



**CULTURAL PLAN
+ 2026 REPORT**



**CITIZENS
FOR
CULTURE**



Welcome to Citizens for Culture.

This document is made up of two connected pieces of work. The first is the Citizens' Cultural Plan which is the work of 51 members of the West of England Citizens' Assembly. It sets out their shared vision and proposed actions for culture and creativity across the region, reflecting both local aspirations and shared regional priorities, in the citizens' own words.

The second is the Citizens for Culture Report. This explains how the Citizens' Assembly was designed and delivered, how citizens were selected, what evidence they considered, and how decisions were made. It is included to provide transparency, learning and accountability for anyone who wants to understand the process behind the Cultural Plan.

You can read the document in full, or dip into the sections most relevant to you. The contents page will help you navigate between the Cultural Plan and the Report, depending on whether you are interested in what citizens decided, how they reached those decisions, or both.

INTRODUCTION

Citizens' Cultural Plan and Citizens for Culture Report



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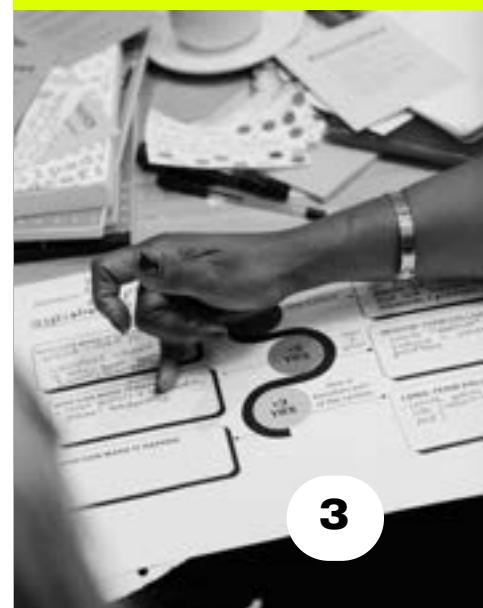
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**SCAN TO VISIT
THE WEBSITE:**
www.citizensforculture.info



3

“

***Quiet voices
will be heard -
listen harder***

Q: What else would you add?



1.

CULTURAL PLAN

1.1 Working Agreement between citizens



At the launch of the Assembly, citizens discussed guide rules for working together. They were presented with a set that were created by the lead facilitators as a starter place - 'Working Well Together 1'.

Members of the Assembly then had an opportunity to build on these with the things they also thought were important - 'Working Well Together 2'.

Working Well Together 2

Working Well Together 1

- Active Listening;
- Respect & Value each other's views;
- Curiosity & Honesty;
- Challenge respectfully;
- Good time keeping;
- Taking responsibility for ourselves;
- Be here;
- Allow space for everyone to speak;
- Support each other;
- Stepping up when needed;
- Recognise different ways of processing.

- Healthy clash opinions is good-openly air our perspectives;
- Ok to disagree;
- There are no silly questions;
- All voices are equal;
- We need to be aware of ageism;
- Quiet voices will be heard –listen harder;
- We don't all have the same sense of humour;
- Recognise different way of communicating;
- Wait for other to finish speaking;
- Speak from your own experience;
- Speak slowly;
- Avoid using colloquialisms;
- Allow space for silence;
- Be aware of the limited discussion time – air space.

1.2

Emerging Themes from the Citizens' Assembly

During the Citizens' Assembly, citizens raised many different ideas and insights. Over time, clear themes began to appear. These themes came from the questions that citizens asked speakers and commentators: both when listening to cultural workers and representatives from across the region and when questioning local authorities about their aspirations for culture.

Rather than being decided in advance, the themes grew naturally from what mattered most to citizens: who gets access to culture, how decisions are made, and whether culture genuinely works for local communities.

This section sets out the main themes that emerged, showing what citizens felt is working well and where change is needed.

1.2.1 | Themes Across the Four Unitary Authorities

Bath & North East Somerset

Citizens highlighted the tension between Bath's strong heritage offer and the needs of surrounding towns and communities. Key issues included:

- Geographic inequity in access to cultural opportunities;
- Heavy reliance on tourism revenue versus reinvestment for residents;
- Limited staffing capacity for delivering cultural strategy;
- A desire for clearer governance and follow-through on cultural plans.

Bristol

Themes centred on inclusion, representation and transparency in cultural decision-making. Citizens emphasised:

- Better engagement with youth (15–25), migrants, refugees and underserved communities;
- Transparent funding processes and clearer prioritisation;
- Strengthening networks and support for volunteers and freelancers;
- Ensuring cultural strategy reflects the city's diversity and voices at neighbourhood level.

North Somerset

Themes centred on fairness, local identity and structural capacity.

Citizens highlighted:

- Underinvestment in culture relative to surrounding areas;
- Geographic disparities across towns and coastal/rural areas;
- Small teams and limited resources constraining delivery;
- Community-focused culture that supports social cohesion, creative careers and youth development.

South Gloucestershire

Citizens focused on sustainable cultural provision across dispersed communities. Themes included:

- Intergenerational access and support for marginalised groups;
- Reliance on volunteers and challenges in sustaining cultural spaces;
- Need for clearer prioritisation and integrated planning across towns;
- Ensuring cultural activity delivers social and community benefit.

1.2.2 | Cross-Cutting Themes Across the Region

Across all four Unitary Authorities, citizens identified consistent priorities:

1

Equity of Access and Inclusion

2

Funding Transparency and Fairness

3

Capacity and Staffing Constraints

4

Strategic Planning and Governance

5

Balancing Community and Visitor Priorities

6

Culture as a Social and Economic Lever

7

Innovation and Independent Approaches

NEXT:

Breakdown and Summary



Equity of Access & Inclusion 1

A universal concern, though expressed differently: urban areas focused on demographic diversity; rural areas focused on geographic fairness and underserved communities.

Funding Transparency & Fairness

Citizens want to understand how decisions are made, how funds are distributed and whether investments offer equitable benefits..

Capacity & Staffing Constraints

Small teams and volunteer reliance are common across the region, creating barriers to delivering cultural ambition at scale.

2

3

4

Strategic Planning & Governance

Citizens called for clear leadership, accountable cultural strategies and stronger coordination across towns, sectors and institutions.

Balancing Community & Visitor Priorities

Particularly in heritage-led areas, citizens questioned whether cultural funding and programming primarily serve residents or tourists.

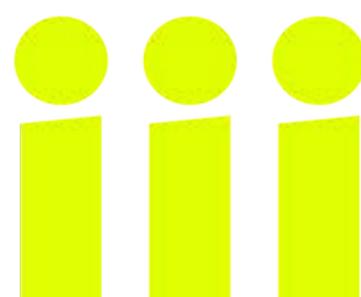
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6

Innovation & Independent Approaches

Citizens value flexible, place-based and independent cultural initiatives, especially where institutional capacity is limited.

7



Cross-Cutting Themes Across the Region

8

Summary

Although each Unitary Authority area faces unique conditions, citizens across the region share core concerns around fair access, transparent funding, sustainable capacity, strong governance, community relevance, and the broader social and economic role of culture. These cross-cutting themes form the foundation of the Assembly's final priorities and highlight the need for coordinated regional action.

Notes and reflections





1.3

A Citizens' Cultural Plan

1.3.1 Unitary Authority Vision Statements & Priorities

- 13 1.3.1.a Bath & North East Somerset Vision Statement and 6 priorities
- 15 1.3.1.b Bristol Vision Statement and 5 priorities
- 17 1.3.1.c North Somerset Vision Statement and 6 priorities
- 19 1.3.1.d South Glos Vision Statement and 6 priorities

1.3.2 Regional Action Plan

- 21 1.3.2.a West of England Vision Statement
- 22 1.3.2.b 13 blended priorities and short-, medium- and long-term actions for the region (linked to multiple pillars)

A Shared Approach to Culture

This Cultural Plan was created through collaboration. Citizens for Culture brought together people from across the West of England with the organisations, institutions and individuals who shape cultural life; referred to throughout this report as "Actors". This includes local authorities, funders, cultural organisations, artists, community groups and people who work in all kinds of roles across the creative and cultural sectors.

From the outset, the intention was clear: culture cannot be shaped by any one group alone. Citizens explored what matters most to them, while Actors shared their realities, including responsibilities, constraints and opportunities. This created a shared understanding of where change is needed and where collective action is possible.



1.3

A Citizens' Cultural Plan

The Citizens' Cultural Plan sets out a future where citizens and Actors work alongside one another to strengthen culture and creativity for everyone. It is both an invitation and a commitment: for citizens to remain involved, and for Actors to work collaboratively, transparently and with shared accountability to help turn this vision into action across the region.

What happens next?

Now that the Citizens' Cultural Plan has been shared, the work moves into its next phase. Citizens are keen to hear how different Actors respond to the priorities set out here, whether through reflection, conversation, commitment or action. This is an invitation to think together about how the Plan can be carried forward collaboratively, recognising the different roles, responsibilities and day-to-day realities that Actors are working with.

The West of England Cultural Compact (see below) offers an existing and trusted space to support this dialogue, bringing together local authorities, cultural organisations, funders and partners to reflect on the Plan, share learning, and help turn priorities into collective action across the region.

We hope that by May 2026 we can bring some of the responses and work together and share it on the Citizens for Culture website (see page 2) linking through to other sites and spaces through which regional Actors are responding to the Citizens' Cultural Plan.



SCAN TO VISIT WEST OF ENGLAND CULTURAL COMPACT

www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk

1.3.1 | *Unitary Authority Vision Statements & Priorities*

Place-based priorities

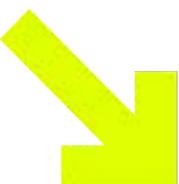
Before identifying region-wide priorities and actions, citizens worked in local authority groups to articulate the priorities and aspirations for culture that matter most in their local areas: Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire.

These place-based priorities are distinct from the regional plan. The regional plan sets out a shared a roadmap for action. Whereas the place-based priorities are presented to inform and influence local decision-making. They are intended to invite each local area to reflect on, and take into account, what citizens have identified as important when planning for culture and creativity.

This means that the place-based priorities are not a delivery plan like the wider regional plan. Instead, the place-based priorities offer insights into local values, needs and ambitions, helping local Actors understand what matters to people in their area and the potential direction of travel for future cultural development in those areas. Each priority brings together two pillars from the themes of Economy, Placemaking, Skills and Wellbeing. The regional plan with actions then follows in section 1.3.2

NEXT:

- Bath & North East Somerset •
- Bristol •
- North Somerset •
- South Gloucestershire •



1.3.1 | Unitary Authority Vision Statements & Priorities

Bath & North East Somerset

Vision Statement

Our vision: a region where culture brings people together and helps every community thrive.

We want culture in Bath and North East Somerset to be fair, visible, and for everyone. Empty buildings could become spaces for art and connection. Funding should be shared openly and reach every community. We want to see local partners working together, breaking down barriers, and making creative spaces affordable and accessible. Culture here should represent all of us, our stories, our voices and our future.

Priorities

1. Repurposing Unused Buildings as Cultural Hubs

We want to work with **Local Authorities, Landowners and Developers** to repurpose unused buildings into long-term cultural hubs. **Because** communities need safe, welcoming places to gather and create. **So that** people can connect locally through culture.

- **Primary Pillar:**
Placemaking
- **Secondary Pillar:**
Wellbeing

2. Protecting Heritage Through Creative Use

We want to work with **Local Authorities, Heritage Trusts and Creative Organisations** to bring heritage buildings into creative use. **Because** heritage buildings risk disuse and culture needs visible, accessible spaces. **So that** history and creativity can thrive together.

- **Primary Pillar:**
Placemaking
- **Secondary Pillar:**
Economy

3. Fair Investment for Under-Represented Voices

We want to work with **Funders**, **Local Authorities** and **Local Businesses** to rebalance investment and co-design funding that reflects diverse communities. **Because** smaller and under-represented groups feel excluded from current processes. **So that** cultural investment reflects real diversity and opportunity.

- **Primary Pillar:**
Economy
- **Secondary Pillar:**
Wellbeing

4. Inclusive Cultural Policy Making

We want to work with **Local Authorities** to involve residents, artists and community leaders in cultural strategy development. **Because** people want to contribute ideas and lived experiences. **So that** cultural decisions are informed, inclusive and supported by all.

- **Primary Pillar:**
Placemaking
- **Secondary Pillar:**
Wellbeing

5. Improving Creative Space Affordability

We want to work with **Local Authorities** and **Property Owners** to reduce the cost of creative spaces and increase access to public and private buildings. **Because** affordability limits cultural participation and creative development. **So that** creativity can flourish in more accessible places.

- **Primary Pillar:**
Economy
- **Secondary Pillar:**
Skills

6. Giving Citizens More Power in Cultural Decisions

We want to work with **Local Authorities**, **Cultural Boards** and **Voluntary Sector Partners** to create ongoing citizen engagement through multiple accessible formats, including forums, assemblies, community groups, and community representation roles such as **local cultural ambassadors** or **parish councils**. **Because** people want direct and meaningful influence over cultural decisions. **So that** cultural decision-making is shared between citizens and councils.

- **Primary:**
Placemaking
- **Secondary:**
Skills

1.3.1 | Unitary Authority Vision Statements & Priorities

Bristol

Vision Statement

Culture for everyone, shaped by us, shared by all.

We want a Bristol where everyone knows what's going on and feels invited. We believe in openness and transparency about how decisions are made and where the money goes. We want our parks, schools, and empty buildings to come alive with creativity, and for travel across the city to be easy and accessible so no one is left behind. We imagine a city where all the different voices in the community help to actively shape its cultural life and legacy.

Priorities

1. Inclusive Local Cultural Directory

We want to work with **Local Authorities**, **Artists**, and **Cultural Organisations** to co-produce an inclusive directory of local cultural groups, venues and activities, using multiple languages and accessible formats. **Because** people don't know what is happening locally and smaller or under-represented groups are missing out. **So that** everyone can easily find cultural opportunities and all groups have fair access to local audiences.

- **Primary:** Wellbeing
- **Secondary:** Placemaking

2. Transparency in Cultural Funding

We want to work with **Local Authorities**, **Mayoral Combined Authority** and **Funders** to publish accessible breakdowns of cultural funding decisions, incl. rejected applications, and include citizens in decision-making. **Because** funding currently feels inequitable and does not reach the communities that need it most. **So that** funding becomes trusted, accountable and driven by community priorities.

- **Primary:** Economy
- **Secondary:** Skills

3. Opening Up Public and Unused Spaces

We want to work with **Local Authorities** and **Mayoral Combined Authority** to support affordable access to parks, schools, libraries and unused buildings for cultural activities, with consultation and guidance on use. **Because** culture needs welcoming, affordable space and many communities lack usable venues. **So that** culture becomes a visible, everyday part of neighbourhood life, strengthening pride and belonging.

- **Primary:** Placemaking
- **Secondary:** Wellbeing

5. Improving Cultural Access Through Transport Support

We want to work with **Local Authorities** and **Transport Services** to support affordable, safe and sustainable transport options that help people reach cultural activities, especially evenings and underserved routes. **Because** transport prevents many communities from taking part in culture. **So that** cultural engagement becomes realistic and accessible for everyone across the city.

- **Primary:** Wellbeing
- **Secondary:** Placemaking

4. Local Citizen-Led Cultural Decision Making

We want to work with **Local Authorities**, **Mayoral Combined Authority** to establish local citizen-led cultural panels with rotating membership and influence over cultural decisions, **even where budget availability is limited**, so that they are not dismissed simply due to funding constraints. **Because** local cultural decisions should reflect community needs rather than top-down priorities. **So that** decision-making becomes transparent, accountable and shaped by local people.

- **Primary:** Economy
- **Secondary:** Placemaking

Notes and reflections

NEXT:

North Somerset • South Gloucestershire •

1.3.1 | *Unitary Authority Vision Statements & Priorities*

North Somerset

Vision Statement

We believe culture should be open, local, and for everyone to enjoy and shape.

We want to celebrate who we are and what we have; the natural and historical landmarks that shape our towns, villages and countryside making North Somerset a unique place to live and a great destination. We believe local people should be key decision-makers and influencers in how culture is funded and supported. We want stronger promotion of what's happening here. More hubs where artists and communities can connect. Supportive council systems that make it easier for us all to create. Our vision is a culture that starts with us, reflects us and belongs to us.

Priorities

1. Transparency in Cultural Funding and Outcomes

We want to work with **Local Authorities, Funders and the Mayoral Combined Authority** to publicly review and share how cultural funding is allocated, who benefits and why. **Because** transparency builds trust. **So that** cultural funding is fair, representative and understood by all.

