



Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme



Rialtas Áitiúil Éireann
Local Government Ireland



Culture & Creativity Strategy

2023–2027



Westmeath

Contents

	Foreword(s) from Cathaoirleach and/or Chief Executive	02
01	Creative Ireland 2023–2027	04
02	Culture and Creativity in Westmeath	06
03	The Creative Ireland Vision for Westmeath	08
04	How the Creative Ireland Programme Works Principles and Values of Creative Communities	10
05	The Strategic Priorities for Westmeath	12
06	Implementation by the Westmeath Culture and Creativity Team	14
	Map of Westmeath Municipal Districts	15

Forewords

Chief Executive

I am delighted to welcome the second Culture and Creativity Strategy for County Westmeath which reflects the ongoing commitment of Westmeath County Council's Executive and Elected Members in supporting our Creative Communities.

Westmeath Creative Ireland Strategy 2023–2027, builds on the success of the 2018–2022 Strategy within which Westmeath Local Authority engaged widely at a local and regional level with multiple stakeholders. Westmeath's rich tradition of creative endeavour was evidenced in the county's active engagement in the Creative Ireland Programme over the last 6 years. The 2023–2027 Strategy sets out priorities to ensure that this nurturing of creative communities continues in a strategic and practical way. The key priorities identified are underpinned by our broader vision for economic, tourism and community development as outlined in the plans and policy documents of Westmeath County Council. The make-up of the Westmeath County Council Culture and Creativity Team comprises key areas of the local authority which includes Arts, Libraries, Heritage, Environment, Community, as well as representatives from arts venues, and Westmeath County Council, reflecting the cross departmental approach of Creative Ireland nationally. To ensure responsiveness to the specific creative and cultural needs of Westmeath and our partner Creative Ireland's national ambitions, the Westmeath Culture and Creativity Team has a flexible and inclusive approach to its membership makeup.

I would like to thank the Culture and Creativity Team and the wider stakeholders who participated through the public consultation process in the completion of this strategy. The implementation of the Culture and Creativity Strategy set out here will be overseen by the Culture and Creativity Team with support from Westmeath County Council. I look forward to the implementation of the Westmeath Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023–2027 and the benefits it will bring to those creative communities living, working in, and visiting Westmeath.

Pat Gallagher

Chief Executive

Message from the Cathaoirleach

It gives me great pleasure as Cathaoirleach of Westmeath County Council, to be associated with producing the second Culture and Creativity Strategy for Westmeath. Our county has a deep vein of creativity, which the previous Westmeath Culture and Creativity Strategy harnessed and developed, and this strategy provides a framework through which we can build upon the work done to-date. The Creative Ireland Programme defines creativity as – an innate set of abilities and learner skills: the capacity of individuals and organisations to transcend accepted ideas and norms, and by drawing on imagination, to create new ideas that bring additional value to human activity. Through the Creative Ireland Programme our definition of creativity has evolved in recent years, moving beyond the traditionally situated realm of Arts and Culture into the more grounded space of lived experiences of local communities. This plan is cognisant of all aspects of our community's capacity to engage in creative contexts.

The Culture and Creativity Team has taken an inclusive approach to preparing this strategy and I would like to thank each member of the Culture and Creativity Team for their commitment to the process. I welcome the publication of this strategy and look forward to working with the Culture and Creativity Team and our partners to deliver its ambitions. I acknowledge the support of Westmeath County Council, Creative Ireland and other partners in facilitating the implementation of this strategy. The Westmeath Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023–2027 is for the people of the county, and I encourage everyone to read it, engage with it and work towards realising the priorities outlined therein.

Cathaoirleach

1 Creative Ireland 2023–2027

The Creative Ireland Programme is an all-of-government initiative committed to enhancing access to, engagement with, and enjoyment of Ireland's culture and creativity. Within the broad range of available definitions, creativity is considered as a set of innate abilities and learned skills; the capacity of individuals and organisations to transcend accepted ideas and norms by drawing on imagination to create new ideas that bring additional value to human activity.

