



AHRC Creative Communities

Policy Lab: Belonging | North East

The [Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government](#) is committed to devolution and restoring power to local communities as part of the new [UK Labour Government manifesto](#).

The North East of England has two devolved areas: the [North East Combined Authority](#) (formerly the [North of Tyne Combined Authority](#), 2019-2024) and [Tees Valley Combined Authority](#).

Culture and inclusive innovation can help Mayoral Combined Authorities to enhance belonging, encourage community cohesion and strengthen social resilience by bringing diverse groups together around shared opportunities or challenges in a place-based context.

Devolution

The new Labour UK Government manifesto commits to [deepen devolution settlements](#) for existing Mayoral Combined Authorities in England and to offer devolution settlements to more areas, encouraging local authorities to come together and take on new powers.

In England, devolution is central to the Government's mission to boost economic growth. The Deputy Prime Minister has pledged to [transfer more powers out of Westminster](#), urging regions currently without devolved powers to work with constituent Local Authorities on new alliances that can help them access greater control over areas like transport, skills, housing and planning and employment support. These new devolution agreements would enable local leaders to make decisions that benefit communities, while also boosting economic growth and opportunity.

The Government plans to establish a [Council of Nations and Regions](#), bringing together the Prime Minister, the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales, the First and deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, and the Mayors of Combined Authorities in England. The Deputy Prime Minister has also pledged to introduce Local Growth Plans across the country. As part of this, Mayoral Combined Authorities will be asked to identify local specialisms and to contribute to work on a national Industrial Strategy.

Tackling economic insecurity at work, at home, in communities and public services is a golden thread running through Labour's missions. [Equality of opportunity](#) and belonging in communities are central to this, with the Labour manifesto pledging equal access to the arts and music and recognising that culture is essential for children and young people to develop creativity and find their voice. The Culture Secretary has emphasised the [social and economic potential of DCMS sectors](#) for national renewal, writing communities back into a new national story, supporting the economy, and creating opportunity for every child.

North East

The North East [regional economy](#) is worth more than £40 billion with 5,500 businesses providing 820,000 jobs. From 2019 to 2024, the [North of Tyne Combined Authority invested £126m](#) into the local economy, including £55.7m for businesses, £23.2m for people, reducing inequality and helping communities to thrive, £21.7m for places like highstreets, towns and new infrastructure, and £25m for major strategic programmes.

The Tees Valley [economic region](#) contributed £79 billion to the UK economy in 2020. The Tees Valley Combined Authority's ambition is to create 25,000 additional jobs and add an additional £2.8 billion into the Tees Valley economy by 2026, becoming a high-value, low-carbon, diverse and inclusive economy.

The [North East Combined Authority](#) (North East CA) was formed in May 2024 and expanded the existing North of Tyne CA. Led by an Elected Mayor and Cabinet, it covers the seven local authority areas of County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland. North East CA aims to create a better way of life by connecting communities, giving people the skills to succeed, and improving wellbeing for all, so that the North East is recognised as an outstanding place to live, work, visit and invest.

[North East Mayor Kim McGuinness'](#) economic plan for the North East is based on three key pledges: improving the foundational economy, delivering on the green jobs revolution and making regional pride a key economic driver with investment in arts and music, culture and sport. The North East [Deeper Devolution Deal](#) 2024 provides North East CA with new powers and budgets and greater control over the key drivers of local growth, including regeneration and affordable housing, the local transport system, and skills and employment support. As part of these plans, North East CA will establish a Culture and Creative Sector Catalyst: a vehicle to attract investment and support growth in the cultural and creative sectors, supported by joint work with government agencies to create a blueprint for culture, the creative industries, heritage, sport, and the visitor economy.

The [Tees Valley Combined Authority](#) (TVCA) is a partnership of five authorities, Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees. The TVCA [devolution deal](#) provides for the transfer of significant powers for employment and skills, transport, planning and investment from central government to the Tees Valley. It paves the way for further devolution over time and for the reform of public services to be led by Tees Valley. It enables TVCA to create an Investment Fund, through a 30-year initial allocation of funding for capital financing of at least £15 million a year.