- **Primary Pillar:**
Economy
- **Secondary Pillar:**
Wellbeing

2. Citizens Involved in Funding Decisions

We want to work with **Local Authorities, and Local Foundations** to involve citizens directly in how cultural funding is distributed. **Because** local people understand their areas best. **So that** resources meet real community needs.

- **Primary Pillar:**
Economy
- **Secondary Pillar:**
Skills

3. Celebrating Local Landmarks and Identity

We want to work with **Local Authorities, Cultural Organisations and Placemakers** to invest in and promote local landmarks that reflect community identity. **Because** pride in place builds belonging. **So that** communities feel recognised, safer and more connected.

- **Primary Pillar:**
Placemaking
- **Secondary Pillar:**
Economy

4. Reaching People Through Trusted Local Messengers

We want to work with **Local Authorities, Schools, GP Surgeries and Community Connectors** to share cultural information through trusted local messengers. **Because** people miss out due to lack of communication. **So that** everyone feels invited and included.

- **Primary Pillar:**
Wellbeing
- **Secondary Pillar:**
Placemaking

5. Fair and Balanced Cultural Funding

We want to work with **Local Authorities and Finance Teams** to allocate cultural funds transparently and equitably across wards, and **clearly show cultural spending to the public (including through bills or public reporting)**, while ensuring cultural access remains affordable for local residents. **Because** fairness and affordability matter to communities. **So that** cultural life is balanced, accessible and accountable across the district.

- **Primary:**
Economy
- **Secondary:**
Wellbeing

6. Creating a Central Cultural Hub for Organisers

We want to work with **Local Authorities, Creative Industries and Voluntary Alliances** to build a shared cultural hub for resources, training and promotion tools. **Because** organisers struggle to connect and collaborate. **So that** creativity and partnership grow across North Somerset.

- **Primary Pillar:**
Skills
- **Secondary Pillar:**
Economy

1.3.1 | Unitary Authority Vision Statements & Priorities

South Gloucestershire

Vision Statement

Together, we're building a South Gloucestershire where creativity connects every community.

We want a South Gloucestershire that listens and learns, a place where creativity belongs to all of us. We believe in asking people what they want and acting on it. Our schools, artists and communities should work together so everyone, whatever their needs, can join in, make and share. We want open, trusted systems and access to training and resources that let imagination grow close to home.

Priorities

1. Affordable Creative Spaces and Resources

We want to work with **Local Authorities**, **Cultural Networks** and **Local Employers** to make creative spaces, tools and resources affordable and easy to find. **Because** cost and access barriers prevent participation and stunt local creative growth. **So that** more residents engage in culture and creative careers thrive locally.

- **Primary Pillar:** Economy
- **Secondary Pillar:** Skills

2. Fair Access to Creative Education

We want to work with **Schools**, **Education Leaders** and **Cultural Partners** to expand and protect creative education including drama, art, music and sport. **Because** creativity is being squeezed out of learning and young people miss opportunities to develop. **So that** every child builds confidence, skills and lifelong engagement in culture.

- **Primary Pillar:** Skills
- **Secondary Pillar:** Wellbeing

3. Fair and Transparent Cultural Funding

We want to work with **Local Authorities** and **Funders** to publish clear funding criteria and decision rationales and provide feedback to applicants.

Because communities need transparency to trust how cultural money is spent. **So that** funding is fair, understood and supportive of long-term cultural development.

- **Primary Pillar:**
Economy
- **Secondary Pillar:**
Skills

4. Ongoing Community Voice in Decisions

We want to work with **Local Authorities** and **Cultural Boards** to create ongoing local consultation panels with rotating leadership. **Because** leadership stagnation blocks fairness and diverse representation. **So that** decisions remain responsive, inclusive and community-led.

- **Primary Pillar:**
Placemaking
- **Secondary Pillar:**
Wellbeing

5. Meeting Access and Support Needs

We want to work with **Local Authorities** **Venues** and **Organisations** to meet physical, sensory, communication and financial access needs across cultural spaces. **Because** disabled people still face barriers to taking part. **So that** everyone can create and experience culture equally and confidently.

- **Primary Pillar:**
Wellbeing
- **Secondary Pillar:**
Placemaking

6. Sharing Learning and Success Measures

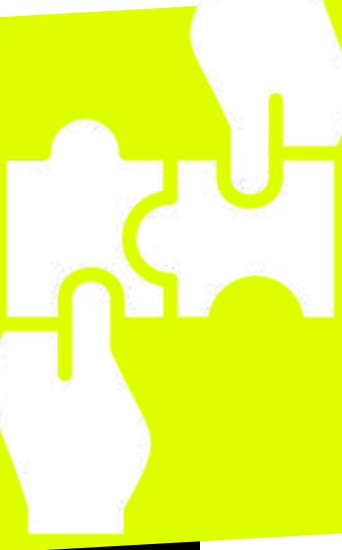
We want to work with **Cultural Organisations**, **Local Authorities** and **Funders** to share what works, what doesn't and what they have learned through evaluation. **Because** learning together strengthens cultural delivery. **So that** practice improves across wellbeing, inclusion and the local economy.

- **Primary Pillar:**
Skills
- **Secondary Pillar:**
Economy

1.3.2 | *Regional Action Plan*

West of England Vision Statement

A fairer, more creative West of England where culture belongs to everyone.



We want a West of England where culture is for everyone as part of everyday life, where everyone can take part, be heard and feel proud of where they live.

We want transparency about how money is spent and fairness in who gets support. People and communities should have a say in the decisions that shape local culture and see their identities, histories and experiences reflected.

Local people across our villages, towns and cities should be able to influence decisions and see their identities, histories and experiences reflected in culture.

We imagine our parks, schools and empty buildings being used for creativity that brings people together. We want it to be easy for everyone to join in, no matter their background, where they live or how much money they do or don't have.

We believe the best ideas come from working together; councils, artists, schools, volunteers and communities sharing power, learning from each other and openly reflecting on what works.

Our vision is simple: a fair, creative and connected region where culture brings people together, belongs to everyone and strengthens our communities.



Notes and reflections

13 blended priorities

Each with short- medium- and long-term actions for the region and linked to multiple pillars

These 13 priorities and their associated short-, medium-, and long-term actions represent the point citizens reached together by the end of the Citizens' Assembly. The priorities and actions are in the citizens own words and set out the practical steps the Assembly believes should now be taken to improve cultural life across the West of England.

Each of the priorities is associated with one of the four pillars from the region's Cultural Strategy published in 2022: Economy, Placemaking, Skills and Wellbeing. The plan also indicates other pillars relevant to each priority. There was a clear overlap of the strategy pillars across the priorities, showing a real need for collaboration and shared accountability for delivering the Cultural Plan.

The actions are not intended as a final or fixed blueprint; they are the beginning of a process. The next stage is for this work to be taken forward, tested, and developed by the Citizens for Culture Panel or 'oversight panel', who will carry these priorities into implementation and ensure they continue to evolve with communities across the region.

Priority 1

- **Primary Pillar:** Economy
- **Secondary Pillar:** Wellbeing

We want to work with Councils and Cultural Networks to create an easy-to-use local and regional directory showing what's on, where, and how to join in — including smaller venues and community groups. Because people don't know what's happening locally. So that everyone can find and enjoy cultural life where they live, in an inclusive and accessible way.

Short-term:

Install physical noticeboards; encourage standardised listing format; pilot digital "What's on" tool with a focus on underrepresented groups, ensuring non-digital access for residents with low digital confidence; meets accessibility standards and includes feedback mechanisms.

Medium-term:

Expand digital tool and its analytics and data tracking; collaborate with social media platforms; provide digital literacy support; ensure community co-design, ethical framework and evaluation; appoint Marketing & Communications lead/team.

Long-term:

Create a fully functional regional cultural directory with promotion and outreach strategy. Integrated across NHS, schools, social care, and transport systems; build permanent Cultural Ambassador network; maintain hybrid physical + digital system and use data to inform cultural policy.

Notes and reflections



Priority 2

- **Primary Pillar:** Placemaking
- **Secondary Pillar:** Economy

We want to work with Councils, Developers, and Land Trusts to open up parks, libraries, schools, heritage buildings, and unused spaces for cultural use, with fair access and local support. Because people need affordable, welcoming places to gather and create. So that culture becomes part of everyday community life.

Short-term:

Open public buildings beyond 6pm; pilot cultural events; identify suitable buildings with local authorities and allies; ensure staffing, safety, utilities coverage and maintenance; consider residents' concerns (noise, traffic) and wider community consultation. Consider accessibility for all (physical, sensory, language).

Medium-term:

Support cultural activity in underused spaces; combine multiple types of public spaces; clarify Creative Hub responsibilities; establish interim management and staffing plan. Include training or guidance for staff/volunteers on inclusion and community engagement.

Long-term:

Establish Creative Hub for long-term management; ensure sustainable staffing, payments, governance and funding models for long-term maintenance and accessibility. Focus hub on enabling public space usage rather than becoming a general-purpose cultural centre. Include mechanisms for ongoing community feedback and co-governance so the hub evolves with local needs.

Priority 3

- **Primary Pillar:** Economy
- **Secondary Pillar:** Wellbeing

We want to work with Local Authorities and Landowners to repurpose unused or heritage buildings as community cultural hubs. Because they can bring people together and prevent decay. So that everyone has access to creative spaces that celebrate culture and heritage.

Short-term:

Promote existing spaces which focus on reusing old building and bringing new life to these spaces. Negotiate temporary rental reductions; safeguard against landlord exploitation; consider residents' and community feedback.

Medium-term:

Establish an oversight committee whose role is to feed into the management of the space, including safety, utilities and bills, and oversee programme management. clarify ongoing cost of maintenance of the space; protect listed buildings. Track usage and impact ie visitor numbers, community engagement, to inform long-term planning.

Long-term:

Evaluate long-term use; formalise maintenance and governance using established methods for citizen-led decision making so management remains responsive to local needs. Ensure staffing, oversight, and funding for sustainability is considered, alongside identifying temporary vs permanent usage for potential longer term commitment to this scheme.



Priority 4

- **Primary Pillar:** Wellbeing
- **Secondary Pillar:** Placemaking

We want to work with Councils, Venues, and Organisations to make access needs clear and ensure spaces, events, and activities are open to everyone — physically, financially, and emotionally. Because too many people still feel excluded. So that culture truly belongs to everyone.

Short-term:

Identify access needs; Include co-design with lived-experience experts so solutions genuinely meet community needs. Consider the need to install ramps, quiet spaces and language accessibility. Balance specificity and breadth of access; ensure costs of staging events do not prevent activity.

Medium-term:

Train staff/volunteers; promote and invite communities via social media, regional What's On app and traditional community noticeboards for further reach; Use feedback from communities to inform outreach approach, implement ticket discounts; assess current regulations and existing accessibility measures. Work with the cultural sector to ensure accessibility is part of organisational culture, tracking outcomes and feedback to inform ongoing improvements.

Long-term:

Establish ongoing systems for engagement, discounts, and accessibility for underserved groups; ensure sustainable funding and monitoring. Formalise accessibility standards for all funded events and spaces to create consistency across the region and regularly review and report on performance and progress. Consider how digital and hybrid participation can increase access for those who can't travel.

Notes and reflections



Priority 5

- **Primary Pillar:** Wellbeing
- **Secondary Pillar:** Economy

We want to work with Councils and Mayoral Cultural Boards to set up small local cultural assemblies or citizen panels to help guide funding and decisions. Because local voices know best what their communities need. So that decisions are made with communities, not for them.

Short-term:

Establish citizens' panels, based on the principles of Citizens' Assemblies, for neighbourhoods involving a diverse mix of local voices. Include guidance or training for panel members on equity, inclusion, and unbiased decision-making. Pilot reporting on funding impact; clarify scope, funding, and level of government; address impartiality, bias and resourcing concerns.

Medium-term:

Encourage local business funding. Review panel outcomes for transparency. Ensure accountability for agreed actions. Add mechanisms for rotation to ensure accessibility and reflection of diverse interests.

Long-term:

Ensure integration with wider city/regional decision-making connected to cultural strategy and budgets. Seek funding from government and local councils. Form independent oversight/ombudsman; formalise rules, recruitment, impartiality; building trust through transparency; define juror skills and remit.

Priority 6

- **Primary Pillar:** Placemaking
- **Secondary Pillar:** Wellbeing

We want to work with Councils, Cultural Orgs, and Placemakers to celebrate local creativity, history, and landmarks through storytelling, festivals, and shared events. Because people want pride in place. So that communities feel recognised, safer, and more connected.

Short-term:

Collect data via research, citizen-informed surveys, and event listings; advertise What's On digital tool and more traditional promotion methods like neighbourhood noticeboards to expand reach. Use story-telling activities in existing community events to ensure data collection is representative of citizens. Celebrate diverse cultures and faiths; ensure budget and safety. Ensure minority voices are represented, including youth and older people.

Medium-term:

Develop community hubs; create culture charter; define KPIs; involve local policing for safety (for community reassurance); reach communities without online access. Consider partnerships (schools, libraries and local organisations) that link local artists to encourage story-telling way of celebrating local culture. Include evaluation and feedback mechanisms to understand which events or initiatives strengthen community pride and cohesion.

Long-term:

Form dedicated culture team; integrate storytelling into placemaking and annual festivals; leverage technology and media; include targeted outreach and inclusive cultural representation. Add mentorship opportunities for local creatives so the celebrations also build skills and capacity, using digital archiving to sustain cultural memory. Use of storytelling, outside of festivals etc as a wider tool for celebrating culture.

Priority 7

- **Primary Pillar:** Economy

- **Secondary Pillar:** Skills

We want to work with Councils and Cultural Networks to create shared creative resource hubs — bringing together space, funding, and information. Because collaboration needs shared infrastructure. So that creative activity becomes easier and more connected

Short-term:

Obtain council buy-in; make support and resources available; build skills and recruit volunteers; establish culture fund; ensure hubs share info and host events to get people more involved and more aware. Include basic evaluation/feedback to understand what works.

Medium-term:

Host events to fund building maintenance; develop skills programmes; expand info-sharing; provide digital access to shared online resources/training; clarify funding and fair salary distribution. Monitoring impact on local creative activity: who is participating, which skills are being built, and what barriers remain.

Long-term:

Build self-sustaining hubs; integrate a wider network of resources; ensure fair salary balance; hubs must be practical, impactful, and sustainable. Consider impact measurement strategy.

Notes and reflections

Priority 8

- **Primary Pillar:** Skills

- **Secondary Pillar:** Wellbeing

We want to work with Schools, Education Leaders, and Cultural Partners to embed creative learning into school life and link with local arts providers. Because creativity builds confidence and aspiration. So that every child grows up inspired by culture and sees creative careers as possible futures.

Short-term:

Sustain and evaluate existing programmes; map existing teaching methods; baseline approaches; expand knowledge of regional culture to inspire creativity in children; share learning and examples from other areas; define clear methods for engaging children with regional culture; provide funded workshops and performances by local creatives in schools in their area.

Medium-term:

Train teachers to embed cultural learning across subjects; providing support and resources so teachers have guidance and materials to sustain creative learning; link schools with arts providers in structured partnerships, shared projects, or co-delivered lessons; learning from local artists through storytelling and placemaking; cover maintained (e.g. local authority) and non-maintained schools (e.g. academies, free schools).

Long-term:

Develop and implement policy-supported curriculum; generate school-led funding through performances or alternative funding mechanisms; inspire creative problem-solving; Link pupils to future creative careers; Ongoing evaluation to ensure equity and access.

“

**people want to
create but can't find
affordable tools or venues**

”

Priority 9

- **Primary Pillar:** Economy
- **Secondary Pillar:** Wellbeing

We want to work with Local Authorities, Arts Council England, and Funders to make cultural funding open and fair — publishing who gets what, where, and why, and involving local people in decisions. Because people feel decisions are hidden and unfair. So that citizens can see where money goes and trust that funding reflects all communities.

Short-term:

Collect funding data (local and regional); Publish accessible reports in easy-to-understand formats (i.e. pie charts) online and in community spaces; communicate to citizens; ensure transparency and address inequities by highlighting gaps in funding and communities currently underserved.

Medium-term:

Develop consistent reporting framework; collect citizen/funder feedback; produce impact evaluations; allow citizens to remain involved and influence decisions through consultations, panels, and/or feedback loops.

Long-term:

Establish Oversight and Scrutiny Panel; embed diverse communities (underrepresented groups, different regions, income levels, age ranges); formalise processes; reduce bias; amplify artists' voices; systematically use data to address gaps and inequalities; periodic review and learning.

Priority 10

- **Primary Pillar:** Economy

- **Secondary Pillar:** Skills

We want to work with Councils and Cultural Networks to provide shared, affordable access to creative spaces, equipment, and resources for artists, communities, and small groups. Because people want to create but can't find affordable tools or venues. So that more people can make, collaborate, and grow creative businesses locally.

