



Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme



Rialtas Áitiúil Éireann
Local Government Ireland



Culture & Creativity Strategy

2023–2027



Wicklow

Contents

	Foreword	02
01	Creative Ireland 2023–2027	04
02	Culture and Creativity in Wicklow	06
03	The Creative Ireland Vision for Wicklow	10
04	How The Creative Ireland Programme Works	
	Principles and Values of Creative Communities	11
05	The Strategic Priorities for Wicklow	12
06	Implementation by the Wicklow Culture and Creativity Team	14
	Map of Wicklow Council Area	15

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Foreword

Wicklow County Council is proud to present this new Culture and Creativity Strategy for the county. County Wicklow is alive with creative potential and possibility which has been abundantly evident in the implementation of the first five year phase of the Creative Ireland Programme in the county. It is our intention to build on the legacy of our first five years of creative development as part of the Creative Ireland Programme, capitalising on existing relationships which have been made and by forging new ones. The rich repository of cultural and creative assets which exist in County Wicklow from the built environment and natural landscapes of rolling hills from mountains to sea, its historic past, together with world renowned infrastructure in the arts and film, provide excellent pivot points for development. In the county, there also exists a healthy eco system for culture and creativity which is ripe for further extension into communities throughout Wicklow.

Wicklow County Council will deliver an ambitious Creative Communities programme, developing direct actions from this Strategy which will allow Wicklow citizens to reach their full creative potential. This Strategy is shaped by the principles expressed within the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022 – 2028 which are defined across three core areas of Healthy Place-making, Climate Change and Economic Opportunity. The work will also be informed by the wider policy and operational context of the local authority reflecting individual plans in the areas of Age Friendly, Archives, Arts, Community Development, Climate Action, Enterprise, Heritage, Film, Healthy Ireland and Sports Development. The success of the first phase of the Creative Ireland Programme for Wicklow was achieved by cross sectional working across all of these areas of work. The financial investment facilitated the development of new projects and programmes which were

interdisciplinary and deeply embedded within local communities. Supports for artists, heritage and creative practitioners were an essential component of building the capacity for creativity in our county.

The creative process is a constant evolution of thoughts, ideas, colour, collaboration and opportunity which when connected with community can achieve phenomenal results. We welcome this new Strategy which provides foundations to target development in particular areas of focus but that will also allow space for things to emerge and develop - things we can't even yet imagine. We will continue to develop a range of opportunities for creative expression which celebrate the rich cultural heritage of County Wicklow and foster a sense of place and identity. Amateur participation in creative practice will be valued and supported and professional creative practitioners will be nurtured.

We have no doubt that the expertise of the Wicklow Culture and Creativity Team can yield a diverse range of programmes to serve all age ranges and interests working towards a resilient and bright creative future.

Mr Brian Gleeson
Chief Executive

Cllr Tommy Annesley
Cathaoirleach



Music Teaching Residency Making Music with Sonamus. **Photograph:** Mark Stedman of Stedman Photography

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 and 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:

1. Creative Youth
2. Creative Communities
3. Creative Industries
4. Creative Health and Wellbeing
5. 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 Wicklow Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023–2027 is to support people’s participation, inclusion and expression within communities, and further strengthen local creative economies.



Rathdrum Primary School
Creative Programme Celebration.
Photograph: Michael Kelly

Rathdrum Primary School
Creative Programme Celebration.
Photograph: Michael Kelly

2 Culture and Creativity in Wicklow

Culture and creativity are thriving in County Wicklow, with solid foundations to build on that are aligned with Creative Ireland's areas of strategic priority. This Strategy will provide a flexible approach and will support local communities to express their needs and wishes for creative development.

Preliminary census data available in 2022 indicates the population in of Wicklow has grown by 9.2% since 2016 to 155,485 in 2022. This reflects a growth of more than double than that occurred in the period between the 2011 and 2016. Similar to many counties in the greater Dublin region, where large urban centres in the county such as Bray, Greystones, and Arklow traditionally saw the largest of the population increases, significant population increases are now being reflected in rural towns throughout the county.

