

# Culture, Arts and Heritage Strategy for the Scottish Borders

2025 - 2028

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## Foreword

As the Executive Member for Culture, I am delighted to present the Culture, Arts and Heritage Strategy for the Scottish Borders.

Over the past months, we have embarked on a journey to understand the cultural landscape of our region. We have engaged with community groups, cultural organisations, and stakeholders to ensure that our strategy reflects the diverse voices and aspirations of the Scottish Borders, and we are committed to continuing work with the sector to refine and improve this document to form a dynamic strategy that truly represents the needs and aspirations of our regional cultural ecosystem.

Collaborative cultural engagement initiatives have been pivotal in bringing together artists, creative practitioners, historians, academics and local communities together to discuss and celebrate our rich heritage and consider how we preserve that for future generations and showcase this unique place and its people to the world.

Our work has been guided by the recognition of the need to improve access to culture and an understanding of all that it is. To improve the diversity of people involved and participating, to address equality and barriers to being a part of local culture and pursuing creative careers.

We have set out to create a strategy that is action orientated, and hope that through continued collaboration we can establish leadership and support strategic goals for the region.

The alignment of our culture strategy with the regional tourism and events strategy will be instrumental in promoting the Scottish Borders as a premier destination for cultural tourism. The pioneering screen strategy and the efforts to promote the region as a destination for film and media will elevate the perception of our cultural offering and showcase our area on the big and small screen. By leveraging the synergies between these strategies, we aim to attract visitors, support local businesses, boost the creative economy and catalyse third sector activity to respond to local need.

Furthermore, our strategy is in harmony with the national frameworks set forth by Creative Scotland and Historic Environment Scotland (HES). We are committed to upholding the standards of excellence and innovation that these organisations champion, ensuring that our cultural initiatives contribute to the broader goals of cultural development and preservation.

As we move forward, I am confident that this strategy will serve as a roadmap for nurturing and celebrating the cultural heritage of the Scottish Borders. Together, we will continue to build a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable cultural landscape that reflects the unique character and spirit of our region.

Thank you to everyone who has spoken with us, told your stories and shared your experiences – we look forward to continuing to work with you on our cultural journey.

Cllr Carol Hamilton  
Executive Member for Housing and Culture  
Scottish Borders Council



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## Introduction

Welcome to the Scottish Borders Culture, Arts and Heritage Strategy. This is a dynamic blueprint for developing and investing in the rich culture and heritage of our region; encouraging residents and visitors alike to participate in and enjoy the traditions and stories that make the Borders unique.

Following engagement with hundreds of communities, practitioners and organisations, this strategy has been developed by Scottish Borders Council in partnership with Live Borders, South of Scotland Enterprise and Creative Scotland as a foundational piece for a Borders Wide approach to cultural development.

Founded on a principle of collaboration and co-production, the strategy is a living document which will evolve as we continue to work with the cultural sector, and craft an approach that empowers communities to embrace long held traditions and invest in a sustainable future for their place.

Successfully implementing this strategy hinges on embedding community-led innovation and third sector presence as a core value and delivery channel and shining a light on the rich tapestry of culture that this region has to offer.

Culture, Arts and Heritage in the Scottish Borders: The Scottish Borders is a region defined by its rich cultural heritage, vibrant arts scene, and strong sense of local identity. Its uniqueness lies in the blend of ancient traditions, diverse communities, and a landscape that inspires creativity. The area's culture is shaped by centuries-old customs such as the Common Ridings, civic weeks, and local festivals, which bring together towns and villages in celebration of their history and community spirit. These events, alongside traditions like the Herring Queen Festival in Eyemouth and the Reivers Festival in Hawick, are not only markers of local pride but also attract thousands of visitors each year, reinforcing the Borders' reputation as a place of living heritage.

Local traditions are fiercely protected and celebrated, with each community contributing its own stories, music, and customs. The region's cultural landscape is marked by a strong volunteer base and community activism, which underpin grassroots arts initiatives and heritage projects. From village halls hosting music and drama to community-led regeneration of historic buildings, the Borders demonstrates a remarkable capacity for self-organisation and creativity.

The Borders is home to a wide array of businesses and organisations spanning visual arts, music, performing arts, crafts, film, literature, and digital innovation. Institutions like the Great Tapestry of Scotland, Melrose Music Festival, and Alchemy Film and Arts showcase local talent and provide platforms for creative expression. The region's museums,

galleries, and libraries serve as vital hubs for lifelong learning, wellbeing, and social connection.

Initiatives such as Inspire Learning and partnerships with Borders College and Heriot Watt University support digital skills and offer opportunities for creative pathways for young people, with opportunities to build on existing partnerships and invest in cultural education.

Community-led plans emphasise the importance of cultural education, career opportunities in the arts, and universal access to music and creative activities.

The Borders' cultural sector is closely tied to wellbeing, with creative health initiatives supporting mental health, tackling loneliness, and empowering communities. Arts-based programmes for early years, dementia care, and postnatal support highlight the therapeutic benefits of cultural engagement. The strategy recognises the need for trauma-informed spaces and inclusive programming, ensuring that culture is accessible to all, regardless of age, background, or ability.

Digital innovation presents opportunities for growth in areas such as screen industries, tourism, and CreaTech.

By presenting a strategic framework to help the Borders harness its unique traditions, creative talent, and collaborative spirit, the region can build a sustainable and inclusive cultural ecosystem. Investment in digital infrastructure, creative

education, and community-led initiatives will drive economic growth, attract visitors, and improve wellbeing.

Encouraging collaboration across the sector between public, private, and third sector organisations whilst formalising partnerships will help to establish leadership, innovation, and shared ownership. By emphasising the role of community and supporting local initiatives, driving diversity, accessibility, and environmental sustainability, the Borders can position itself as a leading destination for culture, arts, and heritage—benefiting residents, visitors, and future generations.

## Vision for Culture Arts and Heritage in the Scottish Borders

By improving access to culture, supporting creative careers, and enterprises promoting collaboration, we aim to enhance the region's cultural identity and showcase the talent of this region to the world.

We want to create a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable cultural landscape that celebrates our rich heritage and local traditions to boost the creative economy, for the wellbeing and prosperity of our residents, communities and visitors.