Short-term:

Identify properties for creative allocation by involving regeneration teams, regional authorities, landlords, and business networks, and make sure it is affordable. Clarify who decides priority for access, how inclusion is ensured, and whether some spaces are designated for specific groups or projects. Create clear mechanisms for community input on what spaces are needed most. Include basic evaluation to see who is using the spaces and whether short-term access is effective.

Medium-term:

Establish a mentoring framework for skills exchange that includes graduates, apprentices, and other experts. Offer digital and remote mentoring options for those who cannot access physical spaces. Ensure there are benefits that can be measured in meaningful ways, such as participation numbers, skill development, or follow-on projects. Avoid this becoming "a tick box process.

Long-term:

Create self-sustaining cultural spaces with equitable access, similar to the warm spaces scheme. Clarify how commercial businesses could engage, whether through sponsorship, partnerships, or renting spaces, while defining a clear balance between community access and commercial use. Ensure sustainability plans cover funding, staffing and maintenance. Ensure spaces do not exclude people who cannot attend in person. Build a framework for long-term sustainability that includes ongoing community feedback to adapt the spaces over time.

Priority 11

- **Primary Pillar:** Economy
- **Secondary Pillar:** Wellbeing

We want to work with Funders, Councils, and Local Businesses to work with smaller, underrepresented groups to make funding fairer. Because current systems benefit a few. So that all creatives have a fair chance to grow and sustain their work.

Short-term:

Collate existing data and provide audits to an independent evaluator, meaning the collected information is organised and shared for objective external review. Identify gaps, begin new funding relationships, and consider a mechanism for tracking initial outreach to ensure accountability.

Medium-term:

Approach potential investors and funders. Propose investment in underrepresented groups. Implement constant monitoring and re-evaluation to refine the process. Clarify what metrics are being used and how success will be measured through key performance indicators (KPI).

Long-term:

Annual reporting; reassess markers (KPIs); use data-driven policy; and include citizen engagement to improve fairness and accountability, clarifying what this engagement looks like. Ensure underrepresented groups are involved in setting KPIs and assessing impact. Include feedback loops so communities can influence future policy and emphasise transparency in reporting to adjust funding priorities.

Priority 12

- **Primary Pillar:** Wellbeing
- **Secondary Pillar:** Placemaking

We want to work with Councils, Funders, Businesses and Cultural Organisations to work together to develop creative solutions for more affordable and accessible transport options across the region for creativity and culture. Because people do not have equal access to creative opportunities. So that people are better connected with creative and cultural opportunities.

Short-term:	Medium-term:	Long-term:
<p>Pilot a subsidised one-price ticket covering transport and events by trialling it at selected venues, involving transport providers. Clearly communicate how people find out about the scheme and who is eligible. Define the logistics of the trial, including whether it applies across the Mayoral Combined Authority zone (such as a kids go free bus offer) or only buses serving participating venues. Include evaluation to understand how such a scheme works in practice.</p>	<p>Evaluate uptake and reach and identify underserved areas. Use postcode analysis, survey feedback. Pilot "Culture Bus Stops" at existing hubs. If Culture Bus Stops are explored, significant questions raised by citizens would need to be addressed, including where would you stop, how often will the bus run, how do people know about it, and therefore how many people will use the bus? Refine eligibility, create feedback loops so participants can report issues and improvements, ensure branding and communication are clear.</p>	<p>Establish permanent "Culture Bus Stops"; curate monthly programmes; ensure accessibility; offer flexible options such as relaxed buses; include a clear communication plan; and use a Citizens' Oversight Panel for evaluation. Some felt "Culture Bus Stops" could get more people involved while others asked for it to be removed asking key questions that would need to be addressed, such as where the buses would stop, how often they would run, how people would know about them, and therefore how many people would use them. Consider exploring related ideas such as a multi-pass that offers access to travel.</p>

Priority 13

- **Primary Pillar:** Wellbeing
- **Secondary Pillar:** Economy

We want to work with Councils to make consultation ongoing and leadership rotating. Because communities change and power should too. So that decisions stay fair and grounded in lived experience.

Short-term:

Set up a Citizens' Jury in Unitary Authority areas; create a Culture Rep / Facilitator. Ensure strong and clearly articulated independence from the Local Authority; and represent diverse lived experience by being clear about how diversity will be defined and recruited, including age, disability, socioeconomic background, ethnicity, and geography.

Medium-term:

Maintain regular consultation and decision-making cycles; establish a fixed admin team; evaluate jury diversity and impact and clarify how often this diversity and impact will be reviewed; rotate leadership to balance continuity and renewal and specify how rotation is decided, whether by election, appointment, or another process; and ensure the evaluation process reaches a widespread section of the population.

Long-term:

Formalise the Citizens' Jury role; integrate its outcomes into the cultural plan; provide wellbeing safeguards and protections to address risks such as bias, political interference, and lack of follow-up; and ensure the jury has meaningful influence and fixed-term rotation. Include ongoing training and support for jurors to ensure informed decision-making, and strengthen the sustainability of participation so it does not rely on ad-hoc enthusiasm. and outreach strategy. Integrated across NHS, schools, social care, and transport systems; build permanent Cultural Ambassador network; maintain hybrid physical + digital system and use data to inform cultural policy.

Notes and reflections

Notes and reflections



2. CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY REPORT

2.1 Introductions and Acknowledgments

What is this report?

This report shares the process of designing and delivering Citizens for Culture so that everyone can find out how the project was put together and how citizens created their Cultural Plan.



Who are the authors of this report?

This report on Citizens for Culture is created by three of the project partners:

LaToyah McAllister-Jones (middle) is Co-Lead Facilitator for Citizens for Culture, designing the Assembly's journey from the first session to the final citizens' Cultural Plan.

Emma Harvey (left) is CEO of Trinity Community Arts and a core delivery partner for Citizens for Culture, responsible for the administration of the Citizens' Assembly.

David Jubb (right) is Co-Director and Co-Founder of Citizens In Power, a UK-wide organisation which supports the design, development and delivery of citizen-led decision-making.

The Cultural Plan is written by 51 citizens from across the region.





Foreword

In 2021, the world was still reeling from COVID. Culture and creativity had played a vital role in keeping spirits up. Our connection to each other was driven by our creativity and we created all types of art to reflect our experiences, from people playing violins on the balconies of Italian apartments to performers walking around the streets in Bristol on stilts.

We saw how everyday people used their creativity to bring joy to others. We saw how people acted together to bring joy to their communities. Mostly without needing formal networks.

It was this citizen-led action which started us thinking. The voices we most need to hear are the ones that have been quietened the longest. But the communities that kept culture alive in their kitchens, parks, group chats and youth spaces were not necessarily the communities that would shape how culture was rebuilt. The people holding families, neighbourhoods, and creative lives together through a crisis which affected us all were not at the tables where decisions were being made.

We felt this deeply. And we knew something had to change.

We shared frustration, hope, and a belief that culture in the West of England could be braver, fairer, and more human. We were asking similar questions:

1. *What would it look like if our communities had more say in shaping the cultural future of this region?*

2. *What if we work with our communities and audiences so that they can see the diversity of their lives represented?*

Foreword (cont.)

These questions became our anchor. They pushed us to imagine a different way of rebuilding that recognised lived experience as a form of expertise and community voice as a form of power. We knew that “business as usual” would not return, not after everything people had survived, created, lost, and reimagined during those years.

This is how and why Citizens for Culture was born.

We had the idea of a Citizens’ Assembly because we believed that the cultural future of this region cannot be written behind closed doors. It must be shaped by the people who live here, in all their brilliance and complexity. By people whose stories are often overlooked. By communities who have carried the weight of exclusion, and those who have kept creativity alive without recognition or support.

The idea of a Citizens’ Assembly could bring residents from across the region together: different ages, backgrounds, identities and experiences, to learn, deliberate, imagine, and decide together. We believed that a Citizens’ Assembly could create a space where someone with no formal connection to the cultural sector could sit beside a seasoned practitioner, both treated with equal respect and influence.

At its heart, the process of a Citizens’ Assembly is about dignity. About trust. About the belief that culture is not something handed down from institutions, but something lived, shaped, and powered by communities.

This report tells the story of that belief in action. It captures what happens when people are invited to shape the cultural life of their region.

And it stands as a reminder of why we began this journey-because the cultural future of the West of England becomes richer, fairer, and more courageous when everyone has a say in its future.

What is Citizens for Culture?

Let's start with some definitions.

When we talk about **citizens** we mean people who live, work or stay in a place. In other words, everyone in the West of England.

When we talk about **creativity**, we mean the human process of making something new whether that's a poem, a piece of music, a painting, a game, or any kind of new idea.

When we talk about **culture**, we mean the outcome of that human creativity. Culture is what we make, share, experience and pass on. It includes art, heritage, stories, performances, design, television and film, crafts and all the things that help shape who we are and how we live together.

These definitions of creativity and culture are based on the same definitions that Arts Council England uses and felt like a good starting point for the Citizens' Assembly.

Citizens for Culture began because not everyone in the West of England gets the same chance to take part in, shape, or benefit from the creative and cultural life in our region.

Some people can't afford to join in, some can't get to where things happen, some don't see themselves represented, and some simply don't feel that culture is "for them."

Citizens for Culture was created to change this.

A Citizens' Assembly brought people together from across the region, selected by a civic lottery - which is a fair way of randomly choosing people so that the group reflects the wider community.

Citizens from across the region got to learn from one another, hear evidence, share experiences and decide what would help make culture and creativity more inclusive for everyone.

This group became the UK's first **Citizens' Assembly for Culture** to create a regional plan for culture and creativity.



**CITIZENS
FOR
CULTURE**

Acknowledgements

As will become clear, this is only the beginning of the Citizens for Culture journey. But there are many people to thank for enabling this work to date.

Firstly, thanks to everyone of the **51 members of the Citizens' Assembly**. Your time, honesty, curiosity, and commitment made this work possible, and your Cultural Plan will shape what happens next.

We would also like to thank **Helen Godwin, Mayor of the West of England** and the **Mayoral Combined Authority** for taking this exciting step towards deepening democracy in cultural decision-making across the region, and for showing leadership to the rest of the UK.

Sarah James, Head of Creative and Cultural Economy at the Combined Authority, deserves special thanks for championing Citizens for Culture over the last three years, along with **Susan Rigby** and **Gail Caig**, former and current Chairs of the region's Cultural Compact. Without their leadership, the Citizens' Assembly would not have secured support across the region.

Deep gratitude goes to the Leaders and Culture Teams of the four Unitary Authorities that are part of Citizens for Culture: **Bath & North East Somerset**, **Bristol, North Somerset**, and **South Gloucestershire**. Their support for the Citizens' Assembly and its outcomes has been invaluable and inspiring.

We are so grateful to the funders who made this pioneering work possible. The **Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation** supported the early research and development that shaped Citizens for Culture. **Arts Council England**, **Paul Hamlyn Foundation**, and the **West of England Mayoral Combined Authority** provided vital support for the delivery of the Assembly itself. **Esmée Fairbairn Foundation** has generously funded the post-Assembly phase, enabling the Citizens for Culture Panel to carry forward the work and support investment aligned with the citizens' recommendations.

Acknowledgements (cont.)

Thank you to the **Sortition Foundation**, who led the selection process and to **Rebekah McCabe and Involve**, who worked alongside LaToyah McAllister-Jones and the team as Co-Lead Facilitator, helping shape the design and delivery of the Citizens' Assembly. Thanks to all those who helped to make our assembly accessible and joyous, including **Speakers, Workshop Leaders, Snapshot Contributors, Community Connectors, Facilitators, online Producers, the Safeguarding and Wellbeing teams, the Oversight Group and Advisory Panel.**

Special thanks to our Citizens' Assembly Producer **Anjali Prashar-Savoie** and our team behind the scenes including **Purplefish** for their communications support, **Trinity**'s team for their care and commitment, and **Watershed** for brilliantly hosting the in-person sessions.

And finally, a huge thank you to the hundreds of organisations and practitioners across the creative and cultural sector, who have supported and developed this approach and who have offered to help carry forward the Assembly's outcomes

It takes all of us to create culture, so thank you for being part of this journey.

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2.1.1 | Process Overview and the “Actors” Framework

In 2021/22, we brought together a Steering Group made up of grassroots cultural organisations to explore the idea of a Citizens’ Assembly.

The Steering Group met people who had run or supported previous Citizens’ Assemblies, including Talking Birds who created one in Coventry as part of their City of Culture programme, Brett Hennig, the co-founder of the Sortition Foundation, and Sarah Allan, who was Director of Capacity Building and Standards with Involve at the time.

From this research and development, the group decided that citizens from across the region should shape the Citizens’ Assembly so that it was relevant to them. The foundations of this work were laid in 2023, when a group of around 45 citizens from across the region were selected by lottery and invited to help shape and design the Citizens’ Assembly.

This group of citizens determined that the Assembly should focus on inclusion. They also said it should have a federal structure which would include four smaller groups representing the Unitary Authority areas, Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. These would then feed into a larger regional Assembly.

The citizens said that the process of the Citizens’ Assembly should feel creative, welcoming and relevant and that they should have oversight of the implementation of the plan in the years following the Assembly. Their design principles, together with a record of these 2023 workshops, is available via the below QR code. And there is a breakdown of how the design of 2025 Citizens’ Assembly addressed these principles in Section 2.2.1 of this report on page 57.

SCAN TO VIEW DESIGN PRINCIPLES

bit.ly/cp-design-principles



Alongside this work, we began meeting with more and more freelancers and organisations working in and around the creative and cultural sectors. They helped to shape our “Actors Framework” (see below) and showed that there was strong support for a more democratic approach to decision-making.

In 2023 and 2024, we applied for funds to support Citizens for Culture and also began working with the Mayoral Combined Authority and the four Unitary Authorities, gaining their full support for Citizens for Culture. Gradually, we grew a larger support base for a citizen-led approach.

We also established an Oversight Group to safeguard the independence, fairness and accessibility of the process. We ran an open call for an Advisory Panel, which was then selected by the Oversight Group, to support the development of balanced and relevant evidence for the Assembly.

We also worked with Community Mobilisers across the region, whose role was to help reach residents who might not normally connect with this kind of process and encourage them to enter the lottery selection process.

In 2025, we developed and tested the core question for the Citizens’ Assembly. We ended up with a single, ambitious question: What would culture and creativity look like in the West of England if they were for everyone?

In June, we sent out 15,100 invitations to participate to households and via our Community Mobilisers. Over the summer, we worked with every single citizen who was selected to ensure each person had the support they needed to take part.

Before the Assembly began, we carried out an evidence gathering phase, working with partners, researchers and cultural organisations to develop ideas for evidence, speakers and content for the Assembly.

This included an open call across the region and the final selection was made by the Advisory Panel.

The actual Citizens' Assembly then ran from September to November 2025 across eight sessions, three in person and five online.

Meetings reflected the federal structure, with Unitary Authority groupings meeting to consider evidence from their areas and then coming together as a whole regional Assembly.

During the Assembly, citizens also raised topics they wanted to hear more about and further evidence submissions were curated including 20 “snapshots” from a wide range of practitioners, organisations and networks.

Citizens considered all this evidence, deliberated together in depth before creating their Cultural Plan.

Notes and reflections

"Actors" Framework

One of the key foundations for this Citizens' Assembly is the Actors Framework. This is necessary because no single organisation can deliver a Cultural Plan.

The "Actors" model for Citizens for Culture brings together a network of people, organisations, authorities and funders.

Simply put, it is a framework for those who have a role in delivering creativity and culture across the West of England. These Actors were asked to support the Citizens' Assembly in two ways.

Firstly, to provide input into the Assembly in the form of evidence and secondly, to support the delivery of the citizens' Cultural Plan.

There remains the opportunity for more Actors to come on board and support the second of these two asks.



Citizens for Culture is working with 6 kinds of Actor:

Associates

People and organisations working in the creative and cultural sectors.

Advocates

Funders and investors in the creative and cultural sectors.

