

## **REPORT TO EXECUTIVE**

Date of Meeting: 28 April 2026

Report of: Strategic Director Place

Title: Exeter Cultural Strategy 2026 – 2031 Public Consultation

### **Is this a Key Decision?**

Yes

### **Is this an Executive or Council Function?**

Executive

#### **1. What is the report about?**

1.1 The Cultural Strategy is in the final stage of its development, and the Council is seeking feedback from residents and the cultural sector. This report is seeking authorisation from Executive to go out to public consultation.

#### **2. Recommendations:**

2.1 That Executive approves the Publication of the draft Cultural Strategy 2026 - 2031 for public consultation from 18 May 2026 for six weeks.

2.2 That the Executive gives delegated authority to the Strategy Director for Place, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, to agree a change to the consultation date if required.

#### **3. Reasons for the recommendation:**

3.1 To gain feedback from residents and the cultural sector on the draft Cultural Strategy.

3.2 Approval to go out to public consultation will enable an evidence-led development of a long-term cultural vision and strategy through engagement and partnership working.

#### **4. What are the resource implications including non-financial resources:**

4.1 Officer time will continue to be spent supporting the development of a new Cultural Strategy from existing resources and budget.

4.2 Officer resources have been identified to lead on and deliver the consultation.

#### **5. Section 151 Officer comments:**

5.1 There are no additional financial implications for Council to consider.

#### **6. What are the legal aspects?**

6.1 The consultation supports compliance with statutory consultation requirements and the Equality Act 2010.

6.2 There are no legal implications because of the recommendations. The public consultation will be carried out in accordance with the Council's Consultation Charter.

## **7. Monitoring Officer's comments:**

7.1 The Monitoring Officer has no additional comments.

## **8. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)**

8.1 In recommending this proposal potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act and an Equality Impact Assessment has been included in the background papers for Member's attention.

## **9. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:**

9.1 No direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the recommendations. However, as part of the strategy Environmental Sustainability has been considered.

## **10. Report details:**

10.1 The draft Cultural Strategy 2026-2031 has been designed to:

- 10.1.1 Establish a clear vision which can address the needs of Exeter's residents and communities.
- 10.1.2 Align with Exeter's ambition to be recognised nationally and internationally as a 'City of Culture' as set in Exeter's 2040 Vision and included in the Corporate Plan 2025-28.
- 10.1.3 Reflect Exeter's current cultural, social and economic landscape, identifying existing cultural assets, community needs and opportunities for cultural development.
- 10.1.4 Reflect the importance of culture as a catalyst to connect communities to Exeter's unique natural environment, heritage, literacy and learning, health and economy, ensuring that cultural growth is at the heart of sustainability and placemaking in Exeter.

10.2 Exeter's Place-Based Cultural Strategy launched in 2019 and ended in 2024. Exeter City Council recognised the importance of updating the Strategy to set a new strategic direction that reflected the city's evolving ambitions and priorities.

10.3 Exeter City Council committed to updating the previous strategy to ensure it is reflective and supports the city as outlined in Exeter's draft City Centre Strategy, Exeter (Local) Plan, Corporate Plan and Liveable Exeter principles.

10.4 In October 2025, Exeter City Council commissioned InPlace Consulting Ltd to assist with the development of the new Cultural Strategy.

