

# Kilkenny County Council Cultural Strategy Arts, Heritage and Libraries 2018–2022





# **Kilkenny County Council Cultural Strategy Arts, Heritage and Libraries 2018–2022**

**Kilkenny County Council Cultural Strategy 2018–2022** is an integrated strategic plan for the delivery of the Arts, Heritage and Library Services of Kilkenny County Council. It replaces the four former Arts, Biodiversity, Heritage and Library Plans.



Graiguenmanagh Library.  
Photo: Dylan Vaughan



# Foreword

We are delighted to present to you **Kilkenny County Council Cultural Strategy – Arts, Heritage and Libraries, 2018-2022** which is an Integrated Strategic Plan for the delivery of the Arts, Heritage and Library Services of Kilkenny County Council and the strategic vision and goals for the development of the three services until 2022.

In Kilkenny County Council we have an active cultural services team engaging with groups and individuals and delivering services across the Heritage, Arts, and Library areas and this plan reflects the collective desire of these three services to work together and help deliver on a shared vision.

This continued commitment to working in partnership will ensure the Arts, Heritage and Library services will play their part in the growth of our City and County.

This ambitious strategy has been informed by an extensive consultation process which we have undertaken to allow us to understand the changing needs of our citizens. The high level of feedback from these consultations indicates the interest and dedication to culture that already exists in the County.

It represents the desire for a more joined-up approach to engagement and consultation, with clear linkages to national policies such as Culture 2025 and the Creative Ireland Programme.

Kilkenny has a proud and rich heritage, a unique and diverse arts environment and is a hub of crafts, design, culture and creativity. We recognise the transformative role that culture can play in people's lives, contributing towards inclusive social and economic development, as well as sustainable development.

The challenge for us all is to sustain and improve the cultural life of the City and County by ensuring that the infrastructure and funding is in place to ensure our communities get maximum benefit, and that their high expectations of cultural activity and development are met.

We hope that this strategy will present many exciting creative opportunities for Kilkenny citizens, allowing them to contribute to all aspects of life, and that it will lead to more choices for people of all generations and backgrounds to participate and contribute to our diverse cultural landscape.

**Councillor Eamon Aylward**

*Cathaoirleach*

Kilkenny County Council

**Colette Byrne**

*Chief Executive*

Kilkenny County Council





Autumn crocus (*Colchicum autumnale*).  
This rare and beautiful flower is now only found in Ireland  
growing on the banks of the River Nore in Co. Kilkenny. It has  
been adopted as the logo of Kilkenny Heritage Forum.  
*Photo: Dearbhla Ledwidge*



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False Hood Series 2018,  
Artist: threadstories.  
Photo: Hazel Coonagh



# Introduction





Our Vision

To create and  
sustain great  
places and  
communities.

# Brief

The Kilkenny County Council Cultural Strategy presents an integrated approach to cultural services and cultural management in County Kilkenny. It replaces separate plans for the Arts, Heritage and Libraries services\*. A number of factors led to the development of this integrated approach, including the establishment of the Cultural Services Section, the desire for a more joined up approach to public consultation, and the direction of national policy such as Culture 2025 and Creative Ireland.

The Cultural Services Section of Kilkenny County Council engaged M.CO to work with them on the development of the Kilkenny County Council Cultural Strategy, taking an integrated approach to Arts, Heritage and Libraries, and exploring the following key challenges:

- How to harness County Kilkenny's **authentic and distinctive cultural assets, people and resources** to further stimulate culture.
- How to unlock opportunities for **greater synergy** within the Cultural Services Section in Kilkenny County Council, as well as **future strategic actions** for Heritage, Arts and Libraries.
- How to promote the **intrinsic value of culture**, increasing the understanding and visibility of culture in County Kilkenny.
- How to best support culture within the **context of existing initiatives and strategies**.

\*This strategy replaces: the Arts Strategy (2005–2009); the Kilkenny Heritage Plan (2007–2011) and Kilkenny Biodiversity Plan (2009–2014)–both were extended to allow full implementation of key actions (a review of key achievements is available from the Heritage Office or [www.kilkennyheritage.ie](http://www.kilkennyheritage.ie)); and the Kilkenny Library Development Plan (2009–2013) – Wider Horizons.

Yulefest 2016,  
Artist: Dan Leo.



# Process

The following strategic steps were undertaken in developing the Cultural Strategy. For full details of all the stages in the process and the timeline of the development of the strategy see the Appendices.

## Discovery

Build on existing knowledge to understand the context – conduct strategic analysis, key 1:1 stakeholder soundings, and an initial stakeholder workshop.

## Public Consultation

Build on initial insights to gather wider user insights and generate ideas for the future – conduct public survey and public pop-up events.

## Strategic Framework

Analyse and synthesise findings to date to develop a strategic framework and emerging options for strategic actions.

## Prioritise Strategic Actions

Using an evaluation framework, identify a priority list of actions to support the implementation of the strategic framework.

## Appropriate Assessment

Screen plans for potential significant effects on Natura 2000 sites (Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas).

## Final Report

Prepare a final report presenting the Kilkenny County Council Cultural Strategy and priority actions for the next five years.

Castlecomer  
Library.  
Photo: Dylan  
Vaughan





# Culture

## Our Interpretation of Culture

In a broad sense, culture arises from the interaction of people and place over time, shaping communities and customs, creative, intellectual and spiritual pursuits, built and natural landscapes, and ecosystems.

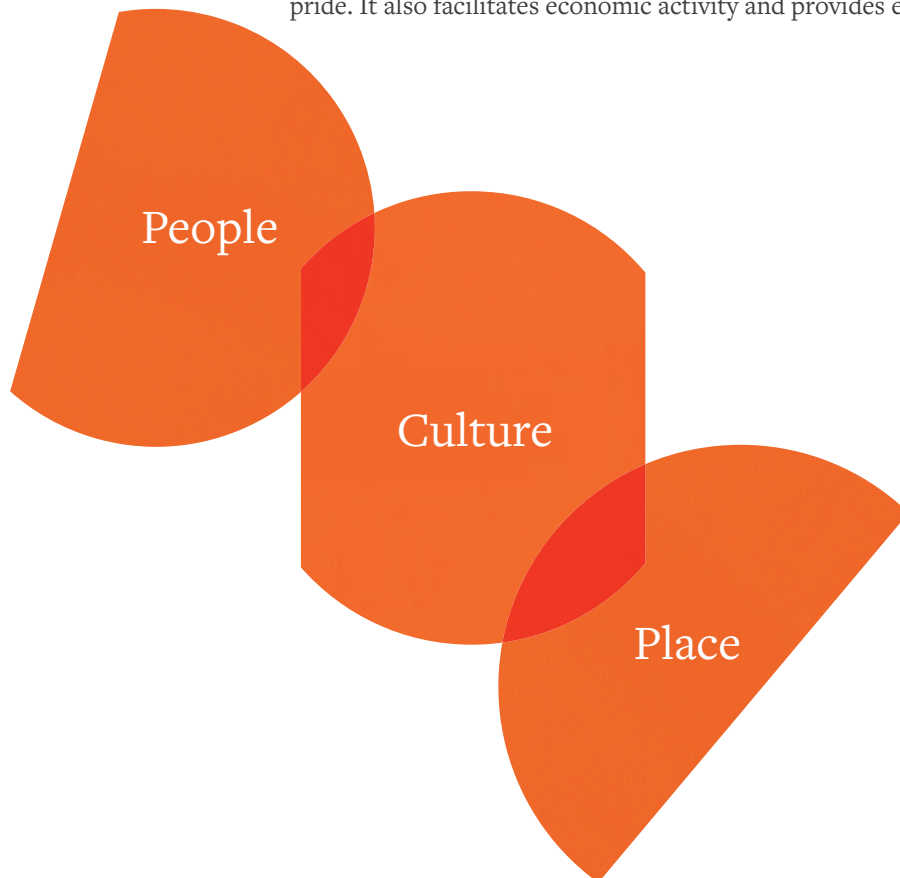
How we define, identify with, and participate in culture varies from community to community and person to person. For the purposes of the Kilkenny County Council Cultural Strategy, the term culture refers to expressions, practitioners and activities within the fields of arts, heritage (built, natural and cultural) and libraries.

