

SUBJECT:	MONMOUTHSHIRE'S DRAFT CULTURAL STRATEGY 2026-2036
MEETING:	PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE:	THURSDAY 29th January 2026
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	ALL

1. PURPOSE:

To present the draft Monmouthshire Cultural Strategy 2026-36 and Action Plan prior to being considered at Cabinet on 11th February 2026.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

To scrutinise the draft Monmouthshire Cultural Strategy and action plan, and consider how it seeks to champion cultural activity, and create sustainable and inclusive cultural growth in Monmouthshire

3. KEY ISSUES:

3.1 Cultural Activity in Monmouthshire is important to community and individual wellbeing. Culture is a blanket term to describe all the activities which people undertake for enjoyment and recreation, as audience or participant, and which bring people together. Cultural Industries are important to our economy and being a place of vibrant, varied and inclusive cultural activity is part of our 'brand' as a visitor destination and underpins quality of life for our communities. Being able to take part in social, recreational and cultural activities of choice and having access to new experiences underpins the wellbeing of individuals and families. Research shows that access to cultural activity, the arts and heritage enhance mental health, reduces social isolation, and improves overall well-being.

3.2 Monmouthshire Council plays a number of roles in supporting cultural activity in the county. The Council is a direct provider of services, and a custodian of heritage objects and buildings. We hold responsibility for the public realm, and work with other public bodies to ensure public safety. We are a landlord and partner with business and the community and voluntary sector. We co-ordinate activity to raise Monmouthshire's profile and to encourage and support creative industries and the hosting of events and filming

3.3 Monmouthshire is at an exciting point as it acknowledges the importance of its past and looks to use its cultural significance to shape its future. In the Community and Corporate Plan under a Fairer Place to Live we committed to developing an inclusive cultural strategy working with our partners and communities across the county. The draft document presented is the result of a collaborative process which has brought creative practitioners and diverse organisations together, as well as reviewing where Monmouthshire Council can maximise community value from new opportunities. A number of new events, projects and collaborations have come forward as a result of this process.

3.4 We are now able to share a draft Cultural Strategy for Monmouthshire that honours the unique character of this county, drawing strength from its people, landscapes and heritage.

3.5 The aim of the draft Cultural Strategy is to strengthen community identity, drive economic growth, enhance well-being, and ensure that the county's diverse voices are heard and valued.

3.6 The draft cultural strategy is a coherent plan that sets out purpose, priorities, and actions for nurturing and sustaining the arts, heritage, and creative industries within our county. It provides a framework for decision-making, seek to secure funding, fosters partnerships, and measures progress.

4 Themes of the draft Strategy:

4.1 Our cultural strategy will commit to making culture accessible to all, by creating more inclusive events, and removing barriers to participation. In Monmouthshire, culture is a source of pride and resilience, helping individuals and communities to flourish.

4.2 Cultural engagement is a powerful catalyst for learning, creativity, and innovation. By working with our schools, youth groups, libraries, and community organisations, the cultural strategy will nurture the next generation of creative thinkers and makers. This is not only about developing future artists; it's about fostering curiosity, confidence, and the skills needed in a rapidly changing world. Heritage trails, artist residencies, and digital platforms can all play a role in inspiring lifelong learning.

4.3 Monmouthshire is home to a wealth of creative talent from writers, musicians, actors, craftspeople, and more. Our cultural strategy can support this ecosystem through established partnership, by offering training, networking,

low cost/affordable spaces, and opportunities to showcase work. By strengthening the sector, Monmouthshire can retain talent, attract new voices, and foster innovation.

4.4 The creative industries are one of the fastest-growing sectors in the UK, and Monmouthshire is well-placed to benefit from this boom. By mapping assets, identifying gaps, and focusing investment, a cultural strategy can unlock new economic opportunities. Heritage sites can be developed as sustainable tourism destinations; local artists and makers can be supported to reach wider markets; and town centres can be revitalised through cultural events and public art. A bold, clear strategy can attract inward investment, support small businesses, and help diversify the local economy.