County Wicklow is colloquially known as the 'Garden of Ireland', owing to its unique landscape steeped in culture and heritage. It is part of Ireland's Ancient East *where vibrant history and modern life meet*. The county covers 2,027 kilometres squared and has monastic sites, pristine beaches, ring forts, coastal walks, wetlands, areas of specialist conservation and biodiversity, areas of archaeological interest, lighthouses, heritage buildings, art centres, artist studios, thirteen libraries and Wicklow Mountains National Park, the largest national park in the state and the only one located on the East Coast. The Wicklow Eco Trail established in Bray in 2020, is one of thirteen worldwide locations on an Eco Trail circuit which aims to organise world class trail running events while raising awareness of the importance of protecting natural environments. The Wicklow Way at 127 kilometres cuts through the panoramic mountain region and is Ireland's oldest marked trail.

The 'Sustainable Uplands Agriculture-environment Scheme (SUAS)' pilot project was established in 2018. The first of its kind in Ireland, it

was developed by Wicklow Uplands Council. The project is designed to assist both commonage groups and individual hill farmers across the Wicklow and Dublin uplands and will ensure the sustainable management of the unique, natural habitats the area is renowned for. It was developed following extensive study of upland vegetation management, the decline in farming activities and the impact it was having on these environmentally significant habitats.

There is a thriving commercial and local craft and design industry in the county with the renowned Avoca hand weavers as well as an array of professional artisans and a newly launched Wicklow Craft Strategy.

In addition, the county is regarded as the home of film in the East of the country with two large independent studios located in Ashford and Ardmore as well as smaller film production houses such as Kite Studios and Create School. A large new film and TV hub is planned for Greystones supported by private investment in partnership with the State. Greystones Media Campus will spread over 670,000 square feet and contain studio space and 14 state-of-the-art sound stages with fifteen hundred people to be employed. Wicklow County Council, with the support of Enterprise Ireland, is creating a new 'Content Creation Development Hub' at Clermont Wicklow County Campus to incubate new and smaller film and AV practitioners in the County. Finally, the South Eastern Regional Creative Corridor Project is based in County Wicklow and supported by Enterprise Ireland and it provides media and content creation measures for film creatives.

In Wicklow there exists a vibrant ecology of festivals and local and voluntarily led culturally based organisations which have a key role in extending culture throughout the county, working beyond cultural venues bringing creativity to all corners of Wicklow.

Since the Creative Ireland Programme commenced, Wicklow County Council has received



Rathdrum Summer Songs Inland & by the Sea. **Photograph:** Michael Kelly

just over one million euro for the development of creative initiatives in the county. The programmes which have been extended into communities reflect new partnerships working across the Wicklow Culture and Creativity Team. Creative Ireland has provided welcome investment to augment the strategic areas of all of our work. This investment is reflected not only from a monetary and organisational perspective but has also created work which has been deeply moving for participants and left a legacy of place based creative practice primed for development in two of our largest rural towns.

The first Culture and Creativity Strategy was underpinned by the values of collaboration, communication, community, participation, inclusivity and empowerment. County Wicklow's focus has been to develop creativity and extend new cultural resources in communities and areas which are least likely to have benefitted from such engagement previously. The type of projects has included the extension of a Creative Wicklow Grant Scheme, intensive place based projects in Baltinglass and Rathdrum, accessible digital archival projects of historic documents of the last century, the establishment of a literature festival, story trails,



Wicklow *Cruinniú na nÓg*, Catherine Fulvio cooking demo. **Photograph:** Michael Kelly

nature films, wellness walks and the presentation of a bumper *Cruinniú na nÓg* programme.

At an early point, the Wicklow Culture and Creativity Team made a decision to develop plans in two areas of work which received specific continuous focus for the duration of the first Strategy. These were in the areas of Creative Practice for Children and Young People and Community Choral Activation.