This strategy recognises that cultural diversity and biodiversity are connected and reinforce each other. It is committed to strengthening the links between them. Cultural practices often depend on specific elements of biodiversity; biodiversity is, in parallel, often developed, maintained, and managed by cultural groups.<sup>1</sup>

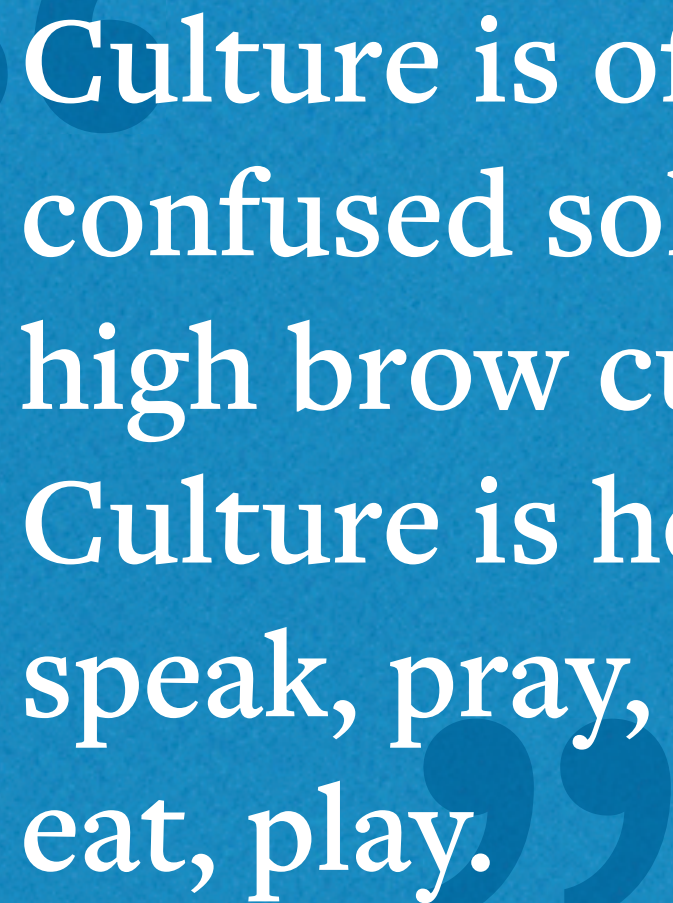
Kilkenny's culture is what makes the county unique, what gives it its special character and its sense of place. It is a reflection and expression of our values, knowledge and traditions.

The culture of Kilkenny belongs to the people of Kilkenny. Ownership confers the right for everyone to participate in culture in accordance with their needs and preferences. It also confers the responsibility of conserving and enhancing culture for ourselves and future generations.

Culture contributes to many aspects of our lives and has many tangible and intangible benefits. It contributes to our quality and enjoyment of life, and our sense of place and local pride. It also facilitates economic activity and provides employment.



1. For further detail on the links between cultural diversity and biodiversity please refer to the Joint UNESCO-SCBD Programme on Links between Biological and Cultural Diversity.



Culture is often  
confused solely as a  
high brow curiosity.  
Culture is how we  
speak, pray, imbibe,  
eat, play.

Survey Respondent





# Cultural Services Section

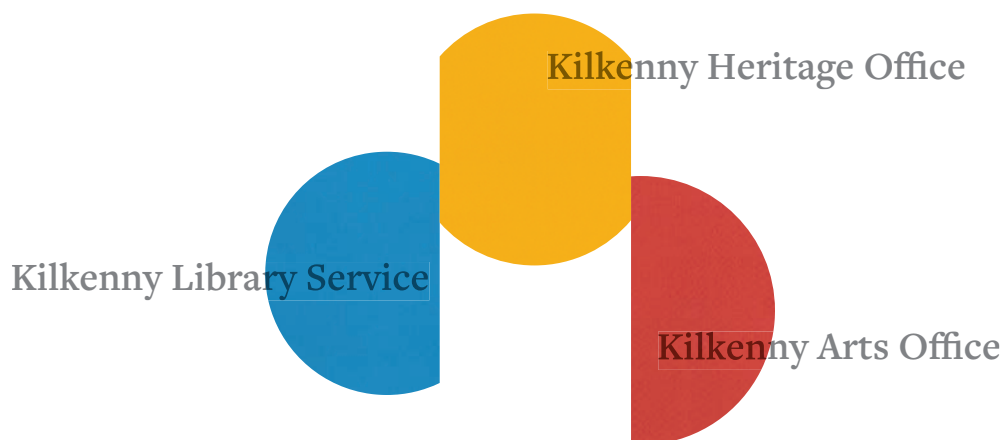
The Cultural Services Section in Kilkenny County Council was formed in October 2015. Its vision is to create and sustain great places and communities, by facilitating a fully integrated and strategic approach to cultural services, comprising the Arts, Heritage, Libraries, Conservation and Architecture services.

The Cultural Services Section aims to play a vital role in the lives of individuals and their communities in County Kilkenny. It serves as a custodian of both national and local culture, and also a catalyst for local culture in County Kilkenny, through supporting high-quality arts, heritage, libraries and architectural design.

The goals of the Cultural Services Section are to ensure: that culture thrives in County Kilkenny; that culture is celebrated and valued; that as many people as possible experience the richness and diversity of culture on offer; and that the Cultural Services Section plays an integral role in Kilkenny County Council.

The Cultural Services Section shares common values, underpinning the development of the Kilkenny County Council Cultural Strategy. These include: culture has important intrinsic value; culture can create economic value for individuals and communities; culture can enhance quality of life, health and wellbeing at a personal and collective level; culture can promote community and civic participation, social inclusion and a better sense of place and identity.