Development Process:

4.5 No cultural strategy can succeed without the active involvement of the people it is meant to serve. Monmouthshire's communities are diverse, ranging from long-established families rooted in rural villages, to recent arrivals seeking new beginnings, to lively market towns where tradition and innovation meet. This diversity is a source of strength, creating opportunities for collaboration, learning, and mutual support.

4.6 Over the past year we have worked in collaboration with local community and town councils, stakeholders, voluntary groups, and creative practitioners to foster inclusive cultural networks to share experiences, create opportunities and to gather intelligence to inform the draft cultural strategy.

4.7 To date, 93 individuals have been engaged directly in the development of the draft cultural strategy to ensure that is shaped by local people and creative businesses (including 18 MCC councillors and officers; 6 key cultural representatives and 69 individuals from across the creative industries).

Workshops held:-

- Thursday 17th July – The Melville Centre Abergavenny, 12- 2pm
- Thursday 17th July – Shire Hall, Monmouth, 6– 8pm
- Monday 21st July – Caldicot Castle, 12– 2pm
- Tuesday 22nd July – Chepstow Leisure Centre, 1– 3pm
- Friday 18th July – Virtual online session 10-12noon
- Tuesday 11th November – Tintern Village Hall 1-3pm
- Tuesday 11th November – Chepstow TIC 5-7pm

4.8 At each workshop the same questions were asked of participants to give consistency and ensure the scope of the themes of the strategy were being addressed, whilst giving individuals the freedom to share their experiences,

knowledge and expertise. A summary has been drawn up and can be found in Appendix 3.

4.9 The wider consultation through Let's Talk Monmouthshire was made available through an online survey from 31 October to 14th December 2025). 135 responses were received (Appendix 4) which have been collated, analysed and comments received are now reflected in the draft Cultural Strategy for Monmouthshire.

4.10 Of the 135 responses received, **68.1%** were female; **62.2%** were over 55 years old; **28.1%** took part in cultural activity a couple of times a month whereas **26.7%** took part in cultural activity at least twice a week. **50.8%** of respondents who took part in cultural activity did so within their own town/village area of Monmouthshire.

85% of respondents indicated that taking part in cultural activity gave them a sense of wellbeing with **73%** saying it made them feel part of their community and **70%** stated that cultural activity supported the local economy. Most people who responded participated in cultural activity as an audience member but significant amounts also as volunteers, performers and artists.

4.11 Comments received were mostly positive and supportive of a cultural strategy for Monmouthshire. We acknowledge that we need to ensure that there is more inclusion of children and young people throughout the strategy and how to promote and encourage people into employment within the cultural sector; acknowledging the difference between north and south, each town and village across the county whilst still being part of the whole; the vast range of twinning and cultural exchanges across the county; a central webpage/database available to the cultural sector to promote events and how to get to them, and find out about opportunities for training and funding.

4.12 Inclusion of the following events and activities were submitted and are now reflected in the draft Cultural Strategy – Magor Frost Fayre; Usk Choral Festival; Kingfisher choir; Monmouth Choral Society; Happy Dragon Theatre; Abergavenny Film Club; Monnow Valley Studio; The Boar Penallt; U3A; WI; Plas Gunter Mansion; local church bells ringers and Morris dancers.

Other generic comments and specific suggestions for work programmes received will be collated and passed on the Cultural Partnership Forum to review and include in future action plans and work programme.

4.13 Whilst the development of the Cultural Strategy for Monmouthshire has been led by the council, it's been coproduced to ensure that Monmouthshire's stories are told, its creativity is celebrated, and its communities are empowered to

shape their own futures and creating strong foundations for resilience, prosperity, and well-being.