### Approach

We set out with this strategy to fulfil basic **principles** to support the development of the cultural sector in the Scottish Borders to be:

- Inclusive
- Action orientated
- Establish leadership
- Foster collaboration
- Encourage participation
- Adaptable and dynamic
- Remove barriers
- Support strategic goals for the region

Using the foundations for cultural development laid out in the National Culture Strategy for Scotland and adopting the **objectives** of:

- Strengthening culture
- Transforming through culture
- Empowering through culture

And supplementing those overarching ambitions with developed Borders priorities:

- Fostering identity and belonging through culture
- Developing culture and creative economy
- Improving access to culture and supporting wellbeing

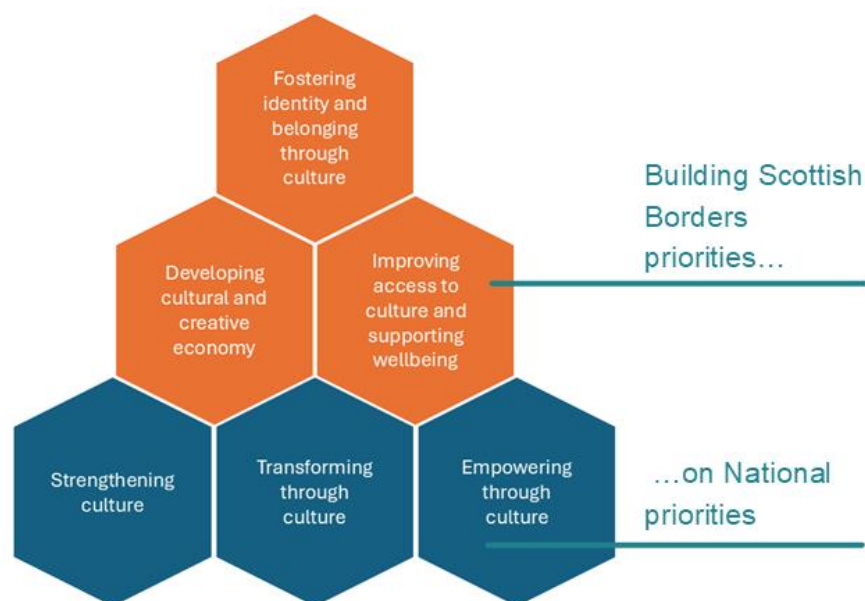


Image | Illustration of the Objectives of the Scottish Borders Culture Strategy Building on the National Strategy's Identified Outcomes

The engagement process confirmed that these overarching principles were correct, and allowed for the feedback and data gathered to be distilled down into eight **themes** that reflect the

aspirations outlined in the engagement provide a framework for bettering cultural development in the Scottish Borders:

**Visibility:** Improve the perception and promotion of the Scottish Borders as a dynamic and contemporary cultural region.

**Connectedness:** Strengthen networks and partnerships within the cultural sector and with other sectors

**Sustainability:** Ensure the long-term viability of cultural initiatives through effective resource management, evaluation metrics, and material to lobby for funding

**Traditions:** Build on the region's strong heritage and traditions while fostering contemporary innovation and attracting industry

**Ambition and Quality:** Encourage high standards and ambitious cultural programming and education

**Unity and Diversity:** Celebrate and empower the region's diverse communities and their unique cultural identities, and encourage participation and equality of opportunity for all

**Safeguarding Our Environment:** Developing a culture sector that is at the forefront of climate adaptation and striving for environmentally sustainable models to invest in cultural spaces and places.

**Skills and Education:** Champion cultural education in our schools and in our communities.

To do this, we need to reset the collective mindset of what culture is, who it's for, what it can do for us, and remove the barriers for people to get involved.

## What does the strategy cover?

The strategy reflects the ideas and aspirations for the region's cultural development and sets out a framework for greater collaboration between public and private sector organisations, freelance individuals and communities. This includes investment in the sector, the value placed on the eco system of heritage and creativity to support and empower communities, grow the economy and support wider regional objectives.

Whilst the strategy recognises the importance of the built environment in the cultural landscape, the management and operational arrangements for buildings, spaces and places do not form part of the recommendations for this document but seeks to support the development of other work programmes considering the viability of heritage and other assets in the Scottish Borders.

## So, what is culture?

The million-dollar question that we have faced throughout our engagement, with very varied and colourful responses. What culture is, and what it includes and represents is met with wildly differing interpretations.

It's so tricky to define in fact, that the national paper, [A Culture Strategy for Scotland](#) goes as far as leaving the definition ambiguous, describing culture as something that takes place everywhere, every day.

The traditions and creativity that this word "culture" captures applies to the stories of this land and its people as far back as millennia, and as recently as the last few seconds. Considering this the "intangible cultural heritage", this strategy aims to capture the essence of ancient and modern history and the application and challenges of the cultural landscape of the here and now. For the purpose of the strategy, we have considered culture as an umbrella term for:

- **Traditions and stories**
- **Heritage and history**
- **Nature and the landscape**
- **Arts, creative practice and self-expression**
- **Creative economy and tourism**
- **Creative health, wellbeing and community cohesion**
- **Cultural and creative education and skills**





South of Scotland Creative Eco-system

Image | “Categories of Culture”

Credit | Creative Economy Guide, South of Scotland Enterprise

The South of Scotland Creative Economy guide outlines 16 categories of interconnected industries which we have broadly adopted to guide the discussions on the spectrum of cultural activity – inclusive of the education, educational resources and skills pathways that are the foundational route into industry and engaging with the sector.

This was to ensure an inclusive approach to engagement and identifying who needs to be involved from the “cultural sector” to help guide the approach. We have sought representative voices from:

- Advertising
- Architecture and Design
- Built Heritage and Destinations
- Computer Games
- Crafts
- Cultural Education and Awards
- Fashion and Textiles
- Film and Video
- Heritage
- Music
- Performing Arts
- Photography
- Radio and TV
- Software and Electronic Publishing
- Visual Art
- Writing and Publishing
- Community and Third Sector Organisations
- Health and Social Care
- Tourism and Visitor Economy

Mapping of the cultural sector has been undertaken as part of the process with more than 1100 organisations active in the Scottish Borders. An overview of the dynamic data can be accessed via the [Culture Strategy Information web page](#) [or Appendix A – Cultural Mapping – List of Cultural Players]

By taking a sector led approach the strategy aims to establish a foundation of engagement both within the creative and cultural sector and the community base to ensure that cultural development is inclusive of the core traditions and heritage offering of the Borders, as well as providing a platform for the creative sector to grow and thrive here into the future.

There is huge opportunity to develop partnerships with private sector and explore joint funding opportunities across public, community and commercial organisations for mutual benefit – building networks, supporting and investing in existing and emerging cross sector groups and venues.