County Wicklow has a proportionately large population of children and young people under 18 years of age. For Children and Young People, the aims were to sustainably develop work for children with complex needs, deliver work to rurally isolated areas in the County with a particular focus on West Wicklow and to present an ambitious countywide *Cruinniú na nÓg* programme. Collaborators in the development of creative work for children with complex needs have included Anna Newel, Dr Eamon Sweeney, Katerina Cussen, Mermaid Arts Centre, Enable Ireland, St Catherine's School and Marino National School. In West Wicklow, partners have included West Wicklow Music Festival, Creative Places Baltinglass, Music Generation Wicklow, Mermaid Arts Centre, West Wicklow Schools, Russborough House and Parklands as well as a multitude of individual professional artists and creative practitioners who were engaged in programmes. *Cruinniú na nÓg* has been a countywide initiative which has grown from a small acorn into a large oak tree of more than thirty events across a wide range of disciplines delivered in 2022. A highlight for the county was the RTÉ broadcast of the *Cruinniú na nÓg* national round up for 2022 from the historic Kilruddery House.

Recognising the value of participation in choral singing as a means of accessing creativity and promoting individual wellbeing, social connection and cohesion, Wicklow developed a Community Choral Activation Plan. This plan aimed to increase the number of people participating in singing for wellbeing, provide professional development for choral leaders and support platforms for choral performance. Since 2018 Wicklow County Council has provided support for thousands of participants in local choirs, developed choral leadership capacity and created networks and

exchange opportunities throughout the county. It has provided support for the further development of Wicklow Sings, a Festival of Choral Singing for choirs in the county which involves thousands of participants across eighteen choirs. A website www.singinwicklow.ie is being launched featuring these eighteen choirs in Wicklow and promoting local participation in singing.

In line with the counties Age Friendly status activities for older persons aged 55+ have been prioritised. Wicklow has developed a model of community music residencies delivered by local professional music ensembles Sonamus and An Táin Trio. This programme has been designed to engage older persons aged 55+ returning to music education for enjoyment and ensemble playing. Wicklow County Council, through the Creative Ireland Programme, initiated this in partnership with Music Network. The model has now been conducted in three other regions in Ireland by Music Network in partnership with local authorities in the regions. Wicklow has accessed additional funding from Creative Ireland through the Creativity in Older Age fund to support this work. The first residency group of participants wished to continue beyond the programme and have now formed an older persons musical group, The Barn Ensemble, which continues to be supported through our Creative Ireland Programme.

As globally the Covid-19 pandemic unfolded the Creative Ireland Programme investment allowed us to adapt and continue to extend programmes to County Wicklow citizens both outdoors and digitally. These moments of brightness had a profound effect on those who experienced them, not least through Covid Care Concerts delivered by Wicklow artists such as Mary Coughlan, Aisling Ennis, and Prof Luke O'Neill who were among the many local musicians who participated led by Gerald Peregrine and the Mobile Music Machine.

All of these actions not only supported a sense of connection and creativity in our communities, but also the lively hoods of the many professional creative practitioners who make County Wicklow their home.

3

The Creative Ireland Vision for Wicklow

The Creative Ireland Vision for Wicklow will be achieved by drawing on the rich built and natural cultural assets of the county, by activating creative participation and by enabling communities to thrive and feel a sense of pride and belonging to their local area.

It will be underpinned by Wicklow County Council's vision for the delivery of all of its services expressed within the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022 –2028.

“To guide and facilitate the sustainable growth of the county in a manner which supports a deep respect for its unique natural heritage, capitalises on the potential of our towns and villages to deliver compact growth, facilitates healthy place-making, supports the creation of self-sustaining settlements and rural areas that are attractive places to live in, work in and visit, provides for new job opportunities, embraces climate action and enables the transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy, improves sustainable mobility and conserves our heritage.”

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 Wicklow County 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.