4.14 To support delivery of the strategy, it is proposed that the Council establish a Cultural Partnership Forum empowered and resourced to make a difference and lead on the action plan. The Partnership forum will meet quarterly and will be made up of 12 nominated individuals and council representatives who signify the many types of cultural activity in Monmouthshire.

4.15 We are working with the Centre for Creative Economy at Cardiff University to understand and establish benchmarks and key cultural outcomes for Monmouthshire including economic, environmental and social benefits; alongside developing initiatives that will see an increase in employment and wellbeing through engagement with the cultural sector.

4.16 The action plan is modest and achievable for its initial first year. Subsequent years will be strengthened through the Partnership Forum as key themes and projects are identified and presented with these community representatives. Using the identified key cultural outcomes for Monmouthshire, that reflect our county, this strategy will help inform place specific local policy and supportive initiatives for local sector growth, adding value to our county and its rich creative ecosystem.

4.17 The Monmouthshire Cultural Strategy will support the council's suite of other plans and strategies including the Placemaking Plans to support the creation of vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive spaces; the Economy, Employment and Skills Strategy to support existing jobs and create new opportunities for businesses and creative industries across the county, and the Monmouthshire Destination Management Plan to ensure that our county is a sought-after tourism destination, to grow our visitor economy and be an inspiring, connected and welcoming place.

4. INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT, (includes equality, future generations, social justice, safeguarding and corporate parenting).

Integrated Impact Assessment attached. (Appendix 5)

5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

Option	Benefit	Risk	Comment
Place Scrutiny Committee to consider and comment on the draft Cultural Strategy for Monmouthshire	Any feedback received will be reflected upon, appropriate amendments made and reported to Cabinet on 11 February 2026		This is the preferred option. The draft Cultural Strategy for Monmouthshire and Action Plan, as drafted, is considered <i>To inspire thriving, connected communities and a prosperous, sustainable future by empowering creative talent, celebrating diversity and fostering wellbeing for all.</i>

6. EVALUATION CRITERIA

The baseline for evaluating performance against a wide range of economic and wellbeing objectives will be set by the Cultural Partnership Forum when established. It is proposed that progress on delivery will be reported through the Service Business Plan, and annually with a report from the Chair of the Cultural Partnership Forum, with updates to Place Scrutiny Committee as needed.

7. REASONS:

- 7.1 To adopt the first Cultural Strategy for Monmouthshire that will assist in preserving and promoting the rich cultural heritage of the county, ensuring that future generations can appreciate and learn from it.
- 7.2 The Strategy will contribute to the Council's ambitions for Monmouthshire - A prosperous county, supporting well-being, health, and dignity for everyone at every stage of life. A Thriving and ambitious place, where there are vibrant town centres, where businesses can grow and develop; and where people feel part of a community and are valued.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 8.1 Officer time and costs associated with the preparation of the Draft Cultural Strategy for Monmouthshire has been met from the Heritage and Culture budget within Place and Community Wellbeing.

- 8.2 The implementation of the strategy will be led by the Head of Culture, Community Learning and Events and colleagues within Place and Community Wellbeing. It is anticipated that officer time and costs will be met from internal directorate budgets for the initial year, to cover the development and design of a central webpage for cultural activities and information, and networking events to bring together and promote sectors of the cultural community. Once the Cultural Forum is established, and along with partners, additional grants will be sourced to support the continued development of cultural activity and implementation of the strategy across the county.

9. CONSULTEES:

Lead Portfolio Cabinet Member
Chief Officer for Place and Community Wellbeing
SLT
Business Cabinet
Place Scrutiny Committee

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Appendix 1 – Original draft Cultural Strategy used for consultation -
Appendix 2 - Revised draft Cultural Strategy and Action Plan (changes highlighted in pink text)
Appendix 3 Summary of Consultations with Creatives and Stakeholders
Appendix 4 Survey Response Report Let's Talk Monmouthshire
Appendix 5 Integrated Impact Assessment

11. AUTHORS:

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