Support to establish stable income streams and reliable funding sources to sustain cultural activity is vital for the core infrastructure of the sector. With scope to improve support to access grant funding for creative practitioners and organisations innovating in our region.

Recognising the huge economic contribution of the creative economy, and the vast wellbeing benefits of cultural activity and inclusion, the strategy outlines the process of engagement to gather information about what is action is needed. This feedback has been used to establish of themes,

and the recommendations for next steps to engage on this, as a dynamic strategy, and for the establishment of a Cultural Partnership model for a collaborative effort to develop Culture.

## Strategic Landscape

Culture is one of the richest offerings we have, and establishing a strategic approach to cultural development, supporting creativity, safeguarding heritage and our environment, and encouraging intercultural dialogue is critical to supporting the sector to thrive in this region and show case our talent to the world.

The strategy is not positioned to compete with or replace current strategies, rather it helps stakeholders to identify the connections and understand the relevance of other strategic documents that rely on a cultural offering, or that function as part of the cultural eco system.

Further information on the interconnected nature of the strategic landscape both regionally and nationally can be found as part of the background papers outlining the research base that supports the strategy. [Appendix B – Strategic Landscape and Context Report]

## Context

The need to develop a new Culture Strategy for the Scottish Borders was identified through the ongoing Scottish Borders Place Partnership and was a recommendation that came out of the [Joint Strategic Review of Live Borders Services](#)

Conducted in 2023 the review prompted a [transformation programme](#) to revitalise and reimagine the leisure offering in the Borders. The recommendations were built upon the feedback of more than 6,500 people, engagement with members of the public, staff, trustees and Councillors at Live Borders and the Council and an assessment of the current services and facilities.

Twenty-six recommendations under three broad categories (property, operational and income generation) along with five further pieces of work were set out by the consultants.

Defining the role of Live Borders as the leisure trust in the cultural space was a desired outcome of the review, however further recognition was given to the need for a whole sector approach to developing the creative industries, supporting the traditions and heritage of the region to flourish, and telling the stories of the Borders region.

This strategy encompasses the geographical area of the rural local authority, addressing the diverse demographic and cultural backgrounds of its residents.

## Looking back to look forward...



*“A cultural strategy for the Scottish Borders will establish shared priorities that drive collaborative work across organisations and sectors and make it possible for us to contribute successfully to wider regional agendas and key national strategies.”*

### ***A Cultural Strategy for the Scottish Borders***

The aspiration for the sector to come together to be greater than the sum of its parts was outlined in the previous Culture Strategy authored in 2014, which sought to establish shared priorities and encourage collaboration to contribute to wider regional and national agendas.

The reporting behind the 2014 initiative highlighted the importance of strategic cultural planning given the challenges typical of a rural Scottish region. Emphasis was placed on the need for sustainable cultural development given the economic pressures but focussed on opportunities and initiatives that brought people and organisations together and made culture more visible.

The vision to have Scottish Borders be recognised and celebrated as one of the richest, most distinctive, and diverse cultural regions in Scotland by 2019 focussed on the aims:

**Communicate:** Enhance the visibility and promotion of the region's cultural activities.

**Connect:** Foster connections within the cultural sector and with other sectors such as tourism and health.

**Value:** Recognise and demonstrate the social and economic value of cultural activities.

**Empower:** Enable cultural organisations and individuals to shape the future of culture in the region

The sentiment of this ambition still rings true today, and there is an opportunity of a new strategic approach to address these ambitions in a contemporary setting.

The opportunity presented to Scottish Borders as part of the South of Scotland with the economic expertise of South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) provides a platform for growth of creative industry and helps to establish the South of Scotland as a creative powerhouse, with over 6000 people working and volunteering in creative industries across the two local authorities, and over 800 businesses in the Borders alone.

Recognising the grassroots and community organisations often provide the first steps into cultural participation and social connection for many residents, the contribution of the third sector in delivering cultural activity is a large part of the picture in the Borders, bringing in additional investment, volunteers, and in-kind resources demonstrating the economic

and social value. That goes into making visible the rich tapestry of activity that there is on offer in this area.

## Engagement

### “Working Together, Improving Lives”

This statement is key theme of the Scottish Borders Council Plan, and by working with the cultural sector, communities and partner organisations Scottish Borders Council aims to provide the foundational engagement for an effective strategy to develop Culture.

The goal is to co-produce a strategy with all the players that engage in creative fields, are the custodians of heritage, and work to celebrate the traditions of the Borders. The strategy needs to represent the beneficiaries of the sector activities and provide a framework to develop and support the rich tapestry of cultural offerings to residents and visitors alike.

Direct engagement on the strategy has provided an opportunity to ask directly what is needed from a strategy and identified the challenges and opportunities. This has been coupled with reference to the range of engagement activities that have taken place over the last number of years, including community led consultation that has taken place as part of place making and gathered a wealth of insights around cultural services, initiatives and spaces.

For further information on the engagement process and other data and resources referenced see [Appendix C – Engagement Report]

## A Cultural Partnership

As part of the engagement process, the strategy has been pitched as a strategy for the sector – a basis for the industry to come together through a process facilitated by the Council. The premise of a strategy that is collectively owned by a “Cultural Partnership” is based on the principles of Creative Scotland Place Partnerships, and the various models that have emerged from those principles in other local authority areas, and the strength that that collaborative forum has afforded other regions.

The development of a cultural partnership model has been tested through members of the Cultural Strategy Advisory Group who have attended sessions on the strategy development facilitated by Southern Uplands Partnership [Appendix D - Public Engagement to Develop a Culture Strategy for the Scottish Borders] and latterly with Creative Services Scotland on the formation of a partnership arrangement, and the structure that might suit the dynamics of the Borders region.

**The forthcoming report will outline a 3 x 3 year phased development approach to establishing the partnership, with the Culture Strategy actions aligned to that model over a 9 year period.**

## Call to Action

In order to address the challenges identified and realise the opportunities and ideas, outlined in the strategy, collaborative working across the sector will be needed to drive the change.

This aligns with the unique opportunities for the Scottish Borders as part of the Natural Capital Innovation Zone (NCIZ) encouraging collaboration to support nature based solutions for the wellbeing economy and tackle the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change.

A strategy ground in action will reap the collective benefits to support a vibrant cultural ecosystem and bring the sector together in a common purpose.

Delivering against the original objectives of:

- Strengthening culture
- Transforming through culture
- Empowering through culture
- Fostering identity and belonging through culture
- Developing culture and creative economy
- Improving access to culture and supporting wellbeing

By establishing an action plan under thematic headings developed from the feedback and data gathered in the engagement stage, there is the opportunity for a collaborative approach to cultural development that benefits the whole sector.

