creative Partnerships West Yorkshire, and Development Director at CapeUK, and she currently chairs the Boards of Guiseley Theatre and Leeds Studio. She holds a PhD in Applied Theatre and Young People's Spiritual Wellbeing, is a qualified Therapeutic Play Practitioner, and is currently progressing towards a Diploma in Play Therapy.



Susan Ingham specialises in research support and data analysis for cultural sector clients. Her twenty years' experience in the cultural and education sectors includes audience & stakeholder research projects at both regional and national levels, alongside the coordination of live theatre in education events across the UK. Past cultural sector research projects include working on behalf of clients such as Arts Council England (for A Night Less Ordinary); Bradford Theatres; Calderdale Cultural Destinations; Kala Sangam; Hull City of Culture 2017;

North East Children's Theatre Consortium; Sheffield Cultural Consortium (for Sheffield Cultural Destinations); Square Chapel Centre for The Arts; and Yorkshire Festival (Tour de Yorkshire). While working for Audiences Yorkshire, Susan led on the House Lights theatre benchmarking project, involving large-scale analysis and audience profiling of Yorkshire and Humber theatre audiences. She holds the MRS Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice and graduated from Lancaster University with an MA in English Literature and Women's Studies.