The vision of the Creative Ireland Programme 2023–2027 is to mainstream creativity in the life of the nation so that individually and collectively, in our personal lives and in our institutions, we can realise our full creative potential, thereby promoting individual, community and national wellbeing.

The Creative Ireland Programme will deliver through collaboration and partnership, promoting understanding and appreciation of the value of creativity in all its forms — whether through the arts, culture, heritage, or technology.

The Creative Ireland Programme will prioritise its work around five aspects for the period 2023–2027:

- Creative Youth
- Creative Communities
- Creative Industries
- Creative Health and Wellbeing
- Creative Climate Action and Sustainability

Through the Creative Ireland Programme, *Creative Communities* supports the partnership between the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and Ireland's local authorities. This partnership enables citizens and communities to explore their culture and creativity at local level and, where appropriate, leverage that creativity to strengthen wellbeing, advance social cohesion and support economic development.

Creative Communities is also innovative in deploying creativity to achieve greater integration across targeted policy priorities. This has delivered new creative engagement initiatives in relation to for example children and young people, older persons, climate action, and local economies. Individuals and communities' perception about the role and value of culture and creativity as central to our wellbeing in its broadest sense is being enhanced.

The opportunity embraced within the Westmeath Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023–2027 is to support people's participation, inclusion and expression within communities, and further strengthen local creative economies.



Performance at Luan Gallery
by New Horizon



Westmeath Oral Heritage
Audit Tara Brady at Work

2 Culture and Creativity in Westmeath

County Westmeath, the Lake County is situated in the heart of Ireland, it is rich in arts, culture, heritage and natural amenities. It is a large rural county at 1,756 square kilometres and the population (as per the 2022 Census) is 95,840 persons. For administrative purposes the county is divided into the Municipal Districts of Athlone-Moate and Mullingar-Kinnegad. The county's geographical dynamic requires a multiplicity of strategies in provision of local services, in engaging with communities, in providing access to creative resources and in reaching audiences.

Westmeath's cultural heritage includes mythology associated with the county and the wider area such as the story of the Children of Lír and An Táin Bó Cuailigne (Cattle Raid of Cooley). Westmeath is closely associated with a number of important writers and scientists. These include Jonathan Swift, Oliver Goldsmith, James Joyce, John Broderick, as well as astronomers William E. Wilson and Kenneth Edgeworth. The county is also associated with a wealth of musical talent such as that of Count John McCormick and Uilleann piper Willie Reynolds.

The 2018 to 2022 Westmeath Culture and Creativity Strategy scaffolded initiatives that facilitated the examination of initiatives and programmes that could have meaningful impact in creative communities across the county. The Strategy also supported extensive partnering with existing cultural infrastructure (libraries, heritage sites, galleries, studios, theatres), the creative practitioners in the county and a Local Authority cross-departmental approach.

This approach facilitated locally led collaborative projects which responded to areas of creative communities where needs and gaps in provision were identified.

During the COVID-19 pandemic Westmeath partnered with the Festival in a Van initiative, which saw a series of mobile performances set up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Across the county the initiatives brought crucial live concerts to residential homes and new community accommodation sites and this model of meaningful engagement and mobile infrastructure has since been adopted and expanded upon outside of the Creative Ireland Programme. Engagement with other strategic partners within the county and region now sees dozens of care facilities benefitting from a year-round programme of engagements. The relationships formed between new communities to Westmeath, the sites and centres that provide temporary accommodation to them, and creatives in the county, speak to the lasting and meaningful partnerships created through the support of the Creative Ireland Programme.