10.5 The Vision and Key Themes of the draft Cultural Strategy have been drawn from three key areas:

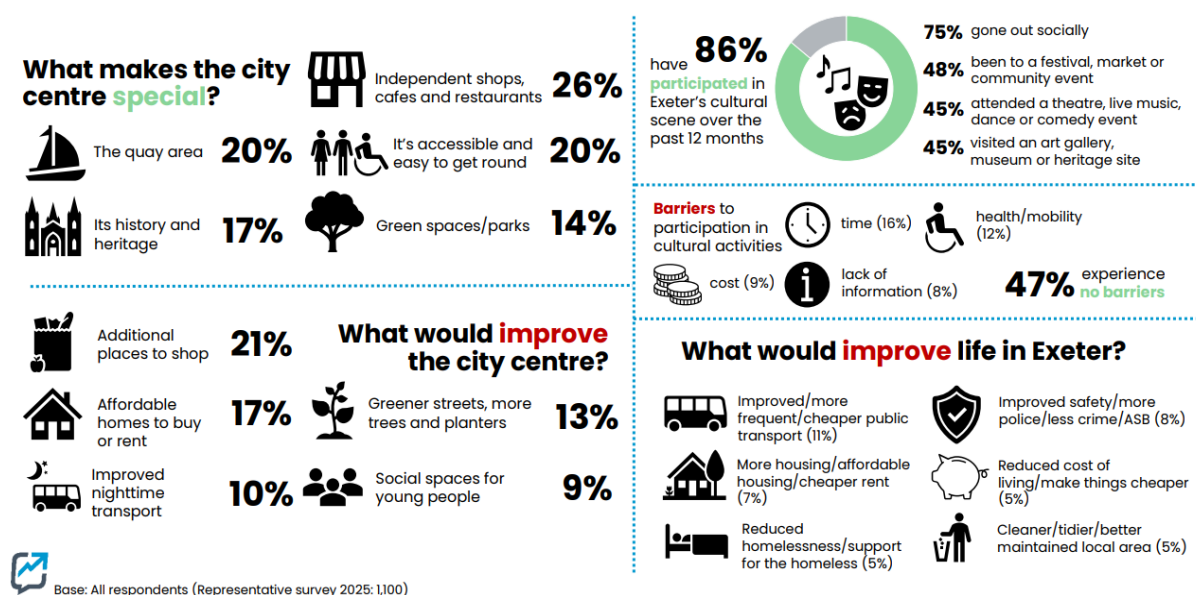
10.5.1 **A Baseline Study:** InPlace Consulting Ltd carried out an initial assessment of scope, key strategies, reports, cultural assets and audience, together with

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benchmarking and sector trends analysis. From this work they were able to build an initial picture from the depth of work already carried out.

- 10.5.2 **Engagement Activity**; The Strategy has been drawn from the results and analysis of an extensive and inclusive engagement programme carried out over five months.
- 10.5.3 **2025 Exeter Residents Survey**: Some questions were included in the survey to gain viewpoints from residents on Culture in Exeter. The infographic below, provides highlights from the 2025 residents survey. The results have been analysed and incorporated into the draft Cultural Strategy. The full results of the resident survey have been uploaded onto the City Council website, which can be viewed: <https://exeter.gov.uk/media/cn0gfoiy/exeter-resident-survey-2025-report.pdf>

## Exeter city centre and cultural scene



10.6 The **Inclusive Engagement Plan** comprised of four key stages of engagement in line with the Council's Consultation Charter, between November 2025 and March 2026:

### 10.6.1 Stage 1: Stakeholder and Community Engagement.

This comprised of a public online survey which received over 500 submissions linked to a visual activity pack. Two workshops were held with young people at Exeter College and one workshop with over 30 representatives from the creative sector. InPlace also conducted over twenty one-to-one interviews with key partners and stakeholders.

### 10.6.2 Stage 2: Cultural Summit

The initial findings from the above engagement phase were shared at an event held at Exeter College on the 26 January 2026. This enabled the Council to test the Vision and Themes and gain an understanding of what needed to be changed.

### 10.6.3 Stage 3: Additional Workshops

From the above Cultural Summit, InPlace held an additional three workshops with the creative sector in early March to help shape the emerging vision, themes and strategic actions.

10.6.4 **Stage 4** is the Formal online Public Consultation, carried out through a survey. The final Cultural Strategy will be reported back to Executive and Council late Summer 2026 for adoption, with implementation starting early Autumn.

10.7 InPlace Consulting has also provided a framework for a detailed action plan, investment plan and monitoring and evaluation plan which will be developed in partnership with the City's key stakeholders and partners once the Cultural Strategy is adopted.

