

Nurturing Creativity, Enriching Communities:

Leitrim County Council
Arts Plan 2024-2027



Comhairle Chontae Liatroma
Leitrim County Council

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FOREWORD

County Leitrim is well regarded for its rich cultural heritage and strong engagement with the arts. As a local authority, we are keenly aware of the transformative potential of the arts and we recognize the profound impact that a thriving cultural landscape can have on society—socially, culturally, and economically.

The Leitrim Arts Plan 2024-2027 represents not just a roadmap for the development of the arts, but contributes towards a blueprint for the broader enrichment of the county. The emphasis on accessibility and engagement is noteworthy and important, recognizing the importance of ensuring that the benefits of the arts are accessible to all members of our community. By prioritizing initiatives that reach out to all communities, particularly young people and diverse demographic groups, the plan aims to break down barriers and create a more inclusive cultural landscape where everyone has the opportunity to participate in the arts.

By working with local, national, and international partners, we can increase our impact, expand our reach, and create synergies that benefit all. In supporting the arts, we are not just investing in cultural infrastructure—we are investing in the well-being and prosperity of our community. Through this plan, we can ensure that in Leitrim we continue to build a county where creativity flourishes, communities thrive, and the arts can bring about positive change.

**Cllr. Paddy O'Rourke, Cathaoirleach,
Leitrim County Council**

INTRODUCTION

Creativity and the arts are vital to Leitrim and serve as a reflection of the county's vitality and aspirations. Leitrim Arts Plan 2024- 2027 is a testament to the commitment of Leitrim County Council to foster the arts and to provide for accessible cultural services throughout the county.

The vision behind this new Arts Plan is to maximize the potential of the arts to foster social, cultural, and economic development. The plan outlines three core priorities: community engagement, nurturing children and young people's creativity, and supporting the professional development of artists. These priorities, along with a commitment to address climate change and promote equality, diversity, and inclusion, form the bedrock of our efforts to enrich peoples' lives through the arts.

We recognize the challenges ahead, understanding that not everyone engages with the arts and that barriers exist, whether economic, geographic or social. Our mission is to break down these barriers, to make the arts accessible to all, and to empower individuals and communities to enjoy the arts and to explore their own creativity.

The plan's commitment to collaboration and partnership is also vital. By fostering cooperation with partners such as the Arts Council and Creative Ireland, we can leverage external resources and expertise that can amplify the impact of our work and create a more sustainable ecosystem for the arts. By nurturing a culture of innovation and collaboration, we can achieve these objectives and position Leitrim as an exemplar of how the arts can serve as a powerful catalyst for social, cultural and economic development.

**Mr. Joseph Gilhooly, Chief Executive,
Leitrim County Council**

LEITRIM ARTS SERVICE

Leitrim County Council Arts Service is the public face of Leitrim County Council's commitment to providing good quality, accessible cultural services to people in Leitrim.

At the core of Leitrim's Arts Service is a firm belief and commitment that everyone should be afforded the opportunity to explore their own creativity to the greatest extent possible, and effective community engagement strategies have indeed enabled people of all ages and backgrounds to have meaningful engagement with the arts, many for the first time. Similarly, the experience and evidence that we have gained from our professional development programme, Creative Frame, confirms that a significant population of artists and creators, working across diverse artforms and media, wish to develop artistic careers in Leitrim and value the opportunities that Leitrim's location, living culture, and supporting infrastructure can offer.

We deliver our services both directly through Leitrim County Council funding, and through partnerships and agreements with other agencies including An Chomhairle Ealaíon/Arts Council and Éire Ildánach/Creative Ireland. Our strategic and operational agreements with An Chomhairle Ealaíon/Arts Council, with Éire Ildánach/Creative Ireland, and with other stakeholders, help to create a measure of stability and scale to sustain the provision of arts services in Leitrim. This strategic combination of the local and the national is of critical importance to arts development in the county. This is likely to increase in importance as national initiatives and new all-of-government policies such as that for the Percent for Art Scheme are delivered in the coming years.

The relative health and strength of the creative sector in Leitrim does not mean that we are without challenges. We are aware that many people do not engage actively with the arts in Leitrim, and we understand that there are many, and often complex, reasons for this. The primary challenge for us in this new plan is to make it easier for people to get involved in the arts in Leitrim, in whatever way best meets their hopes, needs, and ambitions. Our aim is to mobilise all of the county's resources that we have helped to build over many years to reach more people in communities throughout Leitrim and to help them find their pathway into the arts.

Members of Drumkeerin Friendship Club cast their hands for 'Sweeter the Tune' project.



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Musician Natalia Beylis and aerial artist Robin Roche at The Market Yard in Carrick on Shannon on Culture Night



CONSULTATION – WHAT PEOPLE HAVE TOLD US

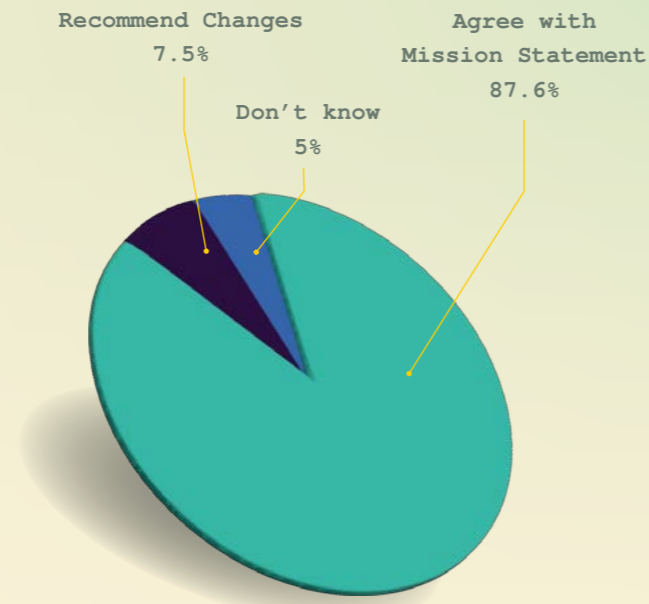
In order to inform the thinking behind the development of this plan, Leitrim County Council conducted three separate public consultation processes. The first brought together different groups of stakeholders in areas such as youth, community development and artists to take part in a wide-ranging discussion on the arts and the wider creative sector, and the impact that our approach had on them and their work. It also sought to explore the interchange between the diverse stakeholders in Leitrim that share an interest in arts development and new opportunities in this regard.

The second process distilled these discussion points into a small number of specific questions, which were presented in an online survey that sought opinions on the priorities of our previous Arts Plan and emerging priorities of our new one.