Westmeath has a proud history at national and local scale, both written and oral. Over the course of the 2018–2022 community open calls, analysis of the common creative 'asks' emerging indicate a need for support in this area. This resulted in the Culture and Creativity Team agreeing a series of mentoring and learning initiatives — managed directly by the team members around collection of oral histories. Heritage, Libraries and Arts collaborated in providing expertise (academics, historians, storytellers/creatives) and locations (cultural spaces including libraries and online

access) to provide training and resources to local communities to capture these valuable memories and stories. The enhanced reach of this scaled up approach created meaningful and ongoing partnerships being created with local radio, with other programmes (John Broderick Residency), with new communities (Accommodation centres) and with creative practitioners (Michael Fortune, Manchan Magan). Across the 5-years of the previous strategy, broadly two thirds of funding allocated annually was spent through the mechanism of a direct/ open call to communities. The remaining funding targeted collaborative county-wide programmes delivered by the local authority sections of Libraries, Arts and Heritage. As the Creative Ireland Programme established a foothold in the county's creative and cultural communities, and developed year-on-year, the following were among some of the key learnings gleaned by the Westmeath Culture and Creativity Team:

- The need for scaffolding for creatives, for communities, and for the emerging 'creative communities' — to scale up projects and programmes as the pattern of many previous funding supports in the creative-community space were — necessarily on a smaller scale.
- The requirement to support and broker meaningful engagement among communities and those creatives living and working in Westmeath, to bring additional value and new perspectives to potential activities.

- The need to build capacity around creative thinking methods and skills in responding to thematically targeted funding opportunities.
- The impact of directing resources towards nurturing the progression from 'one-off' projects towards ideas and activities with sustainable ambitions
- The value in identifying innovative solutions to geographical challenges within the country to grow strong partnerships, encourage collaborative working practices and stay connected to relevant local agency stakeholders for the benefit of emerging creative communities.

3 The Creative Ireland Vision for Westmeath

Westmeath Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023–2027 is committed to supporting sustainable creative communities across the county over the next 5 years. The strategy lays out ambitious priorities that recognise the impact that the Creative Ireland Programme has had in animating Creative Communities across the county over the period of the 2018–2022 Strategy. In aligning with the complimentary objectives within other areas of Westmeath County Council’s work (e.g., Healthy Westmeath, Age Friendly Strategy) this plan empowers the Culture and Creativity Team and the creative communities it serves to develop, excite and empower active participation in Creative Communities across Westmeath.

A commitment to creativity, imagination, equality and access is a cornerstone of the work laid out in this plan.



Mel French Tongue sculpt for animatronic development

4 How the Creative Ireland Programme Works

Principles and Values of Creative Communities

Creative Communities will continue to support local authorities as a wellbeing strategy through:

- **Policy** – Working in partnership across government supporting local authorities to deliver relevant local, regional, and national policies and priorities;
- **Practice** – Flexible, cross-cutting Culture and Creativity Teams providing an agile and adaptable approach central to the delivery of *Creative Communities* as it addresses locally-relevant priorities;
- **Participation** – Providing more opportunities for people to engage with and enjoy culture and creativity at local level in ways that underpin equality of access; and
- **Partnership** – Between central and local government, and Waterford City and County Council and our local culture and creative sectors.

This approach is based on addressing a shared, strategic agenda while delivering on the challenges and opportunities unique to each local authority area.

The *Creative Communities* partnership will be delivered in line with the following principles and values:

- i. Broaden access to, and participation in, cultural and creative activities locally.
- ii. Use culture and creativity as a catalyst for collaboration and innovation in achieving greater wellbeing, social cohesion, and economic development.
- iii. Strengthen the capacity of local authorities to integrate culture and creativity across place-making, regeneration, renewal, and the development of more vibrant, creative, and sustainable places.
- iv. Investing in culture and creativity to support environmental, social, and economic returns that help deliver local authority agendas – from local and regional, to national and international.
- v. Build on the agility and integrated approach of Culture and Creativity Teams to sustain further delivery of targeted collaborative programmes.



Uisneach

5 The Strategic Priorities for Westmeath

The Strategic Priorities for Westmeath's Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023 – 2027 were identified with particular consideration for aligned and complimentary objectives within the Westmeath Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024, Westmeath County Development Plan 2021 – 2027, Westmeath Heritage Plan 2018 – 2023, Westmeath Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024, Westmeath Healthy Ireland Priorities, and Westmeath Libraries and Arts Strategic Plans (in development).