The Kilkenny Arts Office, Kilkenny Heritage Office and Kilkenny Library Service are all part of the Directorate of Housing, Community Culture and Fire Services. These services report to the Strategic Policy Committee for Planning and Development, Heritage, Community, Arts and Culture.



# Kilkenny Library Service

The Kilkenny Library Service is the heart of the local community, providing for the informational, cultural, educational, social and learning needs of the county.

Kilkenny Mobile  
Library Service.  
Photo: Dylan  
Vaughan



## Overview of the Library Service

The core purpose of the Kilkenny Library Service is to provide for the informational, cultural, educational, social and learning needs of Kilkenny citizens.

The service aims to provide safe, trusted and democratic spaces at the heart of the local community which are accessible to everyone and enable engagement and participation.

Strategic programming of events and activities, working in partnership with community groups, cultural organisations, statutory organisations and other groups, as well as the provision of user-focused services, ensures we meet the varied and changing needs of our communities.

The Kilkenny Library Service aims to ensure the delivery of high-quality library programming and services which are community focused and cross sectoral. Working together with our Council and community is a key strategy that enables us to deliver our goals and continually improve the way we deliver our services.

Kilkenny Library Service operates through a branch network of eight libraries. It is supported by the administrative functions of library headquarters, which also provides the local studies service. The mobile library provides a vital rural service and serves over 50 rural areas over a three week schedule. The library service is open over 280 hours per week with late-night and Saturday opening. A broad and varied range of digital services are also provided 24 hours a day, seven days a week via the library's website.





Graiguenmanagh Library.  
Photo: Dylan Vaughan



# Kilkenny Heritage Office

The Kilkenny Heritage Office works to ensure that Kilkenny's heritage is cherished, understood and enjoyed by current and future generations.

St. Peter's Graveyard Ennisnag, Co. Kilkenny. Working with communities to record and conserve our historic graveyards. Photo: Dearbhla Ledwidge



## Overview of the Heritage Office

The core purpose of the Heritage Office is to ensure that Kilkenny's heritage is cherished, understood and enjoyed by current and future generations.

The Heritage Office provides a professional heritage service throughout the county. This includes providing advice and information on heritage issues, developing policies and priorities for the identification, protection, conservation and enhancement of Kilkenny's heritage, collecting and collating heritage data, and promoting heritage awareness and education throughout the county.

The Heritage Officer works with the Kilkenny Heritage Forum to prepare and implement strategic county plans for heritage, i.e County Heritage Plan and County Biodiversity Plan. The Heritage Office and Heritage Forum have adopted a broad definition of heritage, including monuments, archaeological objects, heritage objects, architectural heritage, flora, fauna, wildlife habitats, landscapes, seascapes, wrecks, heritage gardens and parks, geology and inland waterways, as set out in the Heritage Act (1995).

We have also included additional aspects of heritage relevant to County Kilkenny including sport, local history, folklore, place names, genealogy, traditional skills, industrial heritage, social history and oral heritage.

We recognise the importance of strengthening the links between the County Heritage Plan and the County Biodiversity Plan so that both plans are read as one and that they continue to inform and complement each other. To this end, both plans have been incorporated into this new County Cultural Strategy.





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Garden bumblebee (*Bombus hortorum*).  
Kilkenny County Council has adopted this precious pollinator  
as our emblem in our work to support pollinators.  
*Photo: Liam Lysaght*



# Kilkenny Arts Office

The Kilkenny Arts Office works to further strengthen Kilkenny's position as a centre of excellence for the arts and to ensure a successful and thriving arts environment.

POC Show.  
Artist: Patrick  
O' Connor



## Overview of the Arts Office

The Arts Office works to develop, co-ordinate, motivate, inspire and strengthen artistic activity throughout the city and county. We promote the arts as a worthwhile activity for all, coordinate key cultural events, and provide advice and support for groups and individuals.

At the core of all of our work is the practitioner. We offer professional and practical development initiatives across all art forms, thus affording practitioners the time, space and skills to develop their practice.

We coordinate key cultural events and manage community and educational activities, building audiences, increasing capacity and civic participation. The Arts Office collaborates and partners with a number of local and national agencies in order to deliver our initiatives as we recognise this as key to maintaining and developing policy and programming.

The Arts Office works to further strengthen Kilkenny's position as a centre of excellence for the arts and ensure a successful and thriving arts environment within the region.



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False Hood Series 2018.  
Artist: threadstories.  
Photo: Hazel Coonagh



Graig Library.  
Photo: Dylan Vaughan



# Insights

# Strategic Context

## Understanding the Strategic Context

Understanding and aligning with the strategic context provides the opportunity for the Kilkenny County Council Cultural Strategy to contribute and add value to existing strategy and policy objectives from local to European level, and to benefit from existing momentum, initiatives and potential funding options.

A strategic mapping exercise was completed to identify and assess key local, regional, national and European strategies and frameworks, and extract recurring themes, namely:

## Social Value of Culture

In addition to having a vital intrinsic value, culture has an important social value. It plays a role in improving quality of life, health and wellbeing, a sense of local and national identity, and social cohesion.<sup>1 2 3 6 7 8</sup>

It does this, for example, by providing opportunities to access information and learn, to interact with others and share cultural experiences, to feel more immersed in a community, to enjoy recreation and reflection, and to connect with nature, which is of particular importance for children.<sup>2 4 5 10</sup>

There is widespread strategic support for developing cultural initiatives aligning with this motivation. However, it is recognised that there is a need to identify and collate evidence-based data on the social contribution of culture to inform planning.<sup>6</sup>

In particular, there is an interest in supporting and celebrating the Irish language, Gaeltacht areas and traditional culture, such as music, dance, sport, folklore and storytelling, recognising their importance to Irish identity.<sup>1 3 7 8</sup>

## Economic Value of Culture

Culture can also be harnessed to add economic value for individuals and communities.<sup>1 2 3 6 7 8 9</sup>

Culture provides diverse opportunities for individuals to develop into more literate, informed, articulate and confident citizens, which supports local economic initiatives and development, as well as individual wellbeing.<sup>13</sup>

Culture is inextricably linked to creativity, which is increasingly prioritised in local and national strategies as a key catalyst for innovation, learning, entrepreneurship, business differentiation and overall economic prosperity.<sup>1 3 4 9</sup>

There is a recognition that people involved in culture, either as professionals or volunteers, possess vital creative abilities and skills which should be supported, valued and diffused.<sup>8 9</sup>

There is also a desire to encourage the public to engage more in cultural initiatives, especially from a young age, to unlock their full creative potential.<sup>1 2 3 7 8 10</sup>

Culture is also seen as a key driver for the economy in terms of its contribution to creating differentiated, authentic tourism offerings. There is strong support for investing in sustainable cultural tourism initiatives at a local, regional and national level, ranging from the development of cultural quarters to more trails and walks embracing natural heritage.<sup>1 2 3 5 7 9</sup>