Allies

Partners from related fields such as health, education and business

Activists

Community organisations and partners

Authorities

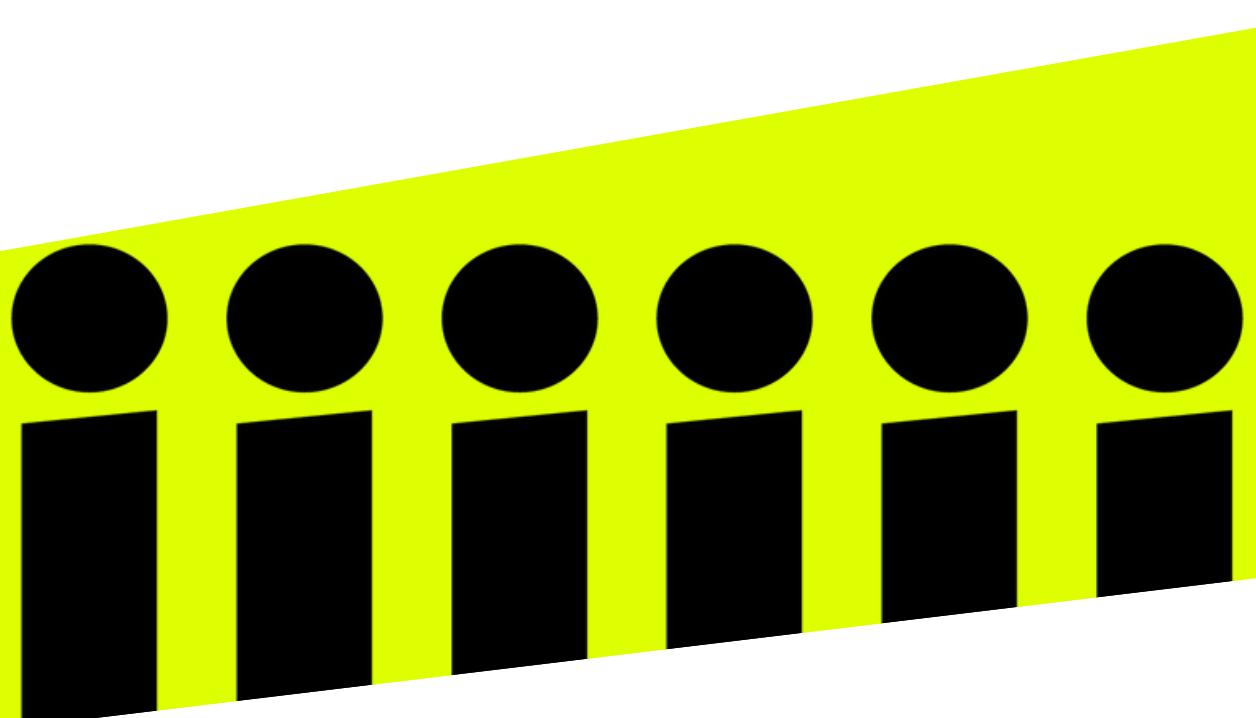
The Combined Authority and the four Unitary Authorities

Accessories

The people we worked with to deliver the Assembly

More than 100 organisations and practitioners have taken on one or more of these roles to date.

This collective approach ensures that the responsibility for the Cultural Plan does not sit with a single institution or body but with a whole regional network , creating shared ownership of both the process and its outcomes, and the conditions for the Plan to be delivered collaboratively.



2.1.1 | The Context in the West of England

Citizens for Culture is part of a wider regional programme in the West of England called Culture West led by the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority and delivered in partnership with the four Unitary Authorities, cultural organisations and practitioners and funded by Arts Council England. Culture West aims to widen access to creative opportunities, strengthen the cultural workforce and support a more resilient cultural ecosystem.

Citizens for Culture is taking place at a time of significant opportunity for creativity in the region. In 2025, the West of England secured a £25 million Creative Places Growth Fund award recognising the region as one of the UK's leading centres for creative industries. The fund is designed to support skills, infrastructure, business development and innovation across the sector from screen and music to digital media and design. It provides a rare chance to invest in culture at scale and to shape the region's cultural future with long-term ambition.

The regional context is also marked by pressure. Local authorities, including Bristol, are facing substantial budget constraints that place cultural services and investment at risk. North Somerset is exploring membership of the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority, signalling a shift towards more integrated regional collaboration. Citizens for Culture sits in the middle of these developments: formed in a period of financial challenge but also of renewed regional ambition and investment.

New devolution legislation is strengthening the role of Mayoral Combined Authorities, giving regions greater responsibility for shaping local priorities. However, culture is not explicitly included in these new powers, even though cultural provision is a key part of regional identity, wellbeing and economic development. This creates a moment where regions have more autonomy and must define for themselves what cultural investment should look like.

More recently, in the recent UK Budget, the Government confirmed new powers for Mayors and Combined Authorities to introduce an overnight visitor levy, allowing regions such as the West of England Combined Authority to raise dedicated income from hotel and short-stay accommodation. Crucially, these powers mean that Combined Authorities can determine how the revenue is reinvested locally, without needing separate approvals from central government.

Across Europe and internationally, visitor levies are commonly ringfenced for culture, events, and placemaking, recognising that cultural activity is a core driver of the visitor economy. For the West of England, this creates a significant opportunity to align future levy revenue with the ambitions emerging from the Citizens' Assembly, supporting inclusive cultural infrastructure, regional storytelling, and long-term investment in the creative life of the region.

Citizens for Culture offers a clear, citizen-mandated set of priorities at exactly the moment when regional powers are expanding and it is the first of its kind in the UK.



Design of the Citizens' Assembly

How the question was developed

The development of the Assembly question was shaped through an iterative design process, led by the Citizens For Culture Delivery team. Ideation meetings were held with a cross section of Actors.

The aim was to create a provocation that was ambitious, inclusive, and capable of guiding residents toward meaningful long-term thinking about culture in the region. From this process, the overarching question for Citizens for Culture was crafted:

What would culture and creativity look like in the West of England if they were for everyone?

Initial reflections:



2.2

Design of the Citizens' Assembly

What would culture and creativity look like in the West of England if they were for everyone?



Initial reflections (continued):

Design of the Citizens' Assembly

This question was intentionally designed to support three levels of cultural planning over time. This was described to Assembly members as follows:

Organising Your Actions

12 - 18 MONTHS

Investment

What it means:

Quick wins or things that need initial funding, resources, or simpler changes.

Goal: Make an early impact or lay groundwork for bigger changes.

12MS - 3 YEARS

Collaboration

What it means:

Work that requires different ACTORS to work together

Goal: Build partnerships & networks that create lasting improvements

3 YEARS +

Systems Change

What it means:

Big picture change to policy, systems or culture that takes time.

Goal: Transform the system so culture is fair, inclusive and embedded in everyday life.

Example:

Providing a small grant for local creative spaces or creating a cultural events directory.

Example:

Setting up citizens panels, co-producing transport solutions, linking schools with local artists

Example:

Transparency is funding systems, ongoing community-led consultation, repurposing buildings

In shaping the question, the design team also drew on learning from previous citizens' assemblies, including assemblies with the following core questions:

1. *What would a good democracy look like for the UK?*

2. *What does a renewed and restored natural environment look like?*

These examples helped ensure that the cultural question carried the same clarity, ambition, and capacity to inspire meaningful deliberation.

What was the problem the Citizens' Assembly was seeking to address?

The question for the Citizens' Assembly was deliberately open and ambitious. But behind this question sat a deeper problem that the Assembly was being asked to explore.

Eleonora Belfiore, Professor of Creative Economies at Coventry University was invited to help define this problem during the Citizens' Assembly.

Professor Belfiore challenged the assumption that people need to be "brought into" culture. Creativity, she argued, is already a universal human trait.

People create, share and participate in culture every day — in homes, communities, youth spaces, places of worship, online and in public life.

Culture is not scarce. The issue is not whether people are creative.

The problem lies instead in who has access to resources, recognition and decision-making power within publicly supported cultural systems. And who does not.

Professor Belfiore highlighted how public funding inevitably involves choices about what counts as culture, whose creativity is valued, and which activities are supported or sustained. These decisions are never neutral.

Over time, they have shaped a cultural infrastructure that consistently privileges certain artforms, institutions, places and social groups. As a result, participation in publicly funded culture remains uneven and closely linked to income, education, geography, disability and ethnicity.

While much cultural policy has focused on improving access, encouraging more people to attend existing cultural activities or feel welcome within institutions, the evidence presented to the Assembly suggested this does not go far enough. Without changing how decisions are made, inequalities are likely to be reproduced, even where intentions are inclusive.

The deeper issue identified for the Assembly was therefore one of agency and authority: who decides what is funded, who defines cultural value, and who is accountable for those decisions.

RIGHT NOW, CULTURE ISN'T FOR EVERYONE

Some people can't afford tickets, materials, or time off to take part



Not everyone can get to creative spaces or events, especially in rural or less connected areas



Some groups don't see their stories, identities, or histories reflected in local culture



Creative careers and funding often go to the same kinds of people or organisations





Professor Belfiore also challenged deficit-based language such as "hard to reach" arguing for a shift from access to agency, recognising people's inherent right to shape, define and lead culture.

For the Citizens' Assembly, this framing was important. It meant the task was not simply to imagine how more people could be included in existing cultural structures, but to consider whether those structures themselves need to change.

This understanding shaped how citizens approached the evidence, their deliberations and the Cultural Plan they developed, responding not only to participation and provision, but to the underlying systems of power, decision-making and accountability that shape culture across the West of England.

The Assembly was presented with a clear sense of the problem they were trying to solve, which facilitated deliberations.



SCAN TO VIEW FULL LIST OF EVIDENCE PRESENTED TO THE ASSEMBLY

bit.ly/cp-commentators-evidence

NOTES

Wider Public Engagement in the Citizens' Assembly

Alongside the Assembly question, a set of public campaign questions were developed to widen participation and feed community insight into the Assembly process.

The value of pairing a reflective question with an aspirational one emerged as the strongest approach. The following questions were identified as the foundation for the public campaign:

1. What cultural experience meant most to you, and why?

2. If you could create one cultural experience for your community, what would it be?

Questions were promoted via the online deliberative polling tool Pol.is with the intention of widening the conversation, with feedback presented to Assembly members as part of the evidence at the launch on 14th September.

This helped to ensure the Assembly was also grounded in lived experience as well as academic and expert input, opening space for imagination, and reflecting the cultural hopes and needs of people across the West of England.

NEXT:

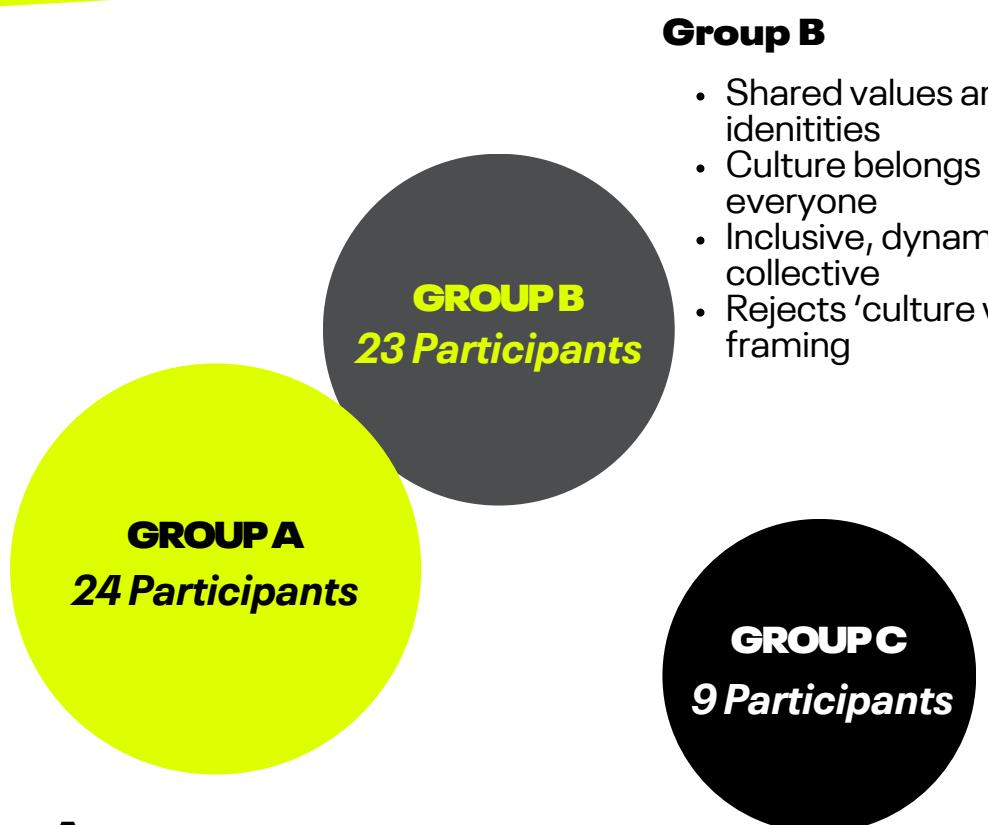
Pol.is Opinion Clusters:
What Does Culture
Mean To You?

Opinion clusters: What Does Culture mean to you?

This diagram visualises a Pol.is conversation on the question

“What does culture mean to you?”

Participants voted on statements submitted by the public. People who voted similarly are shown close together, forming three opinion groups (A, B, C). Circle size reflects how many participants were in each group.



Group A

- Everyday culture undervalued
- Funding misses lived experience
- Gaming, food, TikTok = culture
- Sport is cultural, not just entertainment

Group C

- Culture starts with Family
- Own culture is rarely recognised
- Strong focus on roots and belonging
- More cautious about change

2.2.1 | Core Design Principles and Methods for the Assembly

From the beginning, involving citizens in the design process was essential to ensuring that the Assembly reflected the people it was created to serve.

The input of citizens during the 2023 workshops made the process more democratic, more trusted, and more relevant to the diversity of people and communities across the West of England.

Four principles and nine core methods emerged from this co-design process. These are described below and accompanied by the actions taken by the Assembly team to embed these throughout the process.

Core Design Principles

1

Inclusivity and diversity are critical principles throughout planning and delivery

2

Importance of accessibility and ease of participation

3

Clear communication and transparency to maintain public trust

4

Offer a broad definition of culture as a starting point to include contemporary forms and community-led initiatives

1. Inclusivity and diversity are critical principles throughout planning and delivery

Citizens identified inclusivity and diversity as foundational to the legitimacy and impact of the Assembly.

How this was embedded:

Recruitment used random selection, weighted to ensure representation across age, ethnicity, geography, socio-economic background and lived experience. This was complemented by targeted outreach through trusted community organisations across the region, extending participation beyond those likely to respond to a standard call-out. The core Assembly question focussed on inclusion and facilitation methods were designed to value different forms of contribution, including lived experience, creative expression and community knowledge.

2. Importance of accessibility and ease of participation

Citizens emphasised that participation should be practical, welcoming and free from unnecessary barriers.

How this was embedded:

Accessibility was addressed through a blended model of online and in-person sessions, accessible venues, support for travel and any caring responsibilities or needs. Oversight Group members, including the West of England Centre for Inclusive Living (WECIL) which advised on accessible formats, communications and participant support. Facilitators were fully briefed to work with a range of access needs, including physical access, sensory needs, and neurodiversity.

Notes and reflections

NEXT:

Priority 3 •

Priority 4 •



3. Clear communication and transparency to maintain public trust

Citizens stressed the importance of understanding how decisions were made and how their contributions would be used.

How this was embedded:

From the outset, citizens were clearly informed about the purpose of the Assembly, with a clear scope and remit, how recommendations would be developed, and how outcomes would feed into a regional Cultural Plan with short-, medium- and long-term actions. Regular check-ins, clear agendas, and transparent voting processes ensured participants could see how discussions translated into priorities and actions.

4. Offer a broad definition of culture as a starting point to include contemporary forms and community-led initiatives

Citizens wanted culture to reflect everyday life, creativity and community activity, not just formal institutions.

How this was embedded:

The Assembly began with an intentionally broad framing of key terms such as citizens, creativity and culture. A broad set of examples were offered for culture including heritage, festivals, grassroots activity, digital culture, everyday creativity and community-led culture. Evidence presentations, creative exercises and discussions reinforced this approach, enabling citizens to recognise cultural value in places, people and practices often overlooked by traditional definitions.

Notes and reflections

Core Methods for the Assembly

1

Federated structure for the assembly, balancing local and regional perspectives

2

Support for the local and support for the smaller

3

Important role of young people and their perspective throughout

4

Asset mapping and recognition of existing cultural activity

5

Observe role of culture in mental health, community wellbeing and environment

6

Responsive approach to evolving cultural preferences and societal changes

7

Citizen-led oversight and clear lines of accountability for plan

8

Celebrate diversity of region's identity and heritage

9

Include immersive, creative and cultural experiences to enhance engagement and understanding

Notes and reflections

NEXT:

Breakdown



1. Federated structure for the assembly, balancing local and regional perspectives

Citizens wanted local identity and regional collaboration to sit alongside one another.

How this was embedded:

The Assembly operated through a federated model, with four Citizens' Juries aligned to Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire, coming together as a whole assembly for the region. This structure allowed citizens to develop place-based priorities while also identifying shared regional challenges and actions.

2. Support for the local and support for the smaller

Citizens were concerned that smaller organisations and grassroots activity are often overlooked.