Determining the objectives, and outlining high level actions will allow organisations, communities and individuals to consider how they can contribute to a Cultural Partnership approach, and further the outcomes.

Preserving the cultural identity and integrity of the Scottish Borders will require long term strategies to ensure the preservation of the historic environment and allow the creative economy to flourish. Infrastructure to support that development will be key to that future, making certain that Scottish Borders is in a position to capitalise on all the opportunities to showcase the unique cultural offering of the area.

Identifying short, medium and long term goals will allow for actions with immediate impact to progress whilst planning for future interventions which can be refined and ratified through that partnership approach.

## Visibility

**Improve the perception and promotion of the Scottish Borders as a dynamic and contemporary cultural region.**

This applies equally to visitors, residents and communities alike

Objective	Action	Partners	Timeframe
Working collaboratively with partners to ensure penetration of cultural opportunities into all communities	<p>Demonstrating the opportunities for cultural participation through promotion of case studies of successful initiatives and demonstrating role models from within communities to inspire participation.</p> <p>Showcasing a cross section of community led creative projects including informal and volunteer run venues, pop up events and micro festivals as well as established events and institutions</p>	<p>Creative Practitioners Community Groups Creative Arts Business Network Scottish Borders Council Live Borders Borders Community Action</p>	Short
Provide useful information and support to connect those seeking finance with funding and income opportunities	<p>Improve transparency on public sector funding for the cultural sector, support proactive applications to secure finances and raise awareness of cultural funding opportunities and subsidy control in the work of the <a href="#">Culture and Heritage SLAED</a></p>	<p>Creative Arts Business Network Scottish Borders Council South of Scotland Enterprise Creative Scotland Historic Environment Scotland</p>	Short
Provide a platform for creative business and enterprise to promote their offering and show case Borders talent	<p>Look at possibility of a platform for promotion of literature, film and other media focussed on Borders heritage, history, language and traditions.</p> <p>Showcasing case studies, and opportunities to profile the achievements and careers of local people. Both to encourage visitor interest and inspire the younger generation</p> <p>Identify opportunities for unified promotion and marketing of Borders events akin to the Fringe platform in Edinburgh, offering a single access point to cultural venues, events and activities.</p>	<p>Cultural Partnership Creative Practitioners Scottish Borders Council Live Borders South of Scotland Enterprise Visit Scotland South of Scotland Destination Alliance Event Scotland Creative Arts Business Network Developing the Young Workforce Alchemy Film and Arts</p>	Short / Medium / Long



	Form a cross sectoral working group to look at region wide audience development, considering the segmentation between local residents, day trippers and longer dwelling visitors to develop an approach for tailored experiences and inclusive planning.  Showcase the Borders as a thriving ecosystem for creativity and innovation to attract people to visit, work and live here	Federation of Village Halls Management Committees Borders Community Action Creative Scotland Historic Environment Scotland Community Planning Partnership (CPP)	
Recognising cultural assets and the prime offering of the region to grow the visitor economy	Support the aspirations for tourism development with a formalised strategic partnership between the cultural sector and South of Scotland Destination Alliance and Visit Scotland  Support initiatives of the tourism agency and partners to improve connections between cultural and heritage sites and promotional offers to enhance the visitor offering	Cultural Partnership South of Scotland Destination Alliance Visit Scotland Event Scotland Live Borders Creative Arts Business Network	<b>Short / Medium</b>

## Connectedness

### Strengthen networks and partnerships within the cultural sector and with other sectors.

Consider the structures that already exist, and the mechanisms that could provide better connection

Objective	Action	Partners	Timeframe
Established leadership championing the cultural development of the Scottish Borders and identifying opportunities	Using the process of establishing a Cultural Partnership model to determine the leadership needs of the industry, and the governance structures required to provide effective support for all the sub sectors. Benchmarking against other local authority area models and working collaboratively with advisors from within the sector is key to creating a lasting structure with buy in from the sector.  The partnership must offer equitable status to all partners including third sector and community representatives, young people and those with protected characteristics	Creative Services Scotland Culture sector stakeholders Creative Practitioners Public Scottish Borders Council Community Planning Partnership Children's and Youth Arts Advocacy Borders Additional Needs Group	<b>Short / Medium</b>
Proactive support for creative individuals, voluntary groups, third	Supporting the development of a sustainable functional business network from the structure of the Creative Arts Business Network (CABN) and identifying the role of the network in supporting	Creative Arts Business Network South of Scotland Enterprise	<b>Short / Medium</b>



sector organisations business and enterprise development, training and opportunities	practitioners, organisations and community enterprise across the cultural sector, beyond the creative arts  Consider the need for a “Cultural Forum” for networking, information and knowledge sharing, and consider how SBC community engagement infrastructure could facilitate peer-led, grassroots input and sector professionals-	Scottish Borders Council Creative Scotland Borders Community Action	
Strong meaningful connections between community, industry and education	Through the Cultural Partnership model, connecting community initiatives and enterprise into the ecosystem of funding and support for cultural organisations  Establish opportunities for a cultural industry network to connect with learners and support routes into creative career pathways	Scottish Borders Council Borders College Heriot Watt DYW Scotland South of Scotland Enterprise Skills Development Scotland	Medium
Effective collaboration between agencies for the greater benefit of the region’s wellbeing and prosperity	Develop a multi partner action plan to increase cultural engagement and improve diversity of participants by reducing the barriers and improving access with an alliance of targeted promotion from wellbeing services connected into cultural programming with equitable inclusion of third sector organisations	Cultural Partnership Health and Social Care Partnership Borders Additional Needs Group Community Planning Partnership	Short / Medium
Empower people with data to understand what cultural activity there is in the Borders and make better connections	Continue mapping the sector and explore mechanisms to provide public data to support sector development	Scottish Borders Council Live Borders South of Scotland Enterprise Creative Scotland Historic Environment Scotland	Short
Leverage the wealth of knowledge, skills and cultural excellence in Scotland and bring that expertise to the Borders	Identify opportunities to work in partnership with national organisations outreach teams to expand the cultural offering in the Borders and support innovation and entrepreneurship in emerging industry	Cultural Partnership Melrose Music Festival Royal Chamber Orchestra Borders College CodeBase and Techscaler South of Scotland Enterprise	Short / Medium