Ireland's heritage assets have a multiplicity of benefits, including economic.<sup>14</sup> Ireland's historic built environment and ecosystem services (the benefits that people obtain from ecosystems) are both significant contributors to Ireland's national economy.<sup>15 16</sup>

The wide social and economic benefits of culture are considered of particular strategic importance for rural areas, to help support their sustainability.<sup>3 7</sup>



## INTERNATIONAL

United Nations  
Convention on  
Biological Diversity

European Year  
of Culture 2018

European Level  
Work Plan for  
Culture 2015-2018

Creative Europe

Horizon 2020

## NATIONAL

Arts Council Strategy 2016-2025:  
Making Great Art Work

Creative Ireland  
2017-2022

Heritage Council  
Priorities 2016 and Beyond

National Strategy on Children and  
Young People's Participation in  
Decision-Making 2015-2020

Culture 2025:  
Éire Ildánach

Opportunities for all:  
National Strategy for  
Public Libraries 2013-2017

All Ireland Pollinator Plan 2015-2020

Better Outcomes  
Brighter Futures

Framework for Collaboration:  
An agreement between the  
Arts Council & the County and  
City Management Association

National Literacy and  
Numeracy Strategy 2011-2020

National Landscape  
Strategy 2015-2025

National Biodiversity  
Action Plan 2017-2021

Putting People First-  
Action Programme for  
Effective Local  
Government 2012

Action Plan for Rural  
Development 2016

People, Place and Policy:  
Growing Tourism to 2025

Children and the  
Outdoors 2016

Action Plan for  
Jobs 2017

Get Ireland  
Active

## REGIONAL

South East Economic  
Development Strategy (SEEDS)  
2013-2023

## LOCAL

Kilkenny County  
Council Corporate Plan  
2014-2019

Kilkenny Age  
Friendly Strategy  
2017-2022

Kilkenny County  
Development Plan  
2014-2020

County Culture and  
Creative Plan 2017

County Kilkenny  
Tourism Strategy

County Kilkenny  
Tourism Plan

Kilkenny Local Economic  
and Community Plan  
2016-2021

### Professional and Volunteer Practitioners

Culture relies critically on a dedicated and talented pipeline of multi-disciplinary people working in either a professional or volunteer capacity in the cultural sector.<sup>8</sup>

It is a well-established strategic priority to create the right conditions for people working in the cultural sector to have sustainable and rewarding careers. Amongst other supports, it is necessary to evaluate and address access to job creation and skills development.<sup>1 6 8 11</sup>

It is also widely agreed that there is strategic opportunity in supporting and investing in emerging or established hubs of cultural and creative talent to create centres of excellence that can perform at a national and international level. There is potential to leverage their existing learnings, strengths and momentum. Examples include County Kilkenny's track record in design and crafts, or Ireland's national efforts to concentrate on digital media and film production.<sup>6 7</sup>



Art classes at  
Ferrybank Library.  
Photo: Dylan  
Vaughan

### Access and Public Engagement

The significant benefits of culture can only be fully realised if there is strong public awareness and engagement.

Accordingly, there is strategic demand for initiatives that make culture more prominent, accessible and as close to people as possible, for example by highlighting day-to-day interactions with culture, encouraging free and subsidised access to sites and events, and improving digital access.<sup>1 2 3 7 8</sup>

There is also a strategic need for initiatives that diversify audiences and target excluded groups, to ensure culture represents and includes all people.<sup>3 8</sup>

It is recognised that cultural initiatives create high impact when they are community focused and community led. Accordingly, there is general support for a collaborative approach to cultural planning and decentralised ownership of initiatives.<sup>1 11</sup>



Storytime at  
City Library.  
Photo: Dylan  
Vaughan



### Children and Young People

In particular, it is seen as strategically important to focus on immersing children and young people in culture.<sup>1 2 3 7 8 10</sup>

To support this, cultural organisations should adopt the principle of children’s participation, ensuring children’s views inform their activities.<sup>12</sup>

Culture in all aspects should also be better incorporated into the educational system, such as nurturing creativity, improving arts education and increasing interaction with the outdoors.<sup>1 9 10</sup>

### References

1. Creative Ireland 2017–2022
2. European Year of Culture 2018
3. Culture 2025: Éire Ildánach
4. Opportunities for All: National Strategy for Public Libraries 2013–2017
5. National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017–2021
6. Kilkenny Local Economic and Community Plan 2016–21
7. Action Plan for Rural Development 2016
8. Arts Council Strategy 2016–2025: Making Great Art Work
9. Action Plan for Jobs 2017
10. Children and the Outdoors 2016
11. Heritage Council Priorities 2016 and Beyond
12. National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making 2015–2020
13. Literacy and Numeracy for Life: The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people 2011–2020
14. Bullock et al., 2008. The Economic and Social Aspects of Biodiversity. Benefits and Costs of Biodiversity in Ireland.
15. Ecorys & Fitzpatrick Associates, 2012. Economic Value of Ireland’s Historic Environment.
16. Ecorys & Fitzpatrick Associates, 2016. “Valuing Heritage: Scoping Study.” Unpublished report to Kildare, Kilkenny and Meath County and Cork City Councils.

# Potential Opportunity

## Stakeholder and Public Engagement Process

An extensive stakeholder and public engagement process was carried out in order to gain insights into the cultural context in County Kilkenny and to generate ideas for future action.<sup>1</sup>

The engagement process was targeted at both those people involved in delivering culture in County Kilkenny and those people who engage with it, in order to understand their different perspectives and balance their needs.

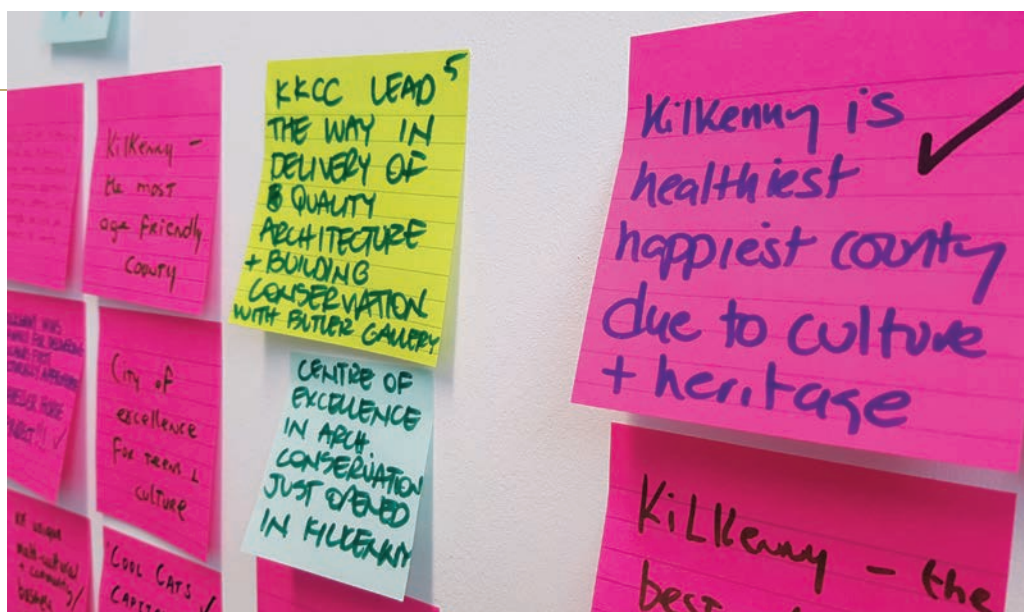
In order to access insights from the professionals and volunteers directly involved in the cultural sector, one-to-one phone calls and a facilitated stakeholder workshop with diverse representation were conducted.