How this was embedded:

Evidence and discussion explicitly considered the experiences of small organisations, freelancers, informal groups and community-led initiatives. The Advisory Panel who selected the evidence for the Assembly were selected from across the region and included a wide range of freelance practitioners to ensure that when evidence was selected it did not only represent larger and more established organisations.

3. Important role of young people and their perspective throughout

Citizens recognised young people as cultural leaders now and in the future.

How this was embedded:

Young people were included as full participants in the Assembly, including a number of citizens in the Assembly under the age of 18. Evidence sessions and discussions also focused on education, skills pathways, access to creative opportunities and youth voice in decision-making. Practitioners and organisations that work with young people featured in the evidence given to Assembly members.

4. Asset mapping and recognition of existing cultural activity

Citizens wanted to start from strengths rather than deficits.

How this was embedded:

Interactive exercises supported citizens to map cultural assets in their local areas, including spaces, organisations, informal networks and community activity. The Actors Framework was used throughout the Assembly to reinforce the importance of existing assets and the potential for partnerships. This was reinforced by regional cultural data and open evidence sessions from practitioners, helping citizens to ground their recommendations in everyday reality.

5. Observe role of culture in mental health, community wellbeing and environment

Citizens consistently linked culture to wider social and environmental outcomes.

How this was embedded:

Evidence explored the relationship between culture, mental health, social connection, wellbeing and place. Citizens discussed how cultural activity contributes to resilience, belonging and environmental awareness, shaping priorities that positioned culture as part of wider systems, not a standalone sector. Safeguarding and wellbeing support were also designed into people's experience of the Assembly itself with quiet spaces always available alongside wellbeing support from professionals with appropriate training to support citizens who wanted to take time out from the process to reflect.

6. Responsive approach to evolving cultural preferences and societal changes

Citizens wanted recommendations that could adapt over time.

How this was embedded:

The Assembly design allowed flexibility in participation, pacing and discussion topics, responding to emerging issues raised by citizens. Conversations explicitly addressed changes in how people engage with culture, including digital participation, shifting work patterns and demographic change. The recommendations were structured as short-, medium- and long-term, with citizens remaining involved as part of a post-Assembly oversight role, ensuring that the Cultural Plan does not have to remain fixed if significant societal shifts take place.

7. Citizen-led oversight and clear lines of accountability for plan

Citizens emphasised trust, accountability and follow-through.

How this was embedded:
Independent governance structures were put in place to safeguard neutrality and accountability. An Advisory Panel supported the selection of evidence, while the Oversight Group focused on equity, inclusion and design integrity. When citizens raised any concerns about the process, this meant there was an independent Oversight Group who could review and suggest adaptations. Funding was secured to provide three years support after the Assembly to enable citizen-led oversight.

8. Celebrate diversity of region's identity and heritage

Citizens wanted the Assembly to reflect the distinct identities of different places.

How this was embedded:
The recruitment of a diverse Advisory Panel ensured a very wide range of perspectives were covered in the Assembly evidence. Evidence presentations, creative content and discussions highlighted the varied histories, cultures and identities across the West of England. Both heritage and contemporary cultural expression were valued, reinforcing the importance of place-based identity alongside regional collaboration.

9. Include immersive, creative and cultural experiences to enhance engagement and understanding

Citizens valued learning through experience, not just discussion.

How this was embedded:

The Assembly used immersive and creative methods throughout. This included a commission for PlayDisrupt to create a Cultural Ecosystem game for the Assembly to help citizens explore the creative and cultural landscape in the region and the different kinds of Actors across the region. Other immersive approaches in the Assembly design included World Café and Goldfish Bowl discussions alongside creative mapping exercises. These approaches supported shared understanding of complex systems, encouraged participation from different learning styles, and helped build trust and collective insight.

2.2.2 | Assembly Infrastructure: the Four Strategic Pillars

One of the other foundations of the Citizens' Assembly was the existing Cultural Plan created for the West of England and launched in February 2022. This outline plan can be found on the Mayoral Combined Authority website via QR code or link below.

The citizens who designed the project back in 2023 had said that they wanted clear definitions and parameters for the Citizens' Assembly. The four core pillars of the existing regional Cultural Plan - Economy, Placemaking, Skills and Wellbeing - provided a strong framework to build upon. The idea of the Citizens' Assembly was to create a 2.0 version of this plan - a more practical and citizen-led action plan that could be delivered - rather than an outline framework.

The four pillars of the outline plan provided a structure for presenting evidence, framing discussions, and guiding the development of recommendations. All evidence submitted to the Assembly, whether from cultural organisations, regional data, or citizen-generated insights, was organised around these four areas to support clarity and coherence.



**SCAN TO VIEW 2022
OUTLINE CULTURAL PLAN**

www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk

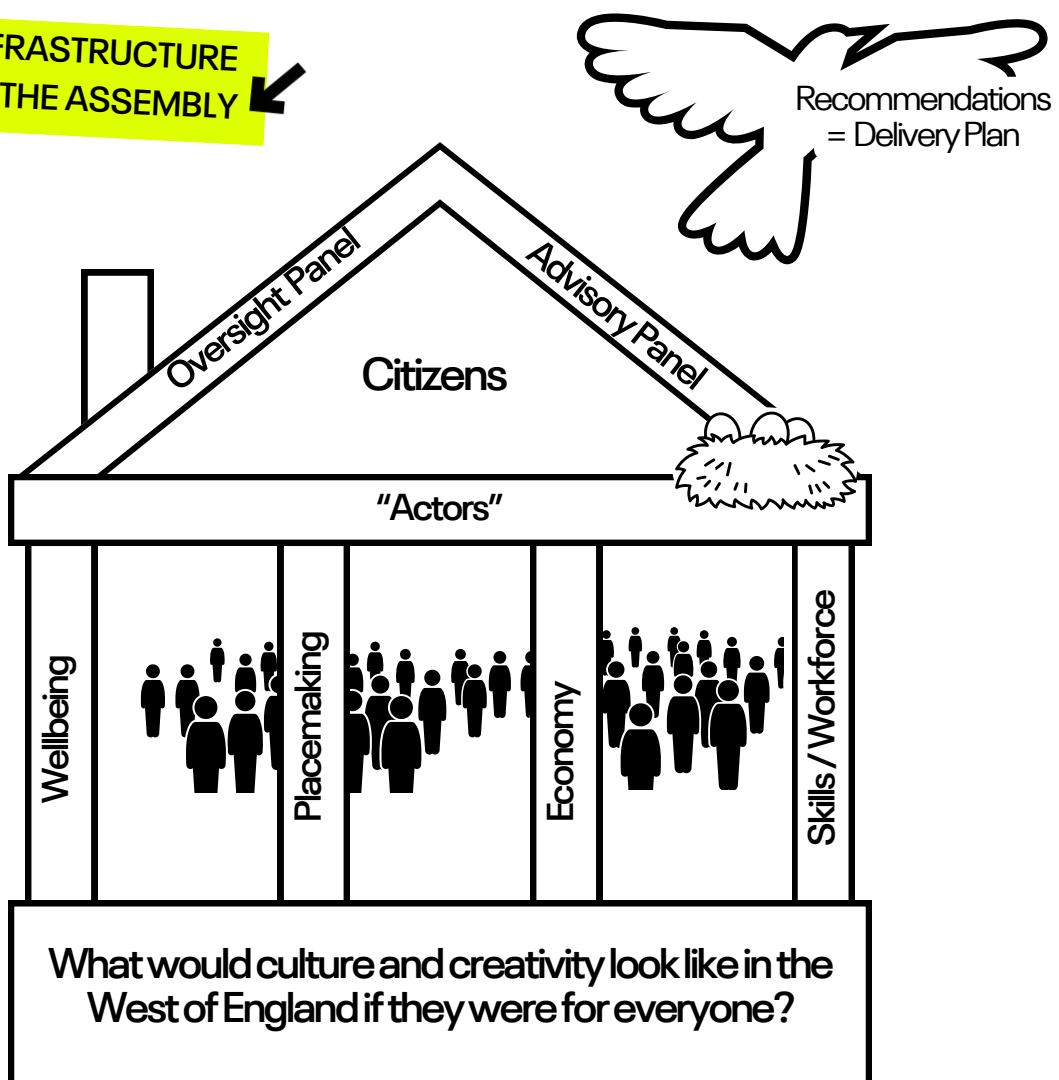
NEXT:

Infrastructure Of
The Assembly Pillars





INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE ASSEMBLY



The pillars acted as the Assembly's scaffolding or infrastructure. A stable foundation that helped participants understand the breadth of the cultural ecosystem while giving them the freedom to explore issues creatively and critically.

By retaining the regional strategy framing, the Assembly ensured continuity with existing cultural priorities, while allowing citizens to challenge, reshape and expand them based on lived experience.

Upcoming pages are an overview of the four pillars and how they informed the Assembly's deliberations.

This section is an overview of the four pillars and how they informed the Assembly's deliberations:

1. Skills

What it means:

Developing creative skills across all ages and stages of life, helping people access pathways into arts, culture and the wider creative industries. This pillar focuses on fairness, visibility, and opportunity, from early education to professional practice.

Why it matters:

Creative skills build confidence, fuel innovation, and strengthen the regional workforce. Supporting skills development helps young people access creative futures and ensures the region can nurture and retain its talent.

Examples of evidence presented:

- Creative careers workshops in schools and colleges;
- Mentoring for young people entering design, music, or film;
- Apprenticeships and early-career placements with creative businesses.

Assembly discussion prompts:

- How can we make creative careers more visible and accessible to young people?
- What support do freelancers and emerging artists need to develop their skills?

2. *Economy*

What it means:

Recognising and supporting the individuals, micro-businesses and independent practitioners who form the backbone of the region's creative economy.

Why it matters:

Freelancers and small creative enterprises generate the majority of creative work. They drive innovation, contribute to local identity, and stimulate economic growth, but they also face financial instability and limited structural support.

Examples of evidence presented:

- Co-working and making spaces;
- Funding, training, and recovery support for freelancers;
- Markets, fairs, and platforms for showcasing local creative products.

Assembly discussion prompts:

- What would help small creative businesses thrive?
- How can local organisations support freelancers more fairly?

Notes and reflections

3. Placemaking

What it means:

Using culture to shape places that feel vibrant, welcoming and connected. This includes public art, festivals, cultural events, creative high streets, and community hubs.

Why it matters:

Culture helps people feel pride in where they live. Placemaking strengthens community connection, enhances local identity, and attracts visitors and investment across the region.

Examples of evidence presented:

- Murals and public artworks telling local stories;
- Festivals and community events;
- Repurposing empty shops into creative or community-led spaces.

Assembly discussion prompts:

- What makes a place feel creative and alive?
- How can culture be embedded into everyday community spaces?

PROMPT: What are your initial thoughts to the above? Feel free to draw, write, or respond in your preferred way.

4. Wellbeing

What it means:

Recognising the powerful role culture plays in health, happiness, and belonging, whether as a creator, participant, or audience member.

Why it matters:

Arts, heritage, music and storytelling support mental health, reduce isolation, and foster connection. Embedding culture in wellbeing ensures that everyone can access the benefits of creative expression, regardless of background or circumstance.

Examples of evidence presented:

- Arts and health programmes in hospitals, care homes and community settings;
- Community choirs, dance groups, art clubs;
- Programmes aimed at improving accessibility and cultural participation.

Assembly discussion prompts:

- How can we ensure everyone has access to cultural experiences?
- What creative activities already support wellbeing across the region?

By structuring the Assembly around these four strategic pillars, the intention was to give Assembly members a clear and accessible route into complex cultural issues. The pillars helped citizens navigate the breadth of the regional cultural ecosystem while anchoring their discussions in the lived realities of communities across the West of England.

This shared framework enabled the Assembly to produce recommendations that were both strategically aligned and community-led, bridging the gap between regional priorities and citizen experience, and ensuring the resulting actions reflect the cultural needs, hopes and ambitions of the people the strategy is designed to serve.

2.2.3 | Purpose and Scope of the Oversight Group and Advisory Panel

Oversight Group

The Oversight Group was established to ensure that the Citizens for Culture Assembly was delivered in a fair, inclusive, and accountable way, for the communities it represented. The group's main focus was to uphold the integrity of the process and ensure that equity and inclusion were embedded at every stage, from design to delivery to follow-up.

Working independently of the delivery partners, members of the Oversight Group reviewed key elements of the Assembly's design and approach, including:

- ***Outreach and Engagement***

To ensure diverse communities were informed and invited to participate.

- ***The process of inviting people to take part***

To make sure the Assembly reflected the population of the West of England and included underrepresented groups.

- ***The appointment of the independent Advisory Panel***

Oversaw evidence selection and ensured a mix of expert and lived-experience insight.

- ***Accessibility of all materials, sessions and formats***

Ensuring participants could take part fully, whether online or in person.

- ***Facilitation and deliberation approaches***

Providing scrutiny to ensure methods were accessible, inclusive, and supportive of meaningful participation.

NEXT:

List Of Oversight Group Members



List Of Oversight Group Members



Ali Browning

Disability.Inc. Manager,
WECIL



Alison Bancroft

Consultant



Blaise Penny-Kirkwood

Creative Youth Network,
Poet and Aim2Be Founder



Dr Thom Oliver

Senior Lecturer in
Politics, UWE Bristol



Ian Noah

Media Consultant; Chair of
Race Equality North Somerset



Kate Webb

Head of Creative,
Creative Youth Network



Liz Jessica Medrano

BEESPOKE Sustainable
Fashion & Creative Hub



Makala Cheung

Filwood Community Centre
Director & Music Artist



Mandy Gardner

CEO of Voluntary Action
North Somerset

The Group drew on a wide range of expertise, including representation and inclusion specialists, community leaders, accessibility experts, cultural practitioners and academics, to provide challenge, guidance and assurance throughout. Their role was crucial in building trust, improving transparency, and ensuring that the Assembly remained genuinely citizen-centred.

List Of Oversight Group Members (cont.)



Rachael Fagan

Freelance Actor/
Producer



Renée Jacobs

Founder of the Belonging
Network



Roger Griffith

Writer, Cultural Historian
and Diversity Consultant



Ruby Sant

Artist



Zannah Chisholm

CEO of Circomedia

*Our focus is to uphold the
integrity of the process and
ensure that equity and
inclusion were embedded at
every stage*

The Advisory Panel

The Advisory Panel was established to support the Citizens' Assembly by ensuring that all evidence, materials and content provided to Assembly members was balanced, relevant, and reflective of both expert knowledge and lived experience.

Advisory Panels are usually appointed by the Oversight Group for a Citizens' Assembly but we decided to go further than most Assembly processes by also undertaking an open call for the Advisory Panel. We wanted to open up the process to the widest possible range of voices.

The composition of the Advisory Panel was then selected by the Oversight Group following the public callout. The callout document for the Advisory Panel can be viewed via the below QR code.

**SCAN TO VIEW ADVISORY
BOARD CALL OUT
DOCUMENT**

<http://tiny.cc/b5jx001>



Role & Responsibilities

Curating evidence & materials

Review and approve calls for evidence, submissions, expert inputs and background materials, ensuring a diverse mix of professional expertise and community or lived-experience insight.

Overview and advice on the Assembly design process

Work with the design and facilitation team to ensure that due consideration was given to the key information to be included in the programme and that the diversity of the four unitary areas was represented across the design.

Role & Responsibilities (cont.)

Ensuring balance and neutrality

Make sure that differing viewpoints are represented including institutions, independent practitioners, community voices, and underrepresented perspectives, to avoid narrow framing or dominance by specific interests.

Supporting transparency and legitimacy

Work alongside the Oversight Group to ensure that the Assembly's information base is credible, inclusive, and accessible, strengthening trust in the process and the resulting recommendations.

Composition & Expertise

The Advisory Panel brought together individuals with expertise or lived experience in:

- Cultural practice and creative industries across the region;
- Community engagement, social justice, and grassroots cultural work;
- Academic or research backgrounds relevant to culture, social policy, public participation;
- Representation from different communities , ensuring input from under-represented groups and reflecting the region's diversity.



**SCAN TO VIEW OPEN
CALL FOR EVIDENCE**

bit.ly/cp-evidence-call-out

When it came to selecting evidence for the Citizens' Assembly, again, we decided to go beyond standard practice and issue an open call.

While we valued and relied upon the expertise of the Advisory Panel, we did not want to exclude anyone from having the chance to submit evidence for the Assembly.