10.8 The draft Cultural Strategy 2026-2031 has the strapline, 'The city of creative confidence', and includes the following vision statement:

***Exeter will be a place where everyone feels more creative confidence - included and connected to culture, environment, heritage and exploring new ideas.***

10.9 There are four key Themes, which have been drawn from the engagement and evidence base. Each Theme has a list of Strategic Actions and Strategic Outcomes.

**10.9.1 Theme 1: How we think and act**

Aim: Exeter to grow into its role as a confident regional cultural capital.

This will be achieved by fostering a culture of ambition and joined-up leadership across Exeter's cultural sector, together with effective partnership working.

**10.9.2 Theme 2: Connecting the eco-system**

Aim: To grow sustainable cultural and creative structures that join the dots.

This will be achieved by nurturing our grass-roots communities of artists, creatives and makers by unlocking spaces, providing affordable facilities, supporting talent development and creating opportunities for people at the early stages of first or new careers.

**10.9.3 Theme 3: Unlocking accessibility and wellbeing**

Aim: An accessible, inclusive and engaging cultural offer providing benefits for all our communities and audiences.

This will be achieved by investing in our cultural offer, support the sector delivering it, advocate for continued funding, and consult with audiences to develop the continued relevance of the offer.

**10.9.4 Theme 4: Encouraging innovation where environment meets culture**

Aim: Connect climate science, arts and literature, heritage, and sustainability with learning and innovation.

This will be achieved by using Exeter's strengths in Research and Development (R&D) and creative industries, as well as its wealth of heritage, as anchor points to inform and direct strategy, programme development, connection with communities and bids for investment.

10.10 The ownership of the Cultural Strategy sits with Exeter City Council and will be used to establish a council-wide strategic approach to facilitating and delivering a City of Culture, with the commitment to culture a core aim running through the whole organisation.

10.11 Delivery of the Cultural Strategy will also lie with a range of different partners who share common objectives. The Cultural Strategy will be an important tool to foster collaboration between stakeholders, partners, residents and the City Council, to ensure activities can be aligned.

10.12 The Exeter Partnership will play its role in supporting and delivering the Cultural Strategy. Through the Exeter Partnership, a Connected Culture Group has been established. The aim is for the Connected Culture Group to become the sectors strategic leadership and advocacy body, as well as facilitating a cultural sector forum to share best practice, expertise, and forge partnerships, which support culture in the city. One of its tasks will be to develop the key themes, principles, and high-level actions in the Cultural Strategy, into a detailed action plan, which is jointly owned by the sector.

## **11. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?**

11.1 A new Cultural Strategy for Exeter supports all four Corporate Plan priorities for the **Local Economy, People, Homes and Sustainable Environment**. Culture and Heritage are recognised as part of the city's economic drivers and supports regeneration. Cultural participation is essential to enhancing health, inclusion, and community spirit, supporting objectives related to civic pride and social cohesion.

11.2 The important role that culture plays in life of the city, including community cohesion, diversity and inclusion, regeneration and economic growth is highlighted in the Council's Final Submission for Local Government Re-Organisation.

## **12. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?**

12.1 Risks include low participation and unrepresentative feedback. Officers will engage with the communications team, to ensure that messages are included in City Council media channels, so that residents and the business community comment on the document.

12.2 A second risk is failure to act on engagement outcomes. This can be mitigated by carefully considering responses, ensuring robust monitoring, and maintaining transparent communication with communities.

## **13. Are there any other options?**

13.1 Members could choose not to approve the public consultation of the Cultural Strategy or delay this decision until later in 2026. However, this would have a significant impact on the delivery and implementation of the Strategy. This would also be counter to

the Council's Consultation Charter.

**Strategic Director Place, Ian Collinson**

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**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)**

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

**List of Appendices:**

- Appendix One - Draft Cultural Strategy EQIA