In order to tap into insights from the more general public, a series of three public pop-up events (Kilkenny City, Ferrybank, Castlecomer) and a survey were completed. Both were advertised extensively by the Cultural Services Section through local media, social media and internal databases.

The engagement process sought to understand what the key needs and wants are for the future, what already exists that works well and can be built upon, and what new ideas have potential and could be explored.

There was a high level of stakeholder awareness, interest and engagement. A total of 150 consultees contributed to the process of developing the Kilkenny County Council Cultural Strategy, with many participants responding positively to the prospect of a joined-up and strategic approach to culture.

Stakeholder workshop.  
Photo: M.CO



1. For further detail on the stages and timeline of the consultation process and the development of the Kilkenny County Council Cultural Strategy please see the Appendices.





Loughboy Library.  
Photo: Dylan  
Vaughan





Gate handle,  
Cappagh,  
Co. Kilkenny.  
One of the many  
beautiful field  
gates recorded for  
the Kilkenny  
Vernacular Field  
Gates Survey.  
Photo: Shem  
Caulfield

#### Understanding Concerns and Needs

What emerged through the stakeholder and public engagement process was a generally positive feeling towards culture in County Kilkenny – both its current state and its future potential.

While an immense pride in the culture of County Kilkenny was evident, it was acknowledged that there is some room to improve. In particular, concerns were raised around resources, funding and accessibility from the perspective of the cultural sector, and awareness and information from the public perspective.

#### Leveraging Strengths

From the stakeholder and public engagement process, a number of key strengths were identified which informed the development of the Strategic Framework, namely:

##### *Interest and Pride*

The stakeholder and public engagement process highlighted the interest and pride of people in County Kilkenny in their culture as a unique strength, with many existing networks and communities actively participating in culture.

There was a keen awareness of existing cultural assets, with people identifying a wide selection of natural heritage, built heritage, cultural networks, community spaces and cultural venues across Kilkenny City and other regional towns.

There was also a high level of cultural engagement amongst survey participants, with 63% engaging at least weekly in cultural activities. Libraries emerged as vital community spaces, with 77% of respondents using them regularly.

##### *Built and Natural Heritage*

Built heritage was highlighted as a signature strength throughout the stakeholder and public engagement process, in particular the preservation of historic buildings and the presence of unique and iconic visitor attractions.

Relatedly, the unique strength most often associated with County Kilkenny's culture was identified as the rich medieval history and the well-preserved medieval buildings, in particular in Kilkenny City.



Despite the emphasis on built heritage as a distinctive feature of County Kilkenny’s cultural offering, natural heritage dominated in terms of actual engagement. It was the most frequently cited cultural touchpoint, with 78% of survey respondents engaging with nature regularly.

#### *Creative Practitioners and Networks*

The survey responses highlighted the long-established, talented and collaborative network of practitioners as a distinctive strength of County Kilkenny’s culture. In particular, they noted the long history of creative practitioners living in County Kilkenny, the presence of agencies and engaged societies, and the collaborative nature of the community of practitioners.

#### *Existing Initiatives*

The survey analysis identified the main strength of County Kilkenny’s culture as the variety of cultural activities and initiatives on offer, which meet the needs and interests of a diverse range of people.

In particular, respondents noted the importance of County Kilkenny’s wide-ranging festivals and events in contributing to its multi-faceted and year-round cultural offering.

As one survey respondent commented: “What makes County Kilkenny culturally distinctive from the other places in Ireland is that there is something for everyone from young to old, and everyone is welcome to attend.”

#### *Children and Young People*

Making children and young people more involved in culture was seen as a crucial part of future success. Stakeholders identified a range of successful initiatives and programmes already tailoring their approach to the needs of children and young people.

They also recognised the important role that schools and libraries play in providing access and encouragement to engage in culture, and strongly emphasised the potential to build on this and do more through these avenues.



Reading in  
Castlecomer  
Library.  
Photo: Dylan  
Vaughan

'Born to Knit'  
Kilkenny County  
Council / Interreg  
project.  
Photo: Ross  
Costigan



### Identifying Emerging Opportunities

A selection of potential opportunities were also identified, namely:

#### Rural Kilkenny

Throughout the stakeholder and public engagement process, it was identified that there is an opportunity to do more to develop and support culture in County Kilkenny's rural areas. It was recognised that they are an important and sometimes underused part of culture.

#### Customs, Storytelling and Folklore

The process revealed a particular interest in building on County Kilkenny's traditional culture, ranging from customs, storytelling, folklore, local history and Irish language.

#### Diversifying Participation

While it was felt that people were generally highly engaged in culture, and that the cultural offering in County Kilkenny catered to a wide range of interests and needs, many stakeholders felt there was an opportunity to make culture more accessible and inclusive.



This ranged from improving physical and financial access, increasing representativeness of minority groups, and demystifying culture and making it more open and relevant to disengaged groups.

This was articulated more strongly by those stakeholders involved in the cultural sector as professionals or volunteers. It was felt this could increase the benefits of culture and make sure they were fairly distributed amongst the population.

Filming the  
'Whispering Fields'  
in Lisdowney,  
Co. Kilkenny.







What makes County  
Kilkenny culturally  
distinctive from  
other places in  
Ireland is that there  
is something for  
everyone from young  
to old and everyone is  
welcome to attend.

Survey Respondent







"The Rocks" field, Kilcross, Co. Kilkenny.  
One of the many field names recorded for the Kilkenny Field  
Name Recording Project.  
Photo: Alan Counihan



The background features a solid blue field. On the left, a bright orange semi-circle is partially visible. On the right, a large red semi-circle overlaps the blue background. The title text is centered horizontally and positioned over the red semi-circle.

# Strategy Development

# Distinctive Cultural Identity

## Distinctive Characteristics of Kilkenny

From analysing the stakeholder insights, it emerged that County Kilkenny benefits from unique strengths underpinning its culture. This offered the opportunity to define a distinctive cultural identity for County Kilkenny, describing what makes it special today that will continue to differentiate it in the future.