List Of Advisory Panel Members



Batch Gueye
West African Griot



Bogdan Mihai Florea
Actor and Researcher,
University of Bristol



Claire Miller
Chartered Architect and
Retrofit Designer



Divija Melally
Movement Artist



Claudia Collins
Socially-engaged Artist,
and Creative Producer



Helen Farmer
Inclusion Producer and
Social Value Consultant



Helen Morley
Theatre Director and
Participation Producer



James Sherlock
Community Pharmacist



Lucy Heard
Arts Producer and Public
Contributor



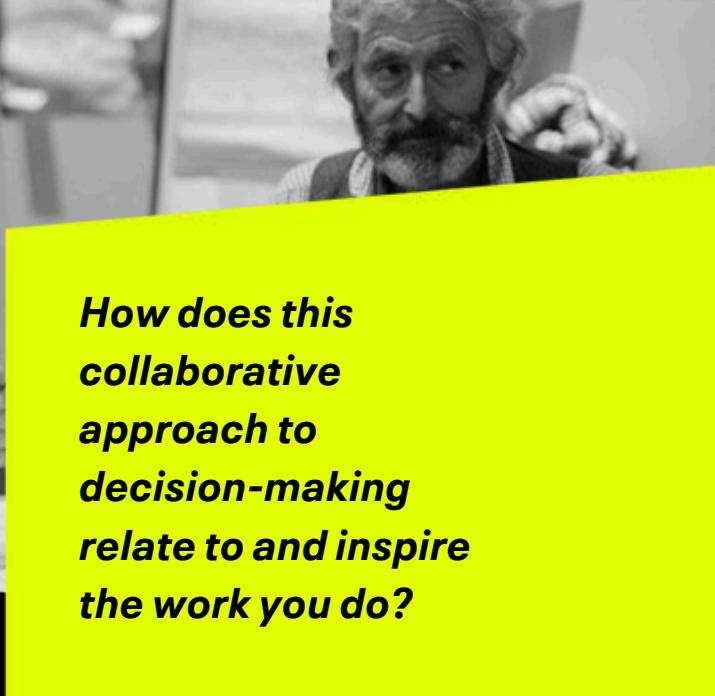
Lynda Rooke
British Actress and
President of Equity UK



Oliver Gamblin
Playwright, Theatre
Producer and Educator



Simbah Pilé
Contemporary Visual
Artist



How does this collaborative approach to decision-making relate to and inspire the work you do?

2.2.4 | Observers for the Citizens' Assembly

Both the Oversight Group and the Advisory Panel were invited to observe the Citizens' Assembly. This opportunity to observe the process was also opened up to a wider group of partners, funders and stakeholders.

Within a Citizen's Assembly, observers can play an important role in bringing transparency to the process and in helping others understand how these processes work. Observation is recognised as good practice in deliberative processes, helping to ensure transparency, build trust, and allow others to learn from how citizens work together on complex issues.

Watching deliberation unfold in real time can be powerful and inspiring, offering an insight into how this approach to decision-making might be used in other contexts.

Observing also comes with important boundaries. Assemblies are designed around the citizens who have been randomly selected to form a representative group, and the focus must remain on supporting their work. Therefore, observers are present to watch, not to participate.

All observers were asked to respect the guidelines provided so that the integrity of the Assembly is protected and citizens can do their best work in a safe, supportive and neutral environment.

***Observation helps to ensure
transparency and build trust.***

***Watching deliberation unfold in real
time can be powerful and inspiring***

Observers for Citizens for Culture included:

- **Alison Bancroft** (Race Equality North Somerset)
- **Beth Hogben** (West of England Mayoral Combined Authority)
- **Chris Luffingham** (Trinity Community Arts)
- **Daisy Thompson** (Involve)
- **Elise Hurcombe** (Bristol City Council)
- **Euella Jackson** (Rising Arts Agency)
- **Helen Morley** (Theatre Director and Participation Producer)
- **Ian Noah** (Race Equality North Somerset)
- **James McQuaid** (Freelancer in Public Engagement Strategies)
- **Renée Jacobs** (Belonging Network)
- **Roz Hall** (Culture West Evaluator)
- **Sally Larkin** (West of England Mayoral Combined Authority)
- **Sarah James** (West of England Mayoral Combined Authority)
- **Stacy Pottinger** (Bath Spa University)

2.3

Recruitment and Selection of Citizens

To ensure that the Citizens' Assembly reflected the diversity of the West of England, recruitment was carried out through a two-stage civic lottery designed and delivered by the Sortition Foundation.

Civic lotteries are widely recognised as one of the fairest methods for selecting representative groups of people to take part in deliberative processes.

Stage 1: Letters of Invitation

In July 2025, the Sortition Foundation sent **15,000 letters** to randomly selected households across Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire, with the distribution weighted towards areas of higher deprivation where response rates are typically lower.

A further **100 invitation letters** were distributed through community partners to residents who might not otherwise receive an invitation through the post, including people without fixed addresses, refugees and those experiencing housing insecurity.

**SCAN TO
VIEW COPY
OF THE
INVITATION
LETTER**

bit.ly/456AeBL

We were aiming for a 2% response rate though we were concerned that, amidst a cost of living crisis, people might not view culture as a topic worthy of time and discussion.

So we set a minimum target of 150 respondents that would give us enough people to enter into a second lottery to enable us to hit our demographic targets for a group of 52.



In the end, we received **300 responses** which achieved our 2% response rate and ensured that the second-stage lottery was set in a strong position.

Stage 2: Second stage lottery

From the pool of 300 respondents, the Sortition Foundation carried out a **stratified random selection** to ensure the final group reflected the population of the West of England across seven criteria:

- gender
- age
- ethnicity
- disability
- educational attainment
- attitudinal
- geography (including rural and urban split)

**SCAN TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE
SORTITION FOUNDATION ALGORITHM**

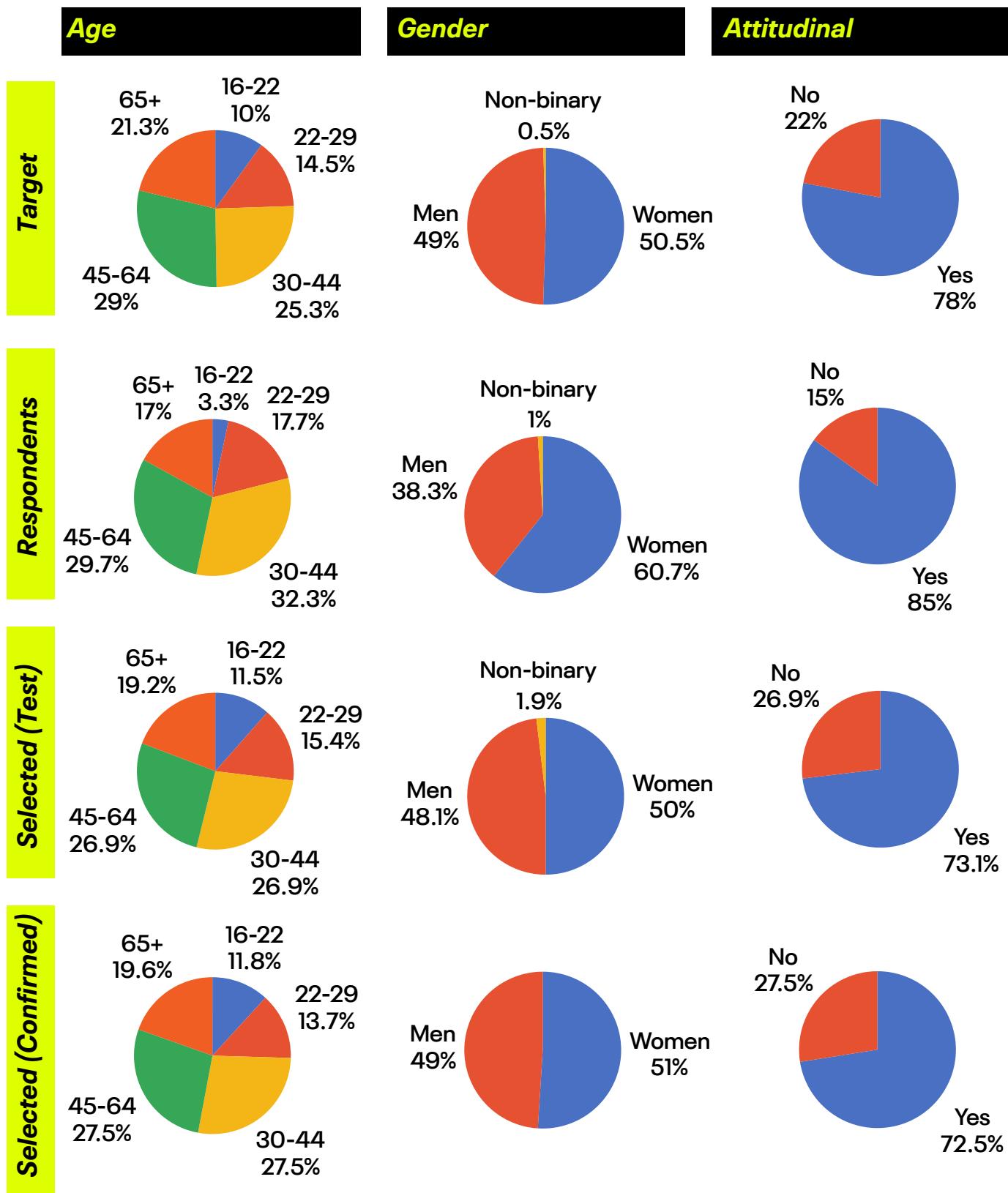
<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-021-03788-6>



The idea of the second stage lottery is to match the resulting group with the demographic representation across the area population. This is why Citizens' Assemblies are sometimes called "mini-publics" because they seek to create a microcosm of the wider community in a specific geographic area.

The attitudinal question we used was based on Arts Council England data about the proportion of the population who are and are not regularly engaged in creative or cultural activities. We wanted to ensure that we had more than the proportion of people who are not engaged with organised creative and cultural activities. Over achieving this proportion felt important in terms of addressing the central question for the Assembly.

These pie charts represent the breakdown across the above criteria in terms of population data from the 2021 census, our target composition, the data of respondents and our final selection after the second stage lottery.



**SCAN TO VIEW PIE CHARTS
FOR ALL SEVEN CRITERIA**

<http://tiny.cc/wqjx001>



The Federal Structure: Regional Assembly containing Local Juries

There is one further layer of complexity that the selection process had to deal with.

As described earlier, Citizens for Culture adopted a federal structure, which was designed with citizens in 2023.

This meant that participants selected through the civic lottery took part in both:

A Regional Citizens' Assembly to create a regional Cultural Plan

And one of four Citizens' Juries covering each Unitary Authority area to set local priorities

In this context, a Citizens' Jury is a smaller version of a Citizens' Assembly. Citizens' Juries have a minimum of 12 members. We had four Citizens' Juries, one for each of the four Unitary Authority areas that made up the Assembly:

- **Bristol** Jury: 16 members
- **Bath & North East Somerset** Jury: 12 members
- **North Somerset** Jury: 12 members
- **South Gloucestershire** Jury: 12 members

These Juries then came together as a whole and a regional Citizens' Assembly of 52 people.

A lot of the work undertaken by citizens during the Assembly was done in the local Juries, identifying local priorities and concerns. These insights then shaped the evidence and the discussion that followed at regional scale.

In the final session of the Citizens' Assembly, on November 9th, the regional Cultural Plan was shaped. This included a prioritisation and voting process for the contents of the regional plan.



In order to ensure that geographic areas were not over-represented at this crucial stage of creating the regional plan, **the Citizens' Assembly** was reduced to 40 people so that it could be proportionate to each area's population for this session:

- **Bristol Jury:** 16 members
- **Bath & North East Somerset Jury:** 7 members
- **North Somerset Jury:** 7 members
- **South Gloucestershire Jury:** 10 members

The make-up of this 40-strong Assembly was part of our original selection process; so the individuals who took part in this final session were set from the beginning, as part of the original selection.

Retention of Assembly Members

Out of 52 Assembly members, only 1 was unable to join the first few sessions of the Citizens' Assembly. By this point, it was too late to replace this individual, reducing the Citizens' Jury in Bristol from 16 to 15 people and the overall Citizens' Assembly to 51 people.

The other 51 members of the Citizens' Assembly remained throughout the entire five-month process of the Citizens' Assembly. No one disengaged or stopped attending sessions.

Equity, Inclusion and Onboarding

Equity and inclusion were central to the design of the recruitment process and the Assembly itself. It is important to acknowledge that taking part in these processes has very different costs for different people. Some can readily put themselves forward while others face multiple and systemic barriers to participation. These imbalances were addressed through the onboarding process.

Once selected, each Assembly member took part in a structured onboarding process designed to build confidence, trust and a shared understanding of what to expect. This began with a personal welcome and clear, accessible information about the purpose of the Assembly, the time commitment involved and the role participants would play.

This included the receipt of a Confirmation Pack (can view an example of a Confirmation Pack for citizens from Bath and North East Somerset via left-hand QR code) at the beginning of the process - and then a Welcome pack in advance of the first Assembly meeting (right-hand QR code).

Over the weeks leading up to the first session, the team stayed in regular contact with each member, answering questions, checking practical arrangements and helping people feel prepared.

Introductory calls and materials explained how the Assembly would work, what deliberation involves and how decisions would be made, while also emphasising that no prior knowledge or experience was required.

Members had already had multiple points of contact by the time the Assembly met in person. They knew more about what to expect and had received varying support offers to ensure they could take part.



**(L) SCAN TO VIEW
CONFIRMATION
PACK EXAMPLE**

<http://tiny.cc/0fx001>

**(R) SCAN TO VIEW
WELCOME PACK**

bit.ly/3LxOAU



Equity, Inclusion and Onboarding (cont.)

We put a series of measures in place which sought to address some of the barriers people might face and to encourage broad participation. These key measures included:

- **Financial support:** up to £700 gift was offered for participating in the Citizens' Assembly; this could be received by bank transfer, as a voucher or it could be donated on behalf of the Assembly member
- **Expenses:** Paying for all travel, childcare and other carer costs in addition to meeting any other expenses to enable people to participate equitably
- **Digital access:** laptops, data packages and technical training for online sessions were provided
- **Venue access:** access guides were provided for the Assembly venue where step-free access, quiet and prayer rooms were available
- **Safeguarding:** a trained team of Level 2 and Level 3 Safeguarding specialists providing support for online and in-person Assembly and Jury meetings
- **Support for disabled members:** the offer of BSL interpretation, captioning, access riders, sensory support and personal assistance
- **Flexible communication:** reminders, phone calls and alternative information formats
- **Community Connectors:** outreach and support for people less likely to respond to postal invitations or civic processes
- **Hybrid participation design:** a mix of in-person and online sessions to reduce barriers

2.4

Assembly Process Design

Timeline and structure of sessions

The first session of the Citizens' Assembly was on 14th September, connecting to the International Day for Democracy on the 15th September. Assembly meetings were held between 14th September and 9th November, with a total of 8 meetings.

Each meeting was designed to take Assembly members through a specific journey which had 3 main components, which were:

1. The Learning Phase

During this phase, participants were introduced to the Assembly question **“What would culture and creativity in the West of England look like if they were for everyone?”** And spend time in small groups working with a facilitator to support their learning, and scrutinise the evidence being presented.

During this phase, Assembly participants were able to ask questions of speakers and presenters, suggest material they wanted to know more about, and hear about different perspectives on the topic.