		Creative Scotland SBC Live Borders	
Maximise the opportunities of working with other regions to encourage cross boundary collaboration with the Scottish Borders	Support the Regional Economic Strategy Delivery Plan to encourage a South of Scotland approach to joining up strategic efforts in Dumfries and Galloway with Scottish Borders and encourage sharing of resources and learning  Recognise the cross border cultural exchange extends beyond the South of Scotland for many of our communities, and explore opportunities for collaboration and connection with our neighbours in East Lothian, Northumberland and South Lanarkshire	Regional Economic Partnership Cultural Partnership South of Scotland Enterprise Scottish Borders Council Live Borders DG Unlimited Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal Edinburgh and South East of Scotland City Region Deal	Medium
<b>Sustainability</b> Ensure the long-term viability of cultural initiatives through effective resource management, evaluation metrics, and material to lobby for funding			
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Sustainable funding models which allow for long term planning	Working as a Cultural Partnership to advocate for the needs of the sector to identify longer term funding models to allow cultural programmes to be established and relied upon by service users	Cultural Partnership Creative Scotland Historic Environment Scotland	Medium / Long
Transparency on funding allocation and expenditure	Formalising a reporting mechanism for statutory funders to publish funding decisions to provide visibility to the sector and public on how culture, creative industry and heritage is being supported and invested in.	Scottish Borders Council Live Borders Creative Scotland Historic Environment Scotland	Short
Progressive procurement models which provide an alternative funding stream to the cultural sector	Formation of a working group to determine the opportunities of leveraging public spending to support funding into the sector through design of procurement contracts, community benefits and participatory budgeting. Looking to other public bodies to collaborate and learn from examples and best practice	Scottish Borders Council South of Scotland Enterprise Improvement Service	Medium

Empower communities to connect with creative practitioners to support community planning	Consider community benefits and participatory budgeting opportunities to support creative place making and the benefits of embedding creative practitioners in change programmes and engagement	Borders Community Action Scottish Borders Council South of Scotland Enterprise Town Teams Community Groups	<b>Short / Medium</b>
	Support communities in their aspirations for community ownership of heritage buildings, venues and assets by ensuring a financially viable model can be achieved with support from economic development professionals  Identify opportunities for collaborative funding models by “bundling” projects to improve eligibility and prospects for financial sustainability with access to longer term investment models and holistic business case development	Community Groups Cultural Partnership Scottish Borders Council South of Scotland Enterprise Community Ownership Support Service Historic Environment Scotland Built Environment Forum Scotland Borders College	<b>Medium / Long</b>
Evaluation models and tools which allow for critical appraisal to determine sustainability and success	Establishing a methodology for evaluation as part of a Cultural Partnership to provide data to influence funding decisions and allow for critical examination of how and where funding is allocated, the reach of the investment, the diversity of the beneficiaries and the benefits to the industry and creative practitioners.  Clear evaluation tools tailored for small-scaled community projects should complement larger-scale impact reporting to support access to traditional and alternative funding models	Cultural Partnership Regional Economic Partnership Community Planning Partnership Scottish Borders Council Borders Community Action South of Scotland Enterprise	<b>Short / Medium</b>

## Traditions

**Build on the region's strong heritage and traditions while fostering contemporary innovation and stewardship of our environment**

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Remove barriers to investment in historical structures and	Forming a working group with national partners to address difficulties in establishing ownership to allow for communities to invest resources in historical structures and sites. Determining mechanisms for encouraging investment from absent landlords and	Historic Environment Scotland Registers of Scotland Scottish Borders Council	<b>Medium</b>

improvement of heritage buildings	statutory applications to prevent building deterioration and preservation of buildings at risk.		
Encourage use case development and community empowerment	Taking a practical approach to risk assessment for communities who wish to utilise historical sites, and bring together partners to support sustainable use cases, whilst being sensitive to historical and archaeological significance.	Historic Environment Scotland Community Groups Scottish Borders Council	Medium
Embrace new technologies and leverage the possibilities to reinvigorate heritage events and sites	Applying technology funding and training opportunities to cultural projects and programmes. Opportunities to leverage national programmes, such as Techscaler, into local organisations coupled with strategic collaboration between academia and the sector to innovate and leverage research and development into the Borders.  Embrace the opportunities of emerging technology for immersive experiences and gamification to bolster participation in culture and expand reach beyond our geography	Borders College Heriot Watt South of Scotland Enterprise Techscaler Scottish AI Alliance Scotland 5G Centre Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal Destination Tweed	Medium / Long
Creative activity which embraces everything the Borders has to offer – showcasing the landscape and the language that inspires people here	Encourage the use of the Scottish Borders as a setting for creativity, leveraging the opportunities of screen development in the region to establish the scenic nature of the land and its biodiversity, and explore the colloquialisms of the Borders embracing the linguistic diversity principles of the Scottish Languages Act	South of Scotland Enterprise Regional Economic Partnership Creative Practitioners Screen Scotland	Medium
Champion local festivals and traditional events to reach a wider audience and encourage participation	Recognise the importance of local festival heritage and the role of civic weeks, common ridings and local events calendars in creating community cohesion and sense of belonging.  Proactively explore opportunities to improve participation and reduce economic exclusion.  Consider strategies and identify funding to ensure local people have the skills to take part in ride outs in years to come.	Cultural Partnership Common Riding Committees Borders Community Action Scottish Borders Council	Short / Medium

## Ambition and Quality

### Encourage high standards and ambitious cultural programming

Objective	Action	Partners	Timeframe
Universal support for cultural organisations and third sector groups to deliver dynamic cultural programmes and events showcasing the range of artists, performers and assets the Borders has to offer	<p>Collaboration, peer support and strong network of connections to empower communities and encourage cross sector collaboration.</p> <p>Support for fundraising and proactive investment in resources to champion the Scottish Borders as a region of cultural excellence.</p> <p>Actively promoting and resourcing community led and third sector run cultural spaces and events to maximise uptake and participation.</p>	<p>Cultural Partnership</p> <p>Venues and Historic Houses</p> <p>Festivals and Events</p> <p>Community Groups</p> <p>Scottish Borders Council</p> <p>Creative Scotland</p> <p>Creative Arts Business Network</p>	Short
Strong and dynamic leisure trust focussed on the cultural enrichment of the Borders, and promoting local talent	<p>Empowering Live Borders to champion cultural development in the region and build relationships with local organisations to foster a collaborative partnership between commercial and community offerings</p> <p>Clearly set out Live Borders market sector and remit to define the parameters of the leisure trusts work to remove feelings of competition with the wider industry and encourage ambition from all sectors in bringing forth creative programmes and events calendars</p> <p>Implement service provision that is designed around the access requirements of the community, considering timetabling to accommodate diversity of users' needs, including those of young people, to encourage participation</p> <p>Continue to work in partnership with Live Borders on the delivery of transformation and facilities programme to ensure sustainability of services and provision of welcoming and inclusive environments</p>	<p>Cultural Partnership</p> <p>Cultural Sector</p> <p>Communities</p> <p>Children's and Youth Arts Advocacy</p> <p>Live Borders</p> <p>Scottish Borders Council</p>	Short / Medium