Two over-arching principals underpin the strategic priorities of Westmeath Culture and Creativity Plan 2023–2027. The principal of Sustainable Development will be applied to all initiatives undertaken by the Culture and Creativity Team. An accepted definition of sustainable development is development which meets the need of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The principal of Social Inclusion will also be applied in the workings of the Culture and Creativity Team. In particular the Culture and Creativity Team will strive to ensure that all priorities identified within this plan will reflect the interests of the socially and culturally diverse communities within Westmeath, and that the resulting activities are relevant and accessible to all.

Creative Communities, Pillar 2 of the National Creative Ireland Programme is the partnership pillar between the National Programme and local authorities, and therefore the main focus for Westmeath Culture and Creativity Strategies. In partnership with Creative Ireland National Team, the Westmeath Culture and Creativity Team and Public Consultation the following strategic priorities have been identified:

- **Economic Development and Creative Industries:** Cultivate opportunities that connect with local industries, creative practitioners and communities, to support cultural and creative activities that drive economic returns locally.
- **Diversity and Access:** Facilitate the capacity of culture and creativity to innovate and collaborate in achieving priorities locally around social cohesion, greater health and wellbeing, with cognizance for the rural and urban makeup of the county, and the growing diversity of our communities.
- **Creative Youth:** Empower young people through cultural and creative processes and strategies to realise their potential and enhance individual potential.
- **Climate Action and Sustainability:** Harness the power of culture and creativity to animate greater awareness, behavioural change and meaningful engagement on the profound environmental changes we are witnessing
- **Westmeath Culture and Creativity Team:** Support capacity building of the Culture and Creativity Teams to lead on the development of collaborative strategies of scale, that benefit the county and in the broadest sense its creative communities.



Art with Una Cahill

6

Implementation by the Westmeath Culture and Creativity Team

Westmeath has a Culture and Creativity Team in place to guide and oversee implementation of this Strategy.

The Culture and Creativity Teams are the cornerstone of *Creative Communities* across all 31 local authorities in Ireland. These teams bring together a significant range and level of expertise and, in many cases, include professionals from architecture, archives, the arts, climate action, community, enterprise and environmental development, heritage, information and communication technologies, Irish language, libraries, spatial planning, tourism and more. This depth of technical expertise affords each local authority a level of insight, resources and delivery experience which few other public or private sector organisations can match.

The role of this team is to:

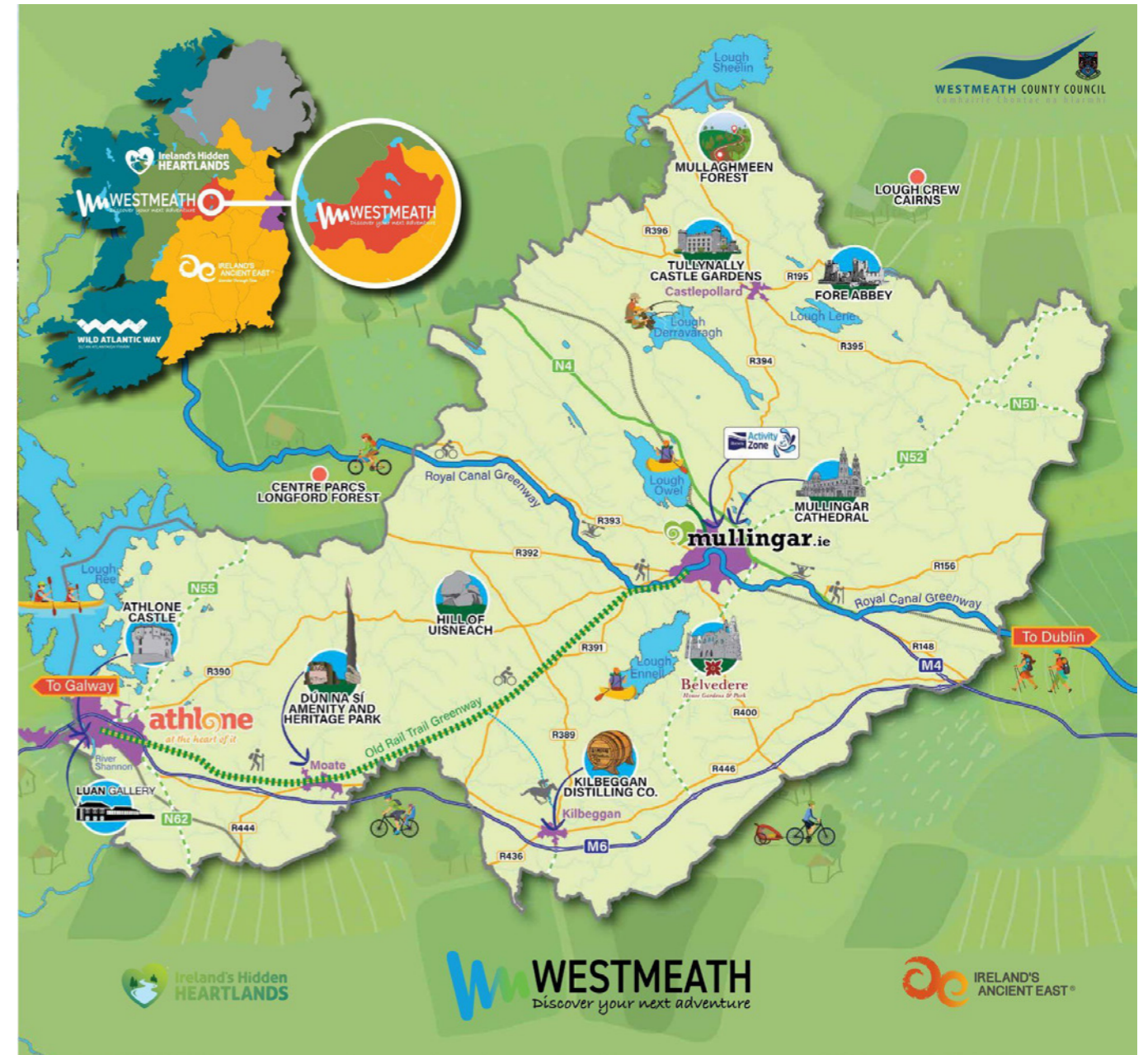
- Provide a collective forum for the ambition of culture and creativity within the local authority;
- Focus on diversity and inclusivity and enable harder to reach communities to participate in cultural and creative activities;
- Build on existing in-house expertise and strategies across areas of wellbeing, social cohesion and economic development to leverage culture and creativity to deliver on targeted local authority agendas;

- Enable a shift in how the cultural and creative sector is valued within and across local authorities and ensure that culture and creativity is embedded across local authority plans, policies and project teams;
- Drive cross-collaborative actions that support change and positive outcomes locally, and potentially between local authorities at regional level; and
- Be innovative and take risks — try new projects and new ways of working.


The delivery of the Strategy is led by the Director of Services for Housing, Community Development, Culture incl. Library and Arts, ICT, Corporate Performance and Development including HR. The membership of the Culture and Creativity Team for Westmeath currently includes Director, Arts, Libraries, Heritage, Environment, Community, Cultural venues, and local representatives.


These structures and processes are a critical success factor that will enable Creative Communities to deliver on strategic priorities for Westmeath.


Map of Westmeath Municipal Districts



A Government of Ireland Initiative.
Tionscnamh de chuid Rialtas na hÉireann.

—
 CreativeIrl

 creativeirl

 creativeireland

—
creativeireland.gov.ie

CREATIVE IRELAND

*Inspiring and transforming people,
places and communities through creativity.*