2. The Deliberation Phase

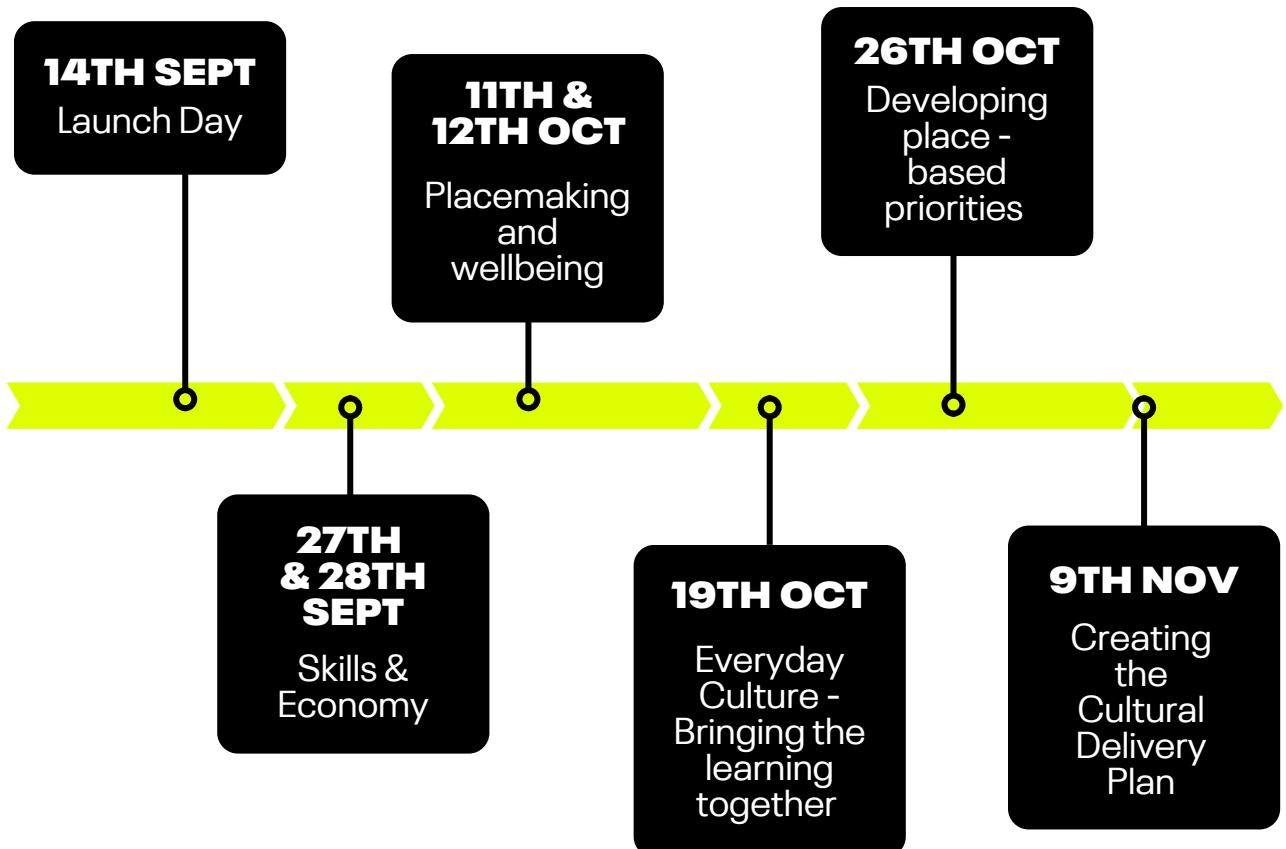
Although described as a phase, deliberation is usually integrated throughout the learning phase, allowing participants to test their thinking, hear from other assembly participants, and negotiate the assembly's key priorities.

Deliberation included consideration of potential trade-offs, thinking about accountability and understanding where power lies to make change.

3. The Recommendations Phase

This phase took place after all the evidence had been presented and Assembly participants had identified their key priorities and were ready to co-create the recommendations and/or priorities identified through the deliberation process. This was an iterative process which involved all participants in the drafting process to ensure collective ownership and responsibility for the outputs.

Timeline and structure of sessions:



In-person vs online components

The Assembly was delivered using in-person sessions for the whole assembly and online sessions for evidence-based sessions.

The project used a mixed model of delivery to ensure there were different ways for assembly members to take part in the Assembly, reducing the need to travel to a venue each time the Assembly met and also providing a cost-effective way to meet with different groups within the Assembly.

In-person sessions

The key features of the in-person sessions were:

- The day started at 10am and finished at 4pm, with a number of breaks and a shared lunch time
- Creating a sense of people coming together from across the region, getting to know each other and creating connections between people
- Working in a small group with a table facilitator, with participants from different parts of the region
- Presentations that had a regional focus
- Observers could attend a morning or afternoon session
- The Assembly gathered songs and images from participants to represent what culture means to them. These were used in the space during in-person assembly, alongside feedback from the online Pol.is survey showing the images on the screen and playing the [Assembly playlist](#)
- Availability of two safeguarding and wellbeing specialists to support the Assembly members
- Quiet/prayer room for anyone who needed to use it throughout the day



**TUNE INTO
THE ASSEMBLY
SPOTIFY PLAYLIST**

<https://sptfy.in/jbiz>

NEXT:

Key Features For
Online Sessions



In-person vs online components (cont.)

Online sessions

The key features of the online sessions were:

- The day started at 10.00 and finished at 16.30, with regular comfort breaks and an offline lunch break.
- Tech support throughout the day for the team and participants
- Online evidence-based sessions were delivered on Saturday and Sunday, with Bristol and North Somerset on Saturday and Bath and North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire on Sunday.
- Assembly participants worked in small groups with other people who lived in the same local authority area
- Sessions were evidence-focused, with online presentations by creative and cultural practitioners.
- Availability of one safeguarding and wellbeing specialist to support the Assembly members
- An additional Zoom room for people to use if they wanted to take time out from the online group

Notes and reflections

Creative and deliberative exercises we used

To support deep learning, shared understanding and collaborative decision-making, the Assembly used a combination of creative and deliberative methods. These techniques helped participants explore complex cultural issues, consider multiple perspectives, and work together to shape meaningful priorities and actions. For example:

- Play:Disrupt Actors Ecosystem Game
- Deep Democracy
- World Café
- Fish Bowl Conversations
- Scavenger Hunt

• *Play:Disrupt Actors Ecosystem Game*

Developed through a co-lab design process with facilitators and game designers, this interactive activity helped participants explore the cultural ecosystem of the West of England.

Through role-play, choices and negotiations, citizens experienced how different "actors" (e.g., councils, funders, community groups, cultural organisations, businesses, audiences) hold different forms of power, responsibilities and influence. The game was designed to be illustrative, imaginative and fun, helping participants understand the dynamic relationships that shape cultural decision-making.

• *Deep Democracy*

Tools from an approach for recognising and resolving conflict known as Lewis Deep Democracy were used to ensure that all voices, including minority opinions, were heard and valued.

Participants were encouraged to express alternative viewpoints and explore the tension between different ideas. This approach helped the Assembly understand where disagreement could become a source of creativity, whilst also considering the potential trade-offs needed to find consensus.

• **World Café**

Through a structured process of rotating small-group conversations, participants explored key questions about cultural access, decision-making and investment using the Skills, Economy, Place-making and Well-being as the main lenses. World Café enabled a cross-pollination of ideas as citizens prepared to make recommendations. This allowed citizens to built on one another's thinking, leading to shared themes that emerged organically from discussion rather than being set in advance.

• **Fish Bowl Conversations**

To support targeted listening and reflection, small groups held a discussion in the centre while others observed from the outside. Participants could join or leave the inner conversation as they felt ready. This method allowed the Assembly to look closely at emerging tensions or areas of uncertainty, while giving space for more thoughtful, balanced contributions.

• **Scavenger Hunt**

This collaborative search activity encouraged participants to explore the "landscape of evidence" provided by speakers, briefing materials, case studies and data snapshots from across the region. By moving around the space, asking questions, and collecting insights, citizens actively investigated what culture looks like in practice in the West of England. It supported active discovery, curiosity and working with evidence in a hands-on way.



2.5

Summary of Sessions

1

**Assembly
Introduction &
Regional Context**

2 - 3

**Local Focus on
Wellbeing and
Placemaking**

4 - 5

**Skills and
Economy**

6

**Connecting Evidence
and Shaping Emerging
Ideas**

7

**Defining the Problem
and Drafting Local
Priorities**

8

**Final Actions
and Cultural
Planning**

Session 1 (In-Person)

- **Sunday 14 September: Assembly Introduction & Regional Context**

Citizens were introduced to the Assembly question, 'what would culture and creativity in the West of England look like if they were for everyone?' and co-created the ground rules for how they would work together over the following eight assembly days.

A practical workshop facilitated by Play:Disrupt helped participants explore the region's cultural and creative ecosystem. In the afternoon, citizens heard evidence from three guest speakers covering the regional context, including the funding landscape, the role of the combined authority and the visitor economy. After each presentation, citizens worked in facilitated groups to reflect and ask clarifying questions. The day concluded with information about the upcoming online sessions, where citizens will begin hearing case studies and evidence selected by the independent Advisory Panel.

Session 2 and 3 (Online)

- **27-28 September: Local Focus on Wellbeing and Placemaking**

Local Citizens' Juries met with separate conversations held for the four groups representing the four Unitary Authorities. This structure enabled citizens to focus on local priorities while continuing to contribute to the shared regional cultural plan. The weekend concentrated on the themes of Wellbeing and Placemaking, with discussions grounded in personal experience and supported by evidence.

Citizens began by reflecting on what culture means to them and shared cultural experiences from across the region. They then received evidence through presentations covering migrant-led cultural work, arts and health, community cultural spaces, public storytelling, disabled-led music practice, heritage and wellbeing, and inclusive theatre for young people. Breakout groups used accessible tools to clarify information, identify questions and relate insights to both local and regional needs. Citizens were now contributing their own suggestions for evidence to explore, which fed into the design of subsequent sessions.



Session 4 and 5 (Online)

- 11-12 October: Skills and Economy**

The Assembly met online for its third weekend, focusing on how culture and creativity contribute to skills development, employment and the wider economy in the West of England. Citizens continued to apply the overarching question to both regional and local contexts, developing place-based priorities alongside a regional Cultural Plan.

Participants explored models of cultural funding and took part in a “deep democracy” exercise examining urban and rural cultural challenges from multiple perspectives. Evidence presentations covered creative industry pathways for young people, participatory arts and local pride, community-led creative projects, and inclusion within film and television. The four Unitary Authorities presented their current cultural strategies and emerging frameworks, linking culture to wellbeing, cohesion and local economic growth.

After each presentation, citizens worked in facilitated groups to reflect, compare local and regional considerations, and identify questions for presenters. Recordings were made available for citizens to revisit. The next session took place in person and introduced “Snapshots”- research overviews that supported citizens to begin shaping emerging priorities.

Notes and reflections

Session 6 (In-Person)

- **19 October: Connecting Evidence and Shaping Emerging Ideas**

The Assembly met in Bristol for its fourth session, bringing all 51 citizens together to connect learning from the previous online weekends and begin generating early priorities. With evidence now gathered on wellbeing, placemaking, skills and the creative economy, the focus shifted toward identifying how these themes might inform both local and regional Cultural Plans.

The day began with facilitated reconnection activities before citizens heard from speakers on culture, activism and workforce conditions in the cultural sector. Presentations from Led by Donkeys, Curiosity Unlimited and Equity prompted discussion on civic participation, representation and fair working practices. Citizens reflected on insights in facilitated group work.

In the afternoon, participants explored additional evidence through a creative “snapshot scavenger hunt” and took part in a World Café session structured around the four regional cultural pillars. Ideas, challenges and potential actions were captured to support the development of place-based and regional recommendations.



Session 7 (Online)

- **26 October: Defining the Problem and Drafting Local Priorities**

The Assembly met online to begin drafting place-based priorities for the four Unitary Authority areas. The session began with citizens reflecting on progress so far before working collectively to define the underlying problem implied by the Assembly's central question. Using an interview with cultural policy scholar Professor Ele Belfiore as stimulus, citizens examined structural inequalities in the UK's cultural system, including how funding frameworks, decision-making processes and institutional power frequently exclude certain communities.

Discussion groups explored ideas around access, agency and fairness, emphasising the need for citizens to have genuine influence over cultural decision-making. In the afternoon, participants generated and refined local priorities across the four pillars of Placemaking, Wellbeing, Skills and the Economy. Through facilitated exercises and voting, each area produced an agreed set of emerging priorities to take forward. The final session focused on turning these into a practical Cultural Plan for the region.

Session 8 (In-Person)

- **9 November: Final Actions and Cultural Planning**

The final Assembly session took place in person, bringing together the 51 citizens to create a region-wide Cultural Plan. Participants reviewed priorities previously voted on for both local areas and the wider region, then worked to convert these into practical short-, medium- and long-term actions.

The day began with citizens revisiting evidence and materials from earlier sessions before exploring how change happens within the cultural system. Discussions focused on the roles and influence of different actors, including councils, funders, organisations, communities and creative practitioners, and how power could be shared more fairly. Citizens then drafted and refined actions across the four pillars of Wellbeing, Placemaking, Skills and the Creative Economy, using facilitated exercises to ensure proposals were realistic and directly addressed the Assembly question.

By the end of the session, each group presented its final set of actions, marking the Assembly's completion. Citizens were informed that a Citizens for Culture Panel would be established to support implementation and maintain a citizen-led approach as the Cultural Plan moves forward.

2.6

Observations by Citizens for Culture Co-founders

One of the most powerful legacies of the Citizens For Culture project is that each of the Unitary Authorities in the West of England now has a set of engaged citizens who understand the region and how they can play a role in influencing the way the region creates policies and interacts with the people who live here. This is an opportunity to engage these groups to increase citizen-led decision-making across the system so citizens start to see themselves in more and more areas of civic life.

This section sets out six reflections and recommendations drawn from the design and delivery of the Citizens for Culture Assembly. They are offered as learning for **all actors across the cultural ecosystem**, including authorities, funders, cultural organisations, community groups, and partners in health, education, housing, development and business.

These reflections are grounded in what citizens said and returned to repeatedly, alongside what the delivery team observed about how power, resources and responsibility currently operate across the system.



Reflection 1: Participation must shift power

What we observed:

Citizens were thoughtful, informed and willing to engage with complexity. They valued being given time, information and space to deliberate. However, participants repeatedly returned to questions of who really decides, how influence is exercised, and whether their involvement would lead to tangible change.

While participation itself was welcomed, confidence in the process was closely linked to whether citizens could see a clear line between their input and real-world decisions.

What this tells us about the system:

Across the cultural ecosystem, participation is increasingly common, but shared authority is not. Engagement is often invited without clarity about where power sits or how citizen input will shape outcomes. This creates a risk that people feel listened to, but not meaningfully empowered.

Recommendations to Actors:

- **Authorities** should commit in advance to where and how citizen recommendations will directly influence policy, funding or delivery decisions, and publicly report back on how those decisions were shaped.
- **Advocates / Funders** should design funding and commissioning mechanisms that explicitly respond to citizen-generated priorities, not solely professional or institutional agendas.
- **Allies** (health, education, housing, business) should recognise citizen-led cultural priorities as legitimate inputs into their own strategies.
- **Community and Activist Actors** should be supported to hold institutions to account through ongoing dialogue and scrutiny, not one-off engagement moments.

Reflection 2: Equity must be designed in

What we observed:

Citizens consistently identified structural barriers to access, including geography, income, language, confidence, time and visibility. Where the Assembly design intentionally intervened, examples of this include targeted recruitment, accessibility support, and careful facilitation, participation was more confident, representative and inclusive.

What this tells us about the system:

By using the same systems we tend to reproduce existing inequalities. Without deliberate corrective action, access to funding, space, visibility and influence continues to concentrate among those already resourced and confident. Equity does not happen by default.

Recommendations to Actors:

- **Authorities** should adopt equity-led policy, funding and engagement frameworks that recognise different communities require different forms of support.
- **Advocates / Funders** should simplify processes, invest in relationship-based funding, and value lived experience alongside professional track records.
- **Associates** (cultural organisations and networks) should examine their own gatekeeping roles and actively share power, space and visibility.
- **Community Actors** should be resourced as partners in delivery and decision-making, not positioned only as consultees or beneficiaries.

Notes and reflections

Reflection 3: Culture creates public value

What we observed:

Citizens consistently described culture as central to wellbeing, belonging, identity, skills development and local pride, particularly in everyday, informal and community-led settings. At the same time, they recognised that cultural work is often treated as optional, fragile or secondary within wider public policy.

What this tells us about the system:

There is a disconnect between the public value culture creates and how it is positioned in decision-making, funding and cross-sector planning. Culture is relied upon to deliver outcomes in health, education and cohesion, but rarely resourced or recognised accordingly.

Recommendations to Actors:

- **Authorities** should embed culture as a core component of public policy across health, education, regeneration and skills.
- **Advocates / Funders** should actively co-invest in cultural activity where it supports shared outcomes, recognising culture as social infrastructure.
- **Associates / Funders** should support long-term, preventative and place-based cultural work, particularly beyond major institutions.
- **Associates and Community Actors** should be supported to evidence impact in ways that reflect lived experience, not solely economic metrics.

Notes and reflections

Reflection 4: Citizens see one system

What we observed:

Through the Actors Ecosystem work, citizens identified confusion about roles, responsibilities and decision-making across councils, funders, cultural organisations, schools, health partners and developers. From a citizen perspective, these distinctions are largely invisible. What matters is whether the system works.

What this tells us about the system:

Fragmentation, siloed working and unclear accountability undermine trust and effectiveness. Citizens often encounter gaps between organisations, even where intentions are aligned.

Recommendations to Actors:

- **Authorities** should play a convening role, bringing actors together around shared priorities and outcomes.
- **All Actors** should use shared tools and language to clarify roles, reduce duplication and improve collaboration.
- **Associates and Allies** should align delivery where objectives overlap, rather than competing for limited attention and resources.

Notes and reflections

Reflection 5: Access to space is systemic

What we observed:

Across all four areas, citizens repeatedly pointed to unused or underused buildings, parks, libraries and schools as opportunities for cultural activity. However, they also described processes for accessing space as opaque, inconsistent and difficult to navigate.