Developing a distinctive cultural identity provides an authentic, overarching vision for future success. It describes three core distinctive characteristics, each of which must be nurtured and maintained in order to maximise the strength and impact of culture in County Kilkenny.

### Strength of History & Heritage

“Our medieval heritage and historic connections to everything from marble to brewing and even distilling, gives us plenty to talk about and claim fame to.”

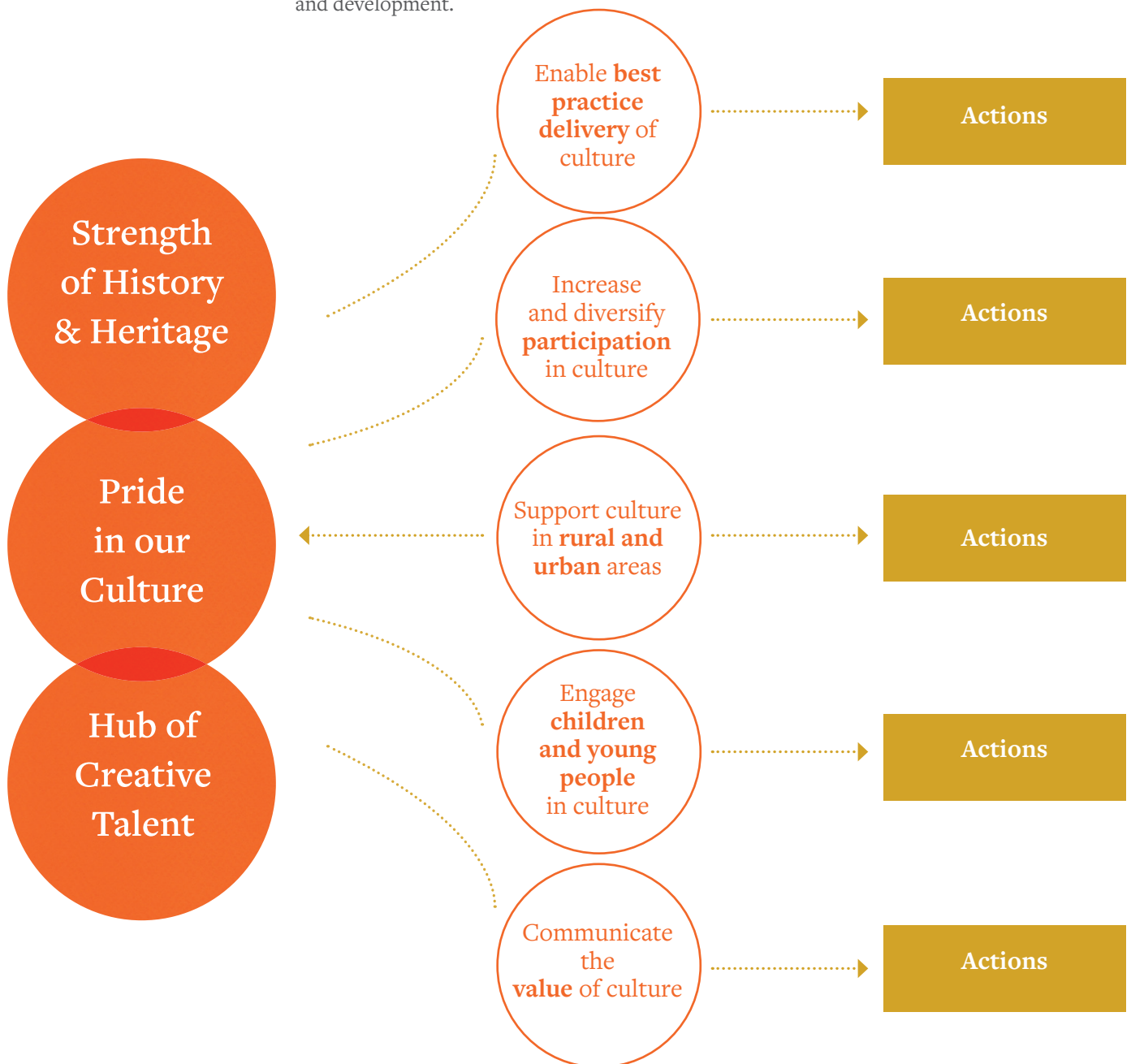
“There is a great sense of pride in Kilkenny’s culture... it is recognised that it contributes to our economy, sense of place and identity.”

### Hub of Creative Talent

“The grassroots efforts of artists, makers, promoters and curators that allow the county to punch well above its weight.”

# Strategic Priorities

Building on our distinctive cultural identity, the strategic priorities arose from stakeholder insights and analysis of existing strategic priorities and initiatives. They were identified as opportunities for County Kilkenny to focus on specific areas which will further enhance and develop its cultural offering into the future. They will provide a targeted focus for the Cultural Services Section over the next five years, defining the areas for special strategic focus and development.





# Strategic Priorities

The strategic priorities were identified as opportunities for County Kilkenny to focus on specific areas which will further enhance and develop its cultural offering into the future. They will provide a targeted focus for the Cultural Services Section over the next five years, defining the areas for special strategic focus and development.



## Enable **best practice delivery** of culture

It is the practitioners who work in the cultural sector, both professional and volunteers, who provide the foundation for culture to thrive in County Kilkenny.

To continue to develop and attract dedicated and talented individuals, it is important for the Cultural Services Section to sustain County Kilkenny's successful track record and reputation as a cultural and creative centre.

The Cultural Services Section will promote best practice management of culture, and help to create an environment where people working in the cultural sector are valued and have rewarding and sustainable careers.



## Increase and diversify **participation**

The impressive quality and variety of cultural activities and amenities on offer throughout County Kilkenny has led to large and engaged audiences.

However, the benefits of culture could be amplified further by increasing participation and spread more equitably by targeting excluded groups.

The Cultural Services Section is committed to enhancing participation by increasing awareness through marketing and information, and by improving physical and financial access.

Kilkenny Wildlife Detectives. Encouraging children to record Kilkenny's natural heritage. Illustration: Alé Mercado





Knockroe passage  
tomb, Co. Kilkenny.

### Support culture in **rural and urban areas**

The substantial rural areas and communities in County Kilkenny are an essential part of its identity.

The wider Kilkenny County Council is committed to making all towns, villages and rural areas across the county sustainable places to live, in terms of economic and social wellbeing.

While this requires a holistic approach, the Cultural Services Section has an important role to play. It is committed to supporting more connected and culturally engaged communities, enabling better access to cultural services, and supporting cultural enterprise and tourism.

### Engage **children and young people** in culture

Immersing people in culture from an early age fosters a deeper appreciation and engagement and helps to safeguard culture into the future.

The cultural offering in County Kilkenny will benefit by continuing to take into account the needs of children and young people.

To support this, the Cultural Services Section is committed to encouraging collaborative planning with children and supporting more targeted cultural initiatives

### Communicate the **value** of culture

In addition to having a vital intrinsic value, culture can provide great social, health and wellbeing, quality of life, environmental and economic benefit to individuals and communities.