<p>Leadership and support for the cultural sector to thrive and prosper with identified networks to support development of organisations, individuals, third sector organisations and community led initiatives</p>	<p>Empowering the Cultural Partnership to establish leadership and proactively work with parties engaging in cultural development and service provision, increasing transparency and building consumer and industry trust</p> <p>Work with the new Live Borders Board and Chief Executive to establish the role of the Leisure Trust in cultural development and leadership within the sector, and build relationships with partner organisations and communities</p> <p>Support Southern Uplands Partnership in the development of a sustainable model for CABN (Creative Arts Business Network) which considers the scope of their ongoing work to support creative and cultural enterprise to thrive in the region, a critical component in a cultural partnership model</p> <p>Build on the work of South of Scotland Enterprise and the Regional Economic Partnership to champion investment in the creative economy and support resourcing development in emerging fields.</p>	<p>Cultural Partnership Scottish Borders Council Live Borders South of Scotland Enterprise Creative Scotland Southern Uplands Partnership Creative Arts Business Network Borders Community Action Borders Chamber of Commerce Regional Economic Partnership Screen Scotland Techscaler Scottish AI Alliance</p>	<p><b>Short / Medium / Long</b></p>
<p>Recognising the global appeal of the cultural offering in the Scottish Borders and actively marketing the region to attract visitors and investment in our creative industries</p>	<p>Acknowledge that culture is the key to bolstering tourism in the region and committing to working closely with SSDA on the delivery of the <a href="#">Responsible Tourism Strategy for the South of Scotland</a> in line with the <a href="#">Responsible Tourism Framework</a> established by Historic Environment Scotland (HES). To capitalise on opportunities for our Creative Economy from visitor activity as outlined in the <a href="#">Creative Economy Guide</a> and <a href="#">Scottish Borders Events Strategy</a>.</p>	<p>SSDA SOSE SBC Live Borders CABN HES Visit Scotland Event Scotland</p>	<p><b>Medium / Long</b></p>

## Unity and Diversity

**Celebrate and empower the region's diverse communities and their unique cultural identities, and encourage participation and equality of opportunity for all**

Objective	Action	Partners	Timeframe
A region where cultural celebration and expression is supported and valued	Establish the Cultural Partnership as the connection between public sector, industry and community, acting as a representative voice of the interests of all, and offering a platform for transparency, and a support structure for developing ideas and encouraging cultural development from all sectors. Embedding community grants, inclusive governance structures, and mentoring/peer learning networks as part of the remit.	Cultural Partnership Scottish Borders Council Creative Arts Business Network Live Borders	Medium
A collaborative approach to ensure penetration of cultural opportunities into all communities and supporting those that offer inclusive cultural services	Supporting creative programming for free to access and affordable events which encourage cultural education through performances, exhibitions, museums and libraries.  Identifying reliable funding streams to support community interest and wellbeing focussed content  Develop and ensure a strategic approach to accessing spaces and facilities for cultural activity across the Scottish Borders which maximises access and affordability  Fostering stronger connections between health care professionals, creative practitioners, cultural organisations and communities to embed a focus on wellbeing outcomes within the regional appraisal of cultural services and the benefits analysis of initiatives.	Community Planning Partnership Cultural Partnership Creative Practitioners Live Borders Health and Social Care Partnership Scottish Borders Council Borders Community Action	Short / Medium
People from all backgrounds empowered to embrace cultural activities and engage in creative	Commit to cultural development as an enriching space for communities to come together, foster wellbeing, a sense of belonging, and cement a Borders identity. Recognise the wellbeing benefits of participation, and actively work to improve Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in and across the sector, with the support of	Community Planning Partnership Cultural Partnership HSCP SBC	Short / Medium



practice to support their personal growth and wellbeing	<p>the Community Planning Partnership Theme 3 and national partners</p> <p>Work with industry and national organisations to implement strategies to improve diversity, equality and inclusion within industry practitioners and attracting new talent into the sector</p> <p>Support national programmes for diversity, equality and inclusion initiatives to embed in the Borders, improving reach and participation, whilst capitalising on how this can support succession planning in the voluntary sector</p>	<p>Live Borders SOSE HES Creative Scotland Scottish Civic Trust Improvement Service Trimontium Museum Community Heritage Alliance Borders Community Action Museums Galleries Scotland</p>	
Growing participation in cultural activity across demographics	Develop a multi partner action plan to increase cultural engagement and improve diversity of participants by reducing the barriers and improving access with an alliance of targeted promotion from wellbeing services connected into cultural programming	<p>Community Planning Partnership Health and Social Care Partnership Cultural Partnership</p>	<b>Medium</b>

## Safeguarding our environment

Developing a culture sector that is at the forefront of climate adaptation and striving for environmentally sustainable models to invest in cultural spaces and places.

Objective	Action	Partners	Timeline
A thriving creative sector that fosters creativity, community engagement, and storytelling—key drivers for climate action	Working with industry partners to support established pathways for environmentally friendly practice and embracing creative placemaking as an opportunity to achieve transformational change to tackle the climate crisis.	<p>Cultural Partnership Creative Practitioners Creative Arts Business Network Culture for Climate Scotland Community Planning Partnership</p>	<b>Short / Medium</b>
Embracing technology and innovation to manage and understand our natural	Celebrating the Natural Capital Innovation Zone and the opportunities to use data to better equip decision making for an environmentally sustainable future.	<p>Community Planning Partnership South of Scotland Enterprise Scottish Borders Council</p>	<b>Medium / Long</b>