Creative Economy

The [economic contribution of the UK creative industries](#) grew by 6.8% to reach £124.6bn in 2022, over twice as fast as the [UK economy as a whole](#). The creative industries account for 5.7% of total UK GVA. Creative industries and research institutions are two key areas highlighted in the [Labour UK Government's 2024 manifesto](#), as part of a sectoral approach to a pro-business environment that supports innovation, investment, and high-quality jobs. Labour will implement a creative industries sector plan as part of their forthcoming Industrial Strategy, creating good jobs and accelerating growth in film, music, gaming, and other creative sectors.

The DCMS [Creative Industries Sector Vision](#) (2023) supports the creative industries – including the culture sector – to grow and contribute to the UK economy, through plans to build a highly skilled workforce for the future, supporting 1 million more jobs across the UK, and maximising the positive impact of the creative industries on communities.

From 2019-24, [North of Tyne Combined Authority](#) boosted the recovery of the culture and creative sector post-pandemic, through investing £5.1m in three Culture and Creative Zones (CCZ), helping writers, artists, actors, film makers, and creatives to grow their businesses, access low cost and free workspaces, fund new ideas and projects and develop new skills. Working in partnership with local authorities they invested £1.7m in each CCZ zone over five years. North of Tyne Combined Authority invested £10m to support the region’s digital sector, supporting 569 businesses to go digital. With partners they delivered support across the digital sector to break down barriers for start-ups, grow the talent pipeline, support scaling businesses and attract companies to the area.

North East Mayor Kim McGuinness and members of North East CA have given the go ahead to a [£25 million investment in the region’s screen industry](#) to begin preparation for Crown Works Studios at Sunderland Riverside. The completed development will create up to 8,450 jobs across the North East by 2033, building community cohesion and belonging through the investment. As the studio development and supply chain grows over the next 10 years, it is forecasted to add a potential £2 billion to the region’s economy. The [Mayor’s manifesto](#) also commits to developing a new Centre for Writing and Publishing in Newcastle with North East CA, Newcastle City Council and Northumbria University to enhance local literacy, digital skills and creative industries growth in the regions. In addition, she pledges to grow the music industry in the region, backing region-wide music events that drive the economy and supporting young people’s careers in the industry. Through lobbying for a new tourism levy, the Mayor proposes to fund culture, events and infrastructure to bring in more visitors.

The [Tees Valley Combined Authority Strategic Economic Plan](#) identified “Digital and Creative” and “Culture and Leisure” as two of seven key sectors which are vital in boosting the regional economy and growing the range and number of jobs. To support these sectors, they have established a £20.5million Growth Programme for the Creative and Visitor Economies. They also work as part of [The North East Screen Industries Partnership with North East CA](#) focused on enhancing the television and film industries offer following a £25m commitment to the North East by the BBC.

Culture and Growth

The culture sector contributed [£34.6bn in 2022](#), accounting for 1.6% of the UK’s GVA. GVA of the culture sector grew by 6.4% from 2021 to 2022, leaving it 3.0% higher than pre-pandemic (2019) and 19.2% larger in 2022 than in 2010 in real terms. The [Labour UK Government manifesto](#) pledges to support children to study a creative or vocational subject until they are 16, and to improve access to cultural assets by requiring publicly funded national museums and galleries to increase the loans they make from their collections to communities across the country. Labour also plan to launch a new National Music Education Network, with information on courses and classes for parents, teachers and children.

Across the seven local authority areas of County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland, a total of 9,460 people are

[employed in arts, culture and heritage occupations](#). Arts, culture and heritage occupations range from being 0.7% of the workforce in Sunderland to 1.7% in Newcastle upon Tyne. Across the five local authority areas of Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland, and Stockton-on-Tees, a total of 2,180 people are employed in arts, culture and heritage occupations – ranging between 0.7% and 0.8% of the workforce across these areas.