In order to maximise its impact, and ultimately the value generated by culture in County Kilkenny, the real existing and future potential should be understood by all involved.

The Cultural Services Section is committed to championing a strategic and integrated approach, measuring and demonstrating the value of culture in a tangible way, and advocating for its importance.







The background features a large blue area at the top, a red area at the bottom, and a yellow area on the left side. The shapes are geometric and overlap, creating a modern, abstract design.

# Implementation

# Implementation Approach

'Making Space' –  
Kilkenny County  
Council / Interreg  
project 2013.  
Photo: Ross  
Costigan



The Kilkenny County Council Cultural Strategy provides strategic direction and a targeted five-year work plan. In particular, it will inform the forthcoming Creative Ireland Plan.

Kilkenny County Council is committed, in partnership with others, to the delivery of the actions in the Kilkenny County Council Cultural Strategy over the period 2018–2022. Other key funding partners include the Heritage Council (under the County Heritage Plan process), the Arts Council, the Libraries Development Unit, the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

The Kilkenny County Council Cultural Strategy will form the basis for the work of the Arts, Heritage and Libraries services for the period 2018–2022. Each service will, on an annual basis, draft a work programme based on the contents of the Kilkenny County Council Cultural Strategy, the Action Areas contained within, and current priorities. This will then be used to apply for funding from various local and national sources. Once an annual budget is confirmed, the work programme will be determined, providing further detail on the projects proposed, the project partners, timeframes and individuals and organisations responsible for delivery.

To monitor and evaluate implementation of the Kilkenny County Council Cultural Strategy, a report on actions undertaken and progress made will be submitted to Kilkenny County Council and published on the Council's website at the end of each year.



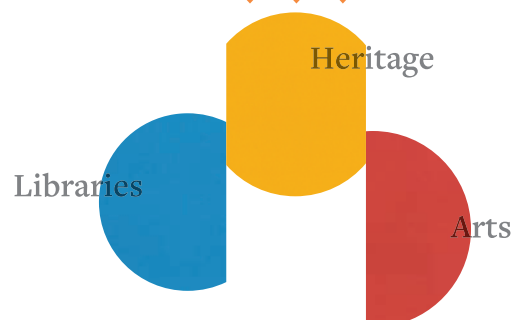
# 5 Year Strategy (2018–2022)

Strategic Priorities x 5

Objectives x 15

Actions x 40

Annual Implementation Plans x 3



Woodstock  
Gardens and  
Arboretum,  
Co. Kilkenny.  
Photo: Dylan  
Vaughan



## Strategic Priority 1:

# Enable best practice delivery of culture

## Objectives:

### Arts

Maintain high quality and excellence in the delivery of all of our of programmes and opportunities for all.

### Libraries

Provide the infrastructure and capacity to create and sustain relationships, strengthen existing partnerships and develop new initiatives to maximise opportunities for the library service.

### Heritage

Support the implementation of key national and local legislation, policies, programmes and plans which identify protect and promote Kilkenny's heritage.



## Actions:



Conduct ongoing monitoring and evaluation to enable the delivery of evidence-based programmes focusing on real needs and requirements of our communities and practitioners.



Enhance and invest in the professional skills of staff in the Arts, Heritage and Libraries services in line with the changing needs of a progressive cultural service.



Actively participate in nationally coordinated projects, and research and development initiatives.



Provide advice and information on legislation, programmes, policies, plans and funding opportunities to identify, protect and promote Kilkenny's culture.



Continue to provide excellent customer service with a well-resourced, well-trained adequate staffing complement.



Maximise opportunities for continued professional development, training and skills for cultural practitioners, professionals and communities.



Deliver high-quality experiences across all of our programmes by working with highly skilled and appropriately experienced cultural practitioners and professionals.



Develop high-quality, appropriate programmes and opportunities to make the Arts an informed career choice.

## Strategic Priority 2:

# Increase and diversify participation in culture

## Objectives:

### Libraries

Develop a forward-thinking, innovative, safe and inclusive service with high levels of use to improve equality of opportunity and to provide for connected and engaged individuals and sustainable communities.

### Heritage

Develop and support programmes which encourage active participation in identifying, recording, protecting, communicating and enjoying Kilkenny's heritage.

### Arts

Provide easy access to high-quality, innovative, exciting, challenging and engaging programmes for existing and new communities and practitioners, ensuring that the arts are woven into the fabric of daily life.



## Actions:



Identify those who are not accessing and participating in culture, or are doing so at a low level, with the aim of addressing their needs and ensuring greater participation.



Develop enhanced digital resources which take a dynamic approach to the changing landscape of knowledge, information access and technology and ensure the virtual experience is as engaging as the physical experience.



Explore opportunities to leverage and cross promote cultural programmes in the county.



Continue to play a key role in collecting, preserving and communicating the local history, heritage and arts of County Kilkenny through the local studies service. Expand and communicate our content to local and worldwide audiences by developing local digital collections to optimise accessibility.



Activate the cultural community, stakeholders and local communities to provide diverse opportunities for engagement.



Develop programmes, in collaboration with highly skilled and experienced cultural practitioners and professionals, that deepen and enrich experiences and encourage active participation and peer-to-peer communication and endorsement of culture.



Identify and resource existing and potential new cultural infrastructure in the county.



Undertake a programme of infrastructural renewal to provide safe, dynamic and flexible library spaces.



Provide a full complement of relevant resources including a current and diverse collection of books, digital content, games and technology to advance and nurture learning at all ages. Aim to achieve the national recommended per capita stock fund target of €3.77.



Work with communities, agencies and other key partners to encourage participation and to identify, record and protect Kilkenny's rich built, natural and cultural heritage.

## Strategic Priority 3:

# Support culture in rural and urban areas

## Objectives:

### Arts

Ensure access to high-quality arts experiences across the county for practitioners and communities alike.

### Libraries

Provide opportunities for connection, inclusion and community engagement by ensuring our library branches and mobile library service support the communities where they are located.

### Heritage

Provide opportunities for engagement with and delivery of heritage programmes and services across the county.



## Actions:



Undertake cultural mapping of County Kilkenny to understand what cultural resources exist and can be better utilised, and to identify gaps that need to be addressed.



Explore storytelling as a way of unlocking local culture and preserving it for future generations by taking a creative and diverse approach to telling stories.



Support and encourage culturally led regeneration in communities across the county.



Utilise the library branch network as a means of engaging with communities and as a platform for arts and heritage in rural and urban areas.



Support and collaborate with active individuals and community groups to extend our reach in rural and urban areas.



Design and offer programmes and services, and develop partnerships and collaboration to enhance cultural engagement and understanding.



Maximise public access to library services in rural areas by providing services that focus on local community goals and reach out and engage with communities.