What this tells us about the system:

Barriers to space are structural, embedded in policy, risk frameworks and ownership models. Without coordinated action, access remains limited to those with existing relationships and confidence.

Recommendations to Actors:

- **Authorities and Landowners** should simplify and standardise processes for community access to public and unused spaces.
- **Developers and Institutions** should view cultural use as part of place-making, not an optional add-on.
- **Associates and Community Actors** should be supported to navigate space access through brokerage, advice and shared infrastructure.

Notes and reflections

Reflection 6: Care and labour must count

What we observed:

Citizens noticed the care, facilitation and emotional labour that enabled honest discussion and sustained engagement. They also recognised the fragility of volunteer-led and community-based cultural work.

What this tells us about the system:

The system often underestimates the human labour required to support participation, facilitation and community-centred cultural delivery. This leads to burnout, inequity and instability.

Recommendations to Actors:

- **Commissioners and Funders** should fully cost facilitation, pastoral care, coordination and community leadership.
- **Authorities and Associates** should build realistic timelines and expectations into participation and delivery.
- **All Actors** should recognise care, trust-building and relational work as core infrastructure, not soft extras.

The Citizens for Culture Assembly

The Citizens for Culture Assembly demonstrated that citizens are ready for deeper, more honest conversations about power, equity and responsibility.

The challenge now lies with all actors across the system to respond with clarity, collaboration and courage; and to match citizens' commitment with meaningful change.

Notes and reflections

Citizens' reflections on the Citizens' Assembly

Throughout the Citizens' Assembly, participants were invited to share feedback on their experience. This included quantitative feedback collected through session evaluation forms, alongside open-text comments reflecting on what worked well and what could be improved.

This section summarises what Assembly members told us about taking part.



Who took part

Feedback responses indicate that many Assembly members were not regular participants in civic or public decision-making. Of those who responded:

- 57% said they never or rarely take part in civic activities
- 16% said they sometimes take part
- 27% said they often or very often take part

This suggests that the Assembly engaged a significant number of people who are not usually involved in formal decision-making processes, bringing new perspectives into regional cultural discussions.

Overall experience

- 86% rated their experience as 4 or 5 out of 5
- 89% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt comfortable, included and listened to
- 84% agreed or strongly agreed that they understood the purpose of the Assembly and their role within it
- 84% agreed or strongly agreed that they found the sessions enjoyable and interesting
- 81% agreed or strongly agreed that the information provided by speakers was clear and useful
- 73% agreed or strongly agreed that the structure and pace of sessions worked well

These responses suggest a high level of confidence in the overall design and delivery of the Assembly, while also indicating areas where some participants experienced challenges.

What worked well

Qualitative feedback reinforces the quantitative data. Assembly members frequently highlighted the value of meeting people from different backgrounds and hearing a wide range of perspectives. Small-group discussions were particularly well received, with many participants reporting that these created space for open, respectful and meaningful conversation.

As one participant reflected:

“It’s a fascinating platform for engaging with other local people... everyone there was motivated to improve things.”

Another noted:

“I take great pleasure in small group discussions. Thanks a lot for the efforts of facilitators.”

These reflections align with the high proportion of participants who reported feeling listened to and included.

Challenges and areas for improvement

While most participants felt the structure and pace of the Assembly worked well, the lower agreement score on this measure (73%) suggests that a significant minority found the sessions demanding. This was reflected in comments about the amount of content covered and the clarity of purpose in some sessions:

- “The purpose of the second meeting was a bit unclear... there was a lot to get through.”***

Some participants also raised practical and environmental issues, particularly in larger in-person sessions:

- ***“Due to the number of people in the room, it became hard to hear what others were saying.”***

A small number of respondents reflected on facilitation boundaries, highlighting the importance of ensuring that citizens' voices remain central:

- ***“I disliked how the facilitators spoke on our behalf.”***

Practical barriers were also noted, particularly around travel and timing:

- ***“Travelling from Bath to Bristol by train proved problematic and left insufficient time to get to the venue.”***

Learning for future citizen-led processes

Taken together, this feedback suggests that the Citizens' Assembly succeeded in creating a space where most participants felt included, informed and able to contribute, including many people who do not usually involve themselves in any kind of civic participation.

At the same time, it highlights the importance of clear session purpose, manageable pacing, providing additional travel time across the region, and ongoing reflection on facilitation practice.

The detail that sits behind these findings will be shared with citizens and inform the next phase of Citizens for Culture as we co-design the way the Citizens for Culture Panel will work going forwards over the coming three years. (See next section 'Next Steps: From the Cultural Plan to Action')

2.8

Next Steps: From the Cultural Plan to Action

The Citizens' Assembly marks the end of one phase of Citizens for Culture and the beginning of another.

The Cultural Plan created by Assembly members sets out what people from across the West of England believe should change. But the value of the report depends on what happens next.

From the outset, Citizens for Culture was designed as a process with ongoing citizen involvement, shared responsibility for delivering the plan and accountability.

Citizens for Culture Panel

During the 2023 citizen-led design workshops, people made it clear that citizens should continue to play a role after the Assembly ended.

In response, Citizens for Culture has always planned for there to be some kind of citizen-led oversight panel made up of citizens, to support and oversee the implementation of the Cultural Plan.

Of course, when this was designed, we could not be sure that any of the citizens who sat in the actual Citizens' Assembly would be interested in this approach as it would involve a significant additional commitment beyond the life and remit of the Citizens' Assembly.

A month after the Assembly concluded, we asked members whether any of them would be interested in being part of this panel and over half of members said yes.

At the time of writing this report, we have invited Assembly members to a co-design session to shape how the oversight and implementation function could work.

We know that its role will be to act as a point of continuity between the citizens who developed the Cultural Plan and the organisations, funders and authorities who are involved in delivering it.

This could mean a number of things.

Firstly, there is funding from the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation of £100,000 to test aspects of the plan and the panel could shape these decisions based on the Cultural Plan created by the Citizens' Assembly and then oversee these trials.

Secondly, there is the potential to work with the region's Cultural Compact, an existing group which brings together the five Authorities (West of England Mayoral Combined Authority with Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and Gloucester Unitary Authorities) with Arts Council England and a wide range of stakeholders from the region. The Citizens for Culture Panel could connect and work with the Cultural Compact on the Cultural Plan.

Thirdly, there is the opportunity for the panel to hold Actors to account on the delivery of the plan. The structure of the Cultural Plan - framed as short, medium and long-term actions - recognises that change takes time and that all aspects of the plan will progress over time. The Citizens for Culture Panel will be able to track that progress and, where necessary, provide additional detail and nuance to aspects of the Cultural Plan going forwards.

In the wider context of Citizens' Assemblies and their design, it is increasingly recognised that long-term oversight and implementation are just as important as the actual Assembly process itself. It is envisaged that this will be a process of learning and reflection between citizens and the Actors who come together to help support the plan.

Learning and reflection

Citizens for Culture is also intended to contribute to wider learning about citizen-led decision-making in culture. Throughout the next phase, learning from the delivery of the Cultural Plan — including what works well and what proves more challenging — will be captured and shared.

This learning will help shape future iterations of Citizens for Culture and inform other places and organisations interested in involving citizens more directly in cultural decision-making. In this way, the work of the Citizens' Assembly extends beyond the immediate outcomes of the Cultural Plan, contributing to a broader shift in how culture is shaped, governed and delivered.

Takeaways



Afterword

As this report was being completed, the Independent Review of Arts Council England, led by Baroness Margaret Hodge, was published. It emerged from a different process and asked a different set of questions, focused on how a national funding body operates and how the cultural system might be strengthened for the future.

The Citizens' Assembly took place before the conclusion of the Hodge Review and began much closer to home, asking people across the West of England what culture looks like in their lives, what feels missing, and what needs to change if culture and creativity are truly to be for everyone.

Despite these different starting points, there is a clear connection between the two. The Hodge Review is, at its heart, concerned with how public funding can better support a cultural system that is fair, accessible and trusted. The Assembly brings lived experience into that conversation, showing how funding decisions, structures and priorities are felt on the ground.

Citizens spoke less about institutions and more about access, visibility, fairness and belonging. They talked about local spaces, everyday creativity, and the barriers that make culture feel distant or out of reach. They also showed that when people are given time, information and support, they are well-placed to engage with complex questions about the future.

Taken together, the Review and the Assembly point to a shared opportunity: to connect system-level reform with public insight, and to ensure that changes to cultural funding and governance are informed by the realities of people's lives and communities.

This Cultural Plan offers one way of doing that. It sets out clear public priorities for creativity and culture across the West of England and shows how those priorities can inform regional action-planning. It is now for all of us who work in the creative and cultural sectors - funders, authorities, organisations, practitioners and collaborators - to consider how these insights can shape next steps.

The hope is simple. That culture in the West of England continues to be built with the people who live here, drawing on their knowledge, their creativity and their commitment to their places. Because when culture reflects the lives of its communities, it is stronger, fairer and more relevant for everyone.

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when people are given time, information and support, they are well-placed to engage with complex questions about the future



Annexes

List of Citizens:

- Abhinay
- Alexander
- April
- Barbara
- Benjamin
- Benona
- Carly
- Charli
- Christine
- Christine
- Christopher
- David
- Eagle
- Egwuchukwu
- Emma
- Emma-Claire
- Esther
- Florin
- Fred
- Gareth
- Gemma
- Holly
- Jason
- Jeremy
- Jo Keely
- Jonathan
- Julia
- Katy
- Lauren
- Luke
- Maria
- Martin
- Mary
- Matt
- Megan
- Mike
- Mustafa
- Nathan
- Neve
- Pearl
- Ross
- Ryan
- Sebastien
- Sienna
- Stephen
- Steve
- Timothy
- Tom
- Windy
- Yulia
- Yvonne

List of Team:

- **Co-Lead Facilitator and Partner** - LaToyah McAllister Jones, Associate Involve
- **Co-Lead-Facilitator** - Rebekah McCabe, Involve
- **Table Facilitators** - Gnisha Bevan, John Lomas, Louise Hill-Davis, Lucy Heard, Manu Maunganidze, Rosalie White, Sandra Meadows, Tony Bhajam
- **Partner** - Emma Harvey, Trinity Community Arts
- **Mayoral Combined Authority** - Sarah James, Head of Creative and Cultural Economy, Zahra Hoccom, Culture Project Officer, Sally Larkin, Careers Hub Officer
- **Online Space Producers** - Cath Mattos and Jo Noble
- **Safeguard and Wellbeing** - Elli Spraggon, Hattie de Santis and Xahnnaa Adlam
- **Culture West Evaluation** - Euella Jackson
- **Sortition Foundation** - Rich Rippin, Caroline Harrison
- **Communications** - Parys Gardener, Purplefish and Sarah Bentley
- **Community Mobilisers** - Ella Sayce and Larna Makeda Bernard
- **Citizens Assembly Producer** - Anjali Prashar-Savoie
- **Citizens for Culture Project Manager and Partner** - David Jubb, Citizens In Power

Annexes

List of Speakers and Commentators (Presentations)

- **Adam Fuller** (The Front Room) - Shared the story of building a community theatre in Weston-super-Mare and its impact on inclusion and wellbeing;
- **Angie Baul** (Trigger) - Presented large-scale public art as a way to reduce isolation and strengthen rural and under-served communities;
- **Bashart Malik** (filmmaker) - Highlighted barriers faced by Black and Global Majority creatives in film and television;
- **Chloe Schofield** (artist) - Shared arts-and-nature work supporting wellbeing and environmental connection;
- **Dana Lungu** (University of Bristol) - Presented learning from work with migrant and refugee mothers, highlighting belonging, welcome and the role of grassroots spaces;
- **David Moss** (NHS) - Drew on lived experience to show how creativity and storytelling can support health, care and system change;
- **Dr Natalie Hyacinth** (sound artist and academic) - Made the case for sound and music as vital tools for community connection and wellbeing;
- **Dr Shawn Sobers** (Fairfield House / UWE Bristol / Firstborn Creatives) - Explored identity, heritage and community storytelling, bridging academic and lived experience;
- **Ella Sayce** (practitioner/producer) - Presented a community-led video project exploring accessible, multi-sensory creative experiences;
- **Esther Lam** (practitioner/producer) - Presented co-created cultural work with Hong Kong migrants, showing how inclusive spaces enable participation and belonging;
- **Julz Davis** (Curiosity UnLtd) + **James Sardi** (Led By Donkeys) - Explored how creativity supports self-expression, activism and community-led change;
- **Katharine Lazare** (Theatre Royal Bath) - Shared the development of Venue 4 as an affordable, community-facing creative space;
- **Kathryn Davis** (Visit West) - Shared insight into the visitor economy, its role in jobs and place, and the importance of sustainability and inclusion;
- **Laura Porter** (Now Hear This Music C.I.C.) - Shared disabled-led, co-produced music practice demonstrating inclusive creative models;

Annexes

List of Speakers and Commentators (Presentations) (Cont.)

- **Lizzy Stephens and Louise Betts** (Travelling Light Theatre) - Shared evidence on the benefits of creative participation for children and young people;
- **Michael Loader** (Somerset Storyfest) - Presented the One Tree Refugee Project, showing how refugee storytelling builds understanding and creativity;
- **Play:Disrupt** (participatory design studio) - Used playful, participatory mapping to help citizens understand how the cultural ecosystem works and where influence and collaboration sit;
- **Professor Eleonora Belfiore** (Coventry University) - Framed the core challenge as unequal access to resources, recognition and decision-making power in culture;
- **Ruby Sant** (artist, producer and facilitator) - Shared practice focused on widening opportunity for people excluded by socio-economic barriers;
- **Sarah James** (West of England Mayoral Combined Authority) - Set out the regional context, including the scale of the creative economy and how culture connects to wider regional priorities;
- **Sophie Moysey** (Arts Council England) - Explained the role of Arts Council England, how funding works, and the pressures facing national cultural investment;
- **Stella Mann** (Glenside Hospital Museum) - Shared how a small museum uses heritage and creative activity to support mental health awareness and wellbeing;
- **Superculture** - Shared place-based learning on building an inclusive creative ecology in Weston-super-Mare.

Annexes

Full List of Evidence Snapshots and Written Submissions

- **AI and creative industries** (team research) - Opportunities and risks of AI for culture, including ethics, access and bias;
- **Alex Gibson** (Museum Development South West) - Overview of the regional museum sector, including pressures, opportunities and community roles;
- **Anna Farthing** (Business Improvement District) - How Business Improvement Districts and visitor levies could support place-based cultural investment;
- **Anna Russell** (National Trust) - The role of heritage and landscapes in shaping identity, access and public benefit;
- **Bernard Donoghue** (Chair of Bristol Old Vic, People's History Museum) - The current financial fragility of the cultural sector and its impact on organisations;
- **Clare Morris, Kate Murray, Emma Wellard and Sophia Richards** (West of England Libraries) - Libraries as free civic spaces, their pressures and future potential as creative and cultural spaces;
- **Culture as a commons** (team research) - Shared cultural spaces, community ownership and stewardship models;
- **Dr Dave O'Brien, Mark Taylor** (University of Manchester, Sheffield University) - How class and inequality shape access and opportunity in culture;
- **Eliza Easton** (Erskine Analysis) - Growth of creative technology and the risks and opportunities for inclusion;
- **How the money works in the cultural sector** (Team Research) - The mixed funding economy and how power and inequality shape investment;
- **Jez Hall** (Shared Future) - How participatory budgeting works and what meaningful citizen power looks like;
- **Jo Verrent** (Unlimited) - Barriers and opportunities for disabled artists and audiences, and what genuine accessibility looks like;
- **Liz Roberts** (University of West of England) - Alternative ideas for a regional cultural plan grounded in practice;
- **Nick Harrison** (Sutton Trust) - Evidence on social mobility and socio-economic barriers in creative careers;

Annexes

Evidence Snapshots and Written Submissions (Cont.)

- **Pauline Mallam** (Aardman Animations) - Practical approaches to embedding equity, diversity and inclusion in creative workplaces;
- **Professor Penny Hay** (Bath Spa University) - The importance of creativity in education and how access shapes long-term opportunity;
- **Robin Simpson** (Creative Lives) - The scale and value of everyday creativity and volunteering, and the barriers facing community groups;
- **Samir Savant** (Arts Council England and St George's Bristol) - Reflections on the future role of Arts Council England and regional partnership;
- **Universal Basic Income for artists** (Team Research) - Learning from international pilots and implications for creative sustainability.

Full list of the questions raised by citizens after the experienced the presentations and evidence:



**SCAN TO VIEW CITIZENS'
LIST OF QUESTIONS**

<http://tiny.cc/b5jx001>

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Notes and reflections