[Let's Create](#) is Arts Council England's ten-year strategy. It has a vision that by 2030 England will be a country in which the creativity of each person is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone has access to high-quality cultural experiences. Three of Arts Council England's [Creative People and Places projects](#) are in the North East – one in Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland, in Sunderland, and in County Durham. The projects focus on increasing the numbers of local people taking part in cultural activity, co-creation, shared decision-making and embedding culture in health, wellbeing, education and employability.

Communities, Culture and Cohesion

The September 2024 [Good Growth for Cities report](#) argues for accelerating devolution and providing the right framework for local accountability, to drive inclusive growth with targeted place-based development strategies. The research shows that the North East has the highest public priority weighting for high streets of any UK region, and a very high weighting on skills, contrasting with lower public priority weightings for jobs, transport, life expectancy and income. The report advocates for cities and local authorities to enhance their understanding of communities through wider-ranging data analysis, to build a real-time profile of communities.

Launched in September 2024, the [Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods](#) will explore how neighbourhood focused regeneration contributes to achieving wider social and economic objectives. It will examine how a new focus on neighbourhoods in national policy could address multiple disadvantage, regenerate communities and enable Government to achieve its mission objectives.

The recent Belong Network report [After the riots: Building the foundations for social cohesion](#) recommends that the UK Government should have a long-term vision to address inequalities in wealth, power and voice to address a gap in communities focussed policy. The report argues that some communities have experienced a loss of civic pride linked to high street decline and the loss of traditional industries. It recommends any strategic response to the summer 2024 riots should include a long-term, cross-departmental national social cohesion strategy. It charges councils and Mayoral Combined Authorities with responsibility to deliver new local cohesion strategies, as well as supporting initiatives that increase social connections between people from different backgrounds. Suggestions include areas such as sport, art and culture, which play an important role in creating shared identities.

The World Health Organisation's [Implementing citizen engagement within evidence-informed policy-making](#) shows the benefits associated with citizen engagement. This includes enhancing societal trust and democratic engagement, improving the effectiveness of policymaking through drawing on an often-overlooked form of evidence and developing the capacities of both citizens and policymakers to engage in deliberations with each other, further enhancing trust and reducing power disparities.

[Studies have shown](#) the value of culture and heritage to community identity. Historic England's [Heritage Action Zones](#) and High Streets Heritage Action Zones - [six of which are in the North East](#) - aim to fuel economic, social and cultural recovery, creating homes, shops, workplaces and community spaces, supporting community cohesion and belonging. Historic England's [2023 Heritage at Risk Register](#) noted that while five North East sites have been saved, a further 13 had been added. A [Community Foundation report](#) highlights that almost all successfully saved heritage sites have one thing in common: they facilitate and are facilitated by community engagement and the long-term commitment of local cross sector volunteers.

The post-pandemic cultural landscape has created significant new challenges and opportunities for communities' access to culture. The Northern Culture APPG's [Case for the North](#) report (2021) found that by bringing people closer to opportunity, the arts, culture and heritage sectors are uniquely placed to generate spillover benefits, from high street regeneration to public health targets, creating identity and community cohesion, and health and wellbeing.

Devolution offers a rare opportunity for creative industries, heritage organisations and cultural institutions to determine their own needs, growth and sustainability, in a context of new powers and funding settlements.

Pre-Lab Provocations

- What are the priorities for culture to help support and develop belonging, community cohesion and societal resilience in communities?
- What one new policy would support the role of culture in enhancing community cohesion in your sector?
- How can Combined Authorities in England use their devolved powers to facilitate and/or strengthen cohesion, resilience and connectivity in their communities, especially in a post riots context?
- How can inclusive innovation and R&D better support creative communities to develop a sense of belonging, community cohesion and societal resilience?