## Strategic Priority 4:

# Engage children and young people in culture

## Objectives:

### Libraries

Create engaging and welcoming spaces and services to support learning and discovery among children and young people, contributing to the economic and social wellbeing of our communities.

### Heritage

Support, develop and promote programmes which engage young people in Kilkenny's heritage, to develop life-long interest.

### Arts

Provide access to high-quality, innovative, exciting, engaging and challenging programmes for children and young people, to encourage early engagement in the arts and to cultivate a deeper appreciation.



## Actions:



Provide opportunities for formal and informal learning in a variety of ways from early childhood to young people in cooperation with local stakeholders, agencies and community organisations.



Research, plan, support and deliver a broad range of creative cultural programming to enrich the lives of children and young people.



Create opportunities to engage young people to co-create cultural content using technology to facilitate their distinct information and communication needs.



Facilitate appropriate engagement of young people in the future direction of programmes to promote ownership.



Work with key partners in the education sector to develop programmes and local cultural resources for teachers, students and early school practitioners.



Capitalise on opportunities to engage children and young people in reading development, literacy and numeracy by providing support to parents, carers, the school network and the pre-school network that supplements academic needs and fosters personal growth.

## Strategic Priority 5:

# Communicate the value of culture

## Objectives:

### Arts

Ensure that the intrinsic, social, educational and economic value of arts is well understood and appreciated by existing and potential stakeholders and communities.

### Heritage

Ensure that the economic, social, cultural and environmental value of Kilkenny's heritage to the county and its communities is recognised and communicated.

### Libraries

Ensure the library is recognised as a key player in sustaining the educational, social, economic, cultural and civic health of the community in ways that are often unseen or unrecognised.



## Actions:



Communicate and raise awareness about Kilkenny's rich cultural resources, maximising all appropriate channels.



Work with key partners to promote and measure the output, impact and value (intrinsic, social, economic, environmental, health and wellbeing) of Kilkenny's culture. Develop appropriate methodologies where required.



Forge alliances and build strategic partnerships at local, regional and national level to develop advocates for culture in the county.



Mainstream culture within the Local Authority; ensure appropriate funding and capacity to allow for the delivery of sustainable services and programmes, as well as availing of opportunities to access alternative funding mechanisms and staff resources.



Act as the point of reference for all cultural matters involving Kilkenny County Council and communicate its work in cultural service delivery.



Improve and strengthen linkages between the Cultural Services section and other sections in Kilkenny County Council.



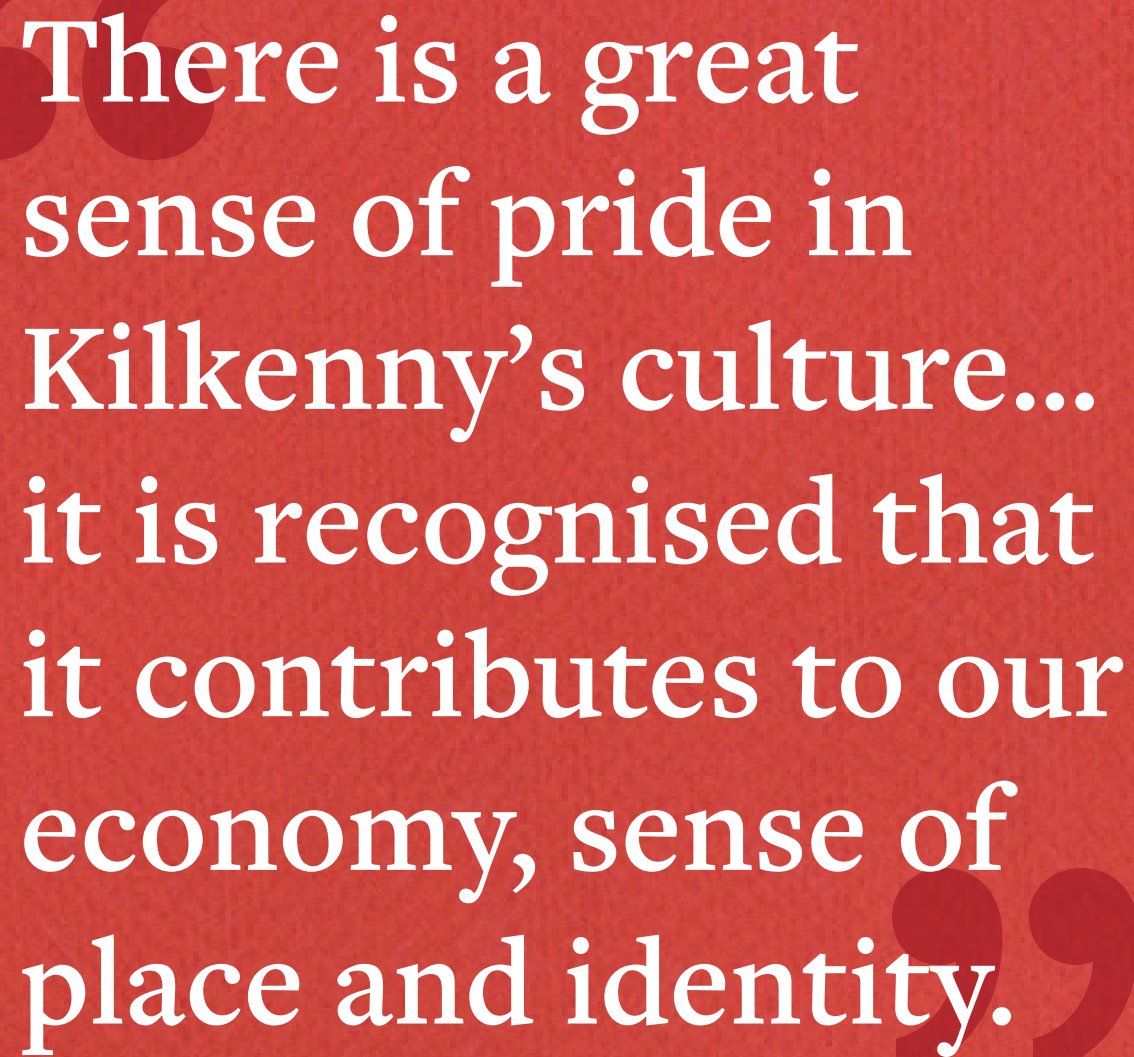
Continue to collect, review and assess current national library performance indicators.



Research new ways to measure library outcomes and impacts, which focus on people and quality of life, to better demonstrate the value of libraries to communities.



Grow the strong brand of libraries and drive more comprehensive awareness of our unique stature as trusted community spaces across current, potential and non users with effective marketing and engagement strategies.



There is a great  
sense of pride in  
Kilkenny's culture...  
it is recognised that  
it contributes to our  
economy, sense of  
place and identity.

Survey Respondent







### **Heritage Office**

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### **Library Service**

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[www.kilkennycoco.ie/eng/Services/Arts/](http://www.kilkennycoco.ie/eng/Services/Arts/)