5 The Strategic Priorities for Wicklow

Our six priorities for the Creative Wicklow Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023-2027 are:

1. Strengthen internal local authority partnerships to ensure that the Creative Ireland Programme reflects and augments the ambitions expressed within existing strategic priorities and actions.
2. Incentivise collaboration between professional creative practitioners in the county across a broad range of disciplines and provide collaborative opportunities for creative practitioners to engage with audiences on cultural themes.
3. Design, deliver and evaluate opportunities for children and young people to engage in high quality creative experiences across the range of work areas of the Culture and Creativity Team in Wicklow.
4. Present opportunities for people to celebrate their place and those which contribute to a greater sense of creative place-making.
5. Support and build the capacity of local amateur choirs and professional choir leaders extending valuable opportunities for community participation in choral singing for health and wellbeing throughout the county.
6. Develop innovative ways to use technology and digital media to provide creative public engagement opportunities contemporising historical narratives and cultural themes.

Strengthen internal local authority partnerships to ensure that the Creative Ireland Programme reflects and augments the ambitions expressed within existing strategic priorities and actions.

- Support the on-going development of the Culture and Creativity Team to reinforce connections and partnerships
- Continue to support the on-going professional development of our artists and creators, including the staff and teams working in our arts organisations, venues and festivals.
- Provide practical supports to assist community and voluntary based heritage creative and cultural initiatives including networking opportunities, training and other resources.
- Enhance and expand existing investment to extend further developing capacity of our cultural and creative infrastructure to reach new audiences and creative engagement.

Incentivise collaboration between professional creative practitioners in the county and provide collaborative opportunities for creative practitioners across a broad range of disciplines to engage with audiences on cultural themes.

- Develop initiatives which encourage a collaborative approach to creative public engagement in the area of creativity and culture.
- Provide opportunities to connect professionals with our communities to explore multi-disciplinary themes.

Design, deliver and evaluate opportunities for children and young people to engage in high quality creative experiences across the range of work areas of the Culture and Creativity Team in Wicklow.

- Focus on the participation of marginalised or rurally isolated children and young people.
- Develop and strengthen programmes that facilitate engagement with young people, either as creative participants and collaborators, and/or as audience members.
- Continue to develop ongoing work for children with complex needs.

Present opportunities for people to celebrate their place and those which contribute to a greater sense of creative place-making.

- Use existing archival, historical and biodiversity resources relating to County Wicklow as a pivotal point for the development of local projects.
- Increase the capacities of our local communities to engage with local creativity and culture.
- Further develop place based work in the towns of Rathdrum and those in West Wicklow.

Support and build the capacity of local amateur choirs and professional choir leaders extending valuable opportunities for community participation in choral singing for health and wellbeing throughout the county.

- Support existing community choral infrastructure and participation levels.
- Develop new opportunities for people to experience and engage with choral music either as participants or audience members.
- Manage the Sing in Wicklow website resource and creative critical dialogue in relation choral practice.

Develop innovative ways to use technology and digital media to provide creative public engagement opportunities contemporising historical narratives and cultural themes.

- Explore opportunities to communicate aspects of the physical and intangible heritage and creativity of Wicklow using technology and digital media.
- Develop the supports needed to encourage local communities to present aspects of their local creativity and culture in new and untraditional ways.
- Investigate pathways to sharing practice via social media platforms.

6 Implementation by the Wicklow Culture and Creativity Team

Wicklow County Council 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 thirty-one local authorities in Ireland. These teams bring together a significant range and level of expertise. 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:

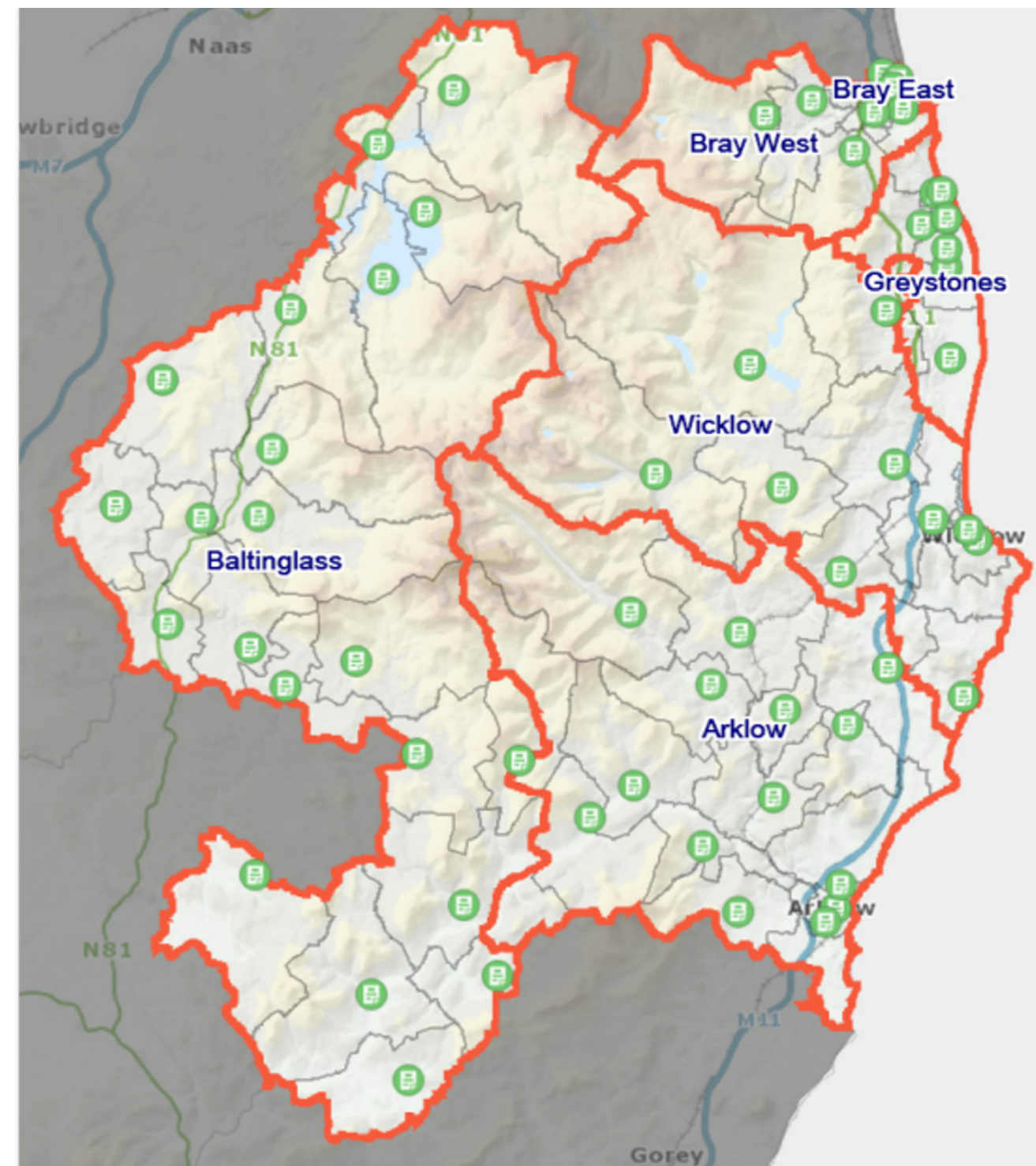
- Provide a collective forum for the ambition of culture and creativity within the local authority;
- Focus on diversity and inclusivity and enable harder to reach communities to participate in cultural and creative activities;
- Build on existing in-house expertise and strategies across areas of wellbeing, 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;
- 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 Community Cultural and Social Development and the members of the Culture and Creativity Team for Wicklow County Council include the Arts Officer, Archivist, Heritage Officer, Director of Services CCSD, The Head Librarian SEO of Wicklow County Library Services, the Senior Executive Officer from Enterprise and Corporate Services, the Sports Partnership Officer, the Climate Action Team Staff Officer the Engagement Coordinator for Wicklow County Council Library Service, and the Administrative Officer from Community, Cultural and Social Development directorate.


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


Map of Wicklow



A Government of Ireland Initiative.
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