environment and provide opportunities for energy efficiency in our buildings and spaces	Exploring opportunities to make cultural venues and spaces environmentally friendly and financially viable, and equipping business and communities with knowledge.	Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal Live Borders Local Energy Scotland Culture for Climate Scotland Community Groups Town Teams	
Support efforts to identify sustainable service models which seek to consolidate and invest in exemplar venues	Working collaboratively with communities and partners to identify real opportunities to safeguard spaces, invest, and create new venues which are environmentally sound and financially viable to support communities for the long term.	Scottish Borders Council Live Borders Museum and Galleries Scotland Local Energy Scotland Culture for Climate Scotland Historic Environment Scotland	Medium
Recognising the historical and ongoing role of community in providing cultural education and identifying opportunities to support	<p>Support the aspirations of communities articulated through Community Action Plans and Place Plans to deliver cultural initiatives, instigate feasibility and business planning to take ownership of cultural assets and explore models of alternative use for areas of local significance</p> <p>Actively support communities who want to pursue opportunities to establish and operate cultural facilities under Community Asset Transfer and provide guidance on business case development, planning and management to ensure long term sustainability</p> <p>Facilitate peer networks within the community to connect complimentary initiatives and establish a network of hubs delivering a range of cultural services across the region</p> <p>Remove barriers to initiatives caused by legislative red tape where possible, and embrace those who wish to be custodians of our built heritage and embark on schemes such as <a href="#">Adopt a Monument</a></p>	<p>Cultural Partnership Town Teams Community Groups Scottish Borders Council Live Borders South of Scotland Enterprise Borders Community Action Historic Environment Scotland Community Ownership Support Service</p>	Short / Medium

Improve access to cultural facilities through strategic planning, considering active travel and climate friendly service delivery	Support the development of a cultural “hub and spoke” model whereby centres of cultural activity, third sector venues and mobile provision have outreach to more rural parts of the Borders through physical connections and digital means improving access and supporting a climate friendly delivery model	Live Borders SOSE Borders Community Action Community Planning Partnership SBC	Long
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## Skills and Education

**Champion cultural education in our schools and in our communities.** Providing access to resources and facilities to learn about culture and creativity and develop skills to allow for participation in creative enterprise

Objective	Action	Partners	Timeframe
Develop and strengthen culture sectors support networks in the educational space through designations in the Cultural Partnership model, inclusive of the youth voice.	<p>Focus on opportunities for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultural development and education – focusing on creative and heritage skills, career development and pathways, linkages with education and academia, connections between community and industry.</li> <li>Technology and Digital – incorporating the sections of the industry that are foundational in the use of technology, Techscaler, infrastructure providers, innovation centres and promotion of opportunities for technology in other mediums and to support cultural business and initiatives.</li> <li>Recognise the opportunity technology presents for talent to live here and work elsewhere and explore ideas to harness the skill sets that exists in the region and connect them with local businesses and community enterprise</li> </ul>	Cultural Partnership Live Borders Community Learning and Development Children’s and Youth Arts Advocacy Creative Arts Business Network South of Scotland Enterprise Techscaler Inspire Academy Wellbeing Programme Board Creative Scotland Historic Environment Scotland	Short / Medium

<p>Consider the role of culture and creativity as a cornerstone of wellbeing in education, and a dynamic career path for young people</p>	<p>Support the proposals within the Scottish Borders Council <b>Education Improvement Plan</b> to expand access to cultural education and explore the possibility of developing and implementing a Cultural Education Policy to provide a consistent approach across all Borders Schools. Including opportunities for informal and extracurricular activities, linking with cultural organisations and a focus on career pathways.</p> <p>Explore opportunities through the Cultural Partnership model to make better linkages between education and industry and reduce barriers to going into schools to work with young people. Build on existing partnerships and promote career pathways.</p> <p>Encourage access to expressive arts and creative means of learning within the pedagogy of schools at all age levels.</p> <p>Embed music education within broader cultural and educational priorities and support the delivery of Instrumental Music Tuition in schools and in the community</p> <p>Leveraging the opportunities of national organisations outreach programmes to provide educational opportunities in the Borders</p>	<p>Cultural Partnership SBC Borders College Heriot Watt DYW Local Employability Partnership (LEP) Youth Music Initiative Live Borders Great Tapestry of Scotland Melrose Music Festival Scottish Chamber Orchestra The Arches Local Pipe Bands Creative Practitioners</p>	<p><b>Short / Medium</b></p>
<p>Support those interested in a creative career pathways to explore opportunities and access higher learning</p>	<p>Demonstrate the value of participation in cultural activities and creative skills to our young people and adult learners, through educational initiatives, skills development and access to opportunities</p> <p>Identify opportunities for creative practitioners to support entry into creative practice with portfolio preparation support and mentoring</p>	<p>Developing the Young Workforce Scottish Borders Council Borders College Heriot Watt Creative Arts Business Network The Association for Cultural Enterprises Hugo Burge Foundation</p>	<p><b>Short</b></p>

Maximise opportunities for creative practitioners and organisations in the region by empowering them with skills	<p>Consider the upskilling required for creatives and organisations to capitalise on the opportunities of capital developments and large scale investments in the region</p> <p>Support business training, digital skills and networking opportunities to connect creatives commissioning and recruiting bodies</p>	<p>Creative Arts Business Network Creative Scotland South of Scotland Enterprise Inspire Academy Skills Development Scotland Borders College</p>	Medium
Work within existing support structures to support interest in cultural career paths, to invest in the long-term sustainability of the sector and our built heritage.	Explore opportunities for investing in skills development through the Local Employability Partnership (LEP) and growth deal funding to deliver education and training in creative and traditional skills, as well as skills required to support retrofit to heritage buildings and appropriate development of historic environments	<p>Local Employability Partnership Scottish Borders Council South of Scotland Enterprise Historic Environment Scotland Creative Scotland DYW Scotland Skills Development Scotland Borders College</p>	Medium
Embrace the historical skill sets of the region and identify mechanisms to maintain the reputation for excellence in creativity through industry	Explore strategic partnerships with private industry and academia to develop career pathways unique to Scottish Borders heritage and traditional skills	<p>SBC SOSE Borders College Heriot Watt Chamber of Commerce Famously Hawick</p>	Long

# Monitoring and Evaluation

## Oversight

The effective evaluation of the Scottish Borders Culture Strategy actions will help to determine the progress of delivery and hold accountable those tasked with projects and initiatives.

The development of a Culture Partnership model to oversee that evaluation will be critical in allowing lessons learned to be captured, and the benefits of cultural interventions being tangible. This will benefit the region through positive messaging about the sector and the benefits it brings to people but also provide valuable data to support future funding and help policy officials understand the impact of their interventions and make better decisions.

The formation of a Cultural Partnership for the Scottish Borders will be facilitated by the experienced team at Creative Services Scotland who are working with the Cultural Strategy Advisory Group, Board, and stakeholders from across the sector and community to identify a structure that fits this region.

The monitoring and evaluation of the Culture Strategy action plan is proposed to sit under the oversight of the Cultural Partnership, with that body having the ability to make relevant decisions and influence the evolution of the strategy.

## Measurements and Metrics

The 2024 [evaluation report](#) on the impact of the UCI world championships on the Scottish Borders economy is a prime example of how recording social impact can produce tangible evidence and better understand the successes and failures of a given event.

There are options in how this could be approached:

- The previous culture strategy from 2014 suggested using external benchmarks, such as the Quality of Life Survey (now replaced with the Household Survey) and Creative Scotland's Creative Place Awards, to measure success and recognition. This approach could reasonably be extended to look at other awards specific to sub sectors and into complimentary sectors, such as tourism and technology. Awards that focus on creative place, such as the SURF Award for Creative Regeneration may offer positive future measures.
- [Cultural Engagement in Scotland \(2023\)](#) report outlines four national performance indicators measure progress against the Culture Outcome:
  - Attendance at cultural events or places of culture
  - Participation in a cultural activity

- Growth in the arts, culture and creative economy
- People working in arts and culture and creative industries

The first two national indicators are reported on using the data from the Scottish Household Survey (SHS) at national and sub-national levels. It is worth noting the latest data for the Scottish Borders from the SHS only represents opinions from an older demographic, so only presents a partial picture.

- The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport ([DCMS](#)) [Monitoring and evaluation strategy](#) authored in 2022 sets out the departments own monitoring proposals, and focussed on evaluation as the cornerstone of evidence-based policymaking. This evaluation is proposed through Impact Assessment (IA) and Quality Assessment (QA) with a focus on what is proportionate. There may be an opportunity to take learning from this national body and appropriate a version applicable to the Scottish Borders.
- Community Led Local Development funds across Scotland have used the [Social Value Engine](#) as a way of assessing social return on investment for three years, with Borders achieving the highest impact in 2023/2024 of any LAG (Local Action Group) in Scotland. The principle is to use proxies to compare different types of projects, their outcomes, and impacts, allowing

organisations to quantify and showcase the social return on investment (SROI) for their initiatives.

- The more recently published [Developing a Cultural Indicator Suite Interim Report](#) promotes a methodology for understanding and measuring cultural vitality. Developed by the Centre for Cultural Value it is based on an ecosystemic approach capturing formal and informal cultural activities, participation, access, diversity, and infrastructure to reflect how culture contributes to community identity, wellbeing, and resilience across urban, rural, and coastal settings.

Establishing a model for evaluation that is appropriate for Scottish Borders is a key consideration for the Cultural Partnership, to allow for objective reflection on what has worked well in the past, and how that can be learned from in the future. Alignment with the methodology of national strategy may offer benefits, but the prime consideration is a measure of value that is appropriate to the cultural landscape of the Scottish Borders region.

This will benefit the sector through a robust evidence base to support lobbying and securing funding, representing the activity in the region from a data driven process which also showcases the wealth of activity.

## Conclusion

The culture strategy does not sit in isolation, rather it is part of a rich tapestry of what culture is and can be. Set amongst a thriving sector with individual organisation mission statements and aspirations for delivering programming and showcasing excellence in the sector.

There is a library of strategy and policy documents which align and intersect with the aspirations outlined and offer an opportunity for collaboration on a regional scale, between individuals, communities, third sector, private and public organisations to drive resources into this space and really make a difference to how people here experience culture.

This can be achieved by fostering a cultural eco system that embraces all the many forms of cultural activity, and welcomes participation and cross pollination between industry and communities across;

- Education, creative economy and practitioners
- Heritage, history and traditions
- Modern culture and new technologies
- Tourism and events
- Community initiatives and enterprise

The commitment to developing a Cultural Partnership model to establish a cross-sector approach to strategy delivery provides a tangible framework for accountability and delivery on actions.

A formalised governance for sector development provides a basis to interact with those who are already championing investment in culture, support the actions within the Regional Economic Strategy to embrace the development of a Culture Strategy in the Scottish Borders and the evolving partnership that creates for South of Scotland and the cultural structures with Dumfries and Galloway including the delivery of the aspirations of the regional Screen Strategy.

Partners in the implementation of the culture strategy are committing to continuing the conversation. Using this draft strategy as the foundation for a dynamic document that responds to the needs of the sector, accounts for political and strategic landscape changes, and helps everyone involved in this rich eco system to benefit through maximised opportunities, and to prosper with support and leadership.



## Acknowledgements

This initial draft of a new Culture strategy for the Scottish Borders has been made possible thanks to the willingness of the public, representatives from within the sector, freelance creatives and partner organisations to speak to us about what is needed to support a thriving cultural scene in the region.

Oversight of the process has been provided by a monthly board facilitated by Scottish Borders Council, comprising of:

**Cllr Carol Hamilton** – SBC, Executive Member for Culture

**Jenni Craig** – SBC, Director Resilient Communities

**Catriona McAllister (replacing Jill Franks)** – Live Borders, Chief Exec

**Mark Geddes** – SOSE, Strategy Manager - Cultural and Creative Capital Strategy

**Sam Smith** – SBC, Chief Officer - Economic Development

**James Bewsey** – SBC, Quality Improvement Officer – Education

**Karen Dick** – Creative Scotland – Head of Place, Partnerships & Communities

Additional representation from:

**Chris Myers** – SBC, Director of Adult Social Work and Care

**Lesley Munro** – SBC, Director Education

**Special thanks are given to those who have offered their time to engage, comment and be part of an advisory group made up of representatives from the creative industries, heritage, academia, cultural organisations, community activists and strategic partners.**

**We welcome ongoing dialogue to refine this strategy to be truly owned by the sector, and representing a tangible action plan for leadership, growth and support for everyone to engage in.**

**Thanks are extended to Creative Scotland who have supported the development process and provided financial support to develop the strategy and ensure inclusive engagement with the sector.**



## References

[A Culture Strategy for Scotland](#)

[Creative Economy Guide](#)

[Culture Strategy Information web page](#)

[Joint Strategic Review of Live Borders Services transformation programme](#)

[Education Improvement Plan 2024-25](#)

[UCI Impact Evaluation Report](#)

[Cultural Engagement in Scotland \(2023\)](#)

[Scottish household survey 2019: culture and heritage - report](#)

[\(DCMS\) Monitoring and evaluation strategy](#)

[Social Value Engine](#)

[Developing a Cultural Indicator Suite Interim Report July 2025](#)

## Appendix

A – Cultural Mapping – List of Cultural Players

B – Strategic Landscape and Context Report

C – Engagement Report

D – Public Engagement to Develop a Culture Strategy for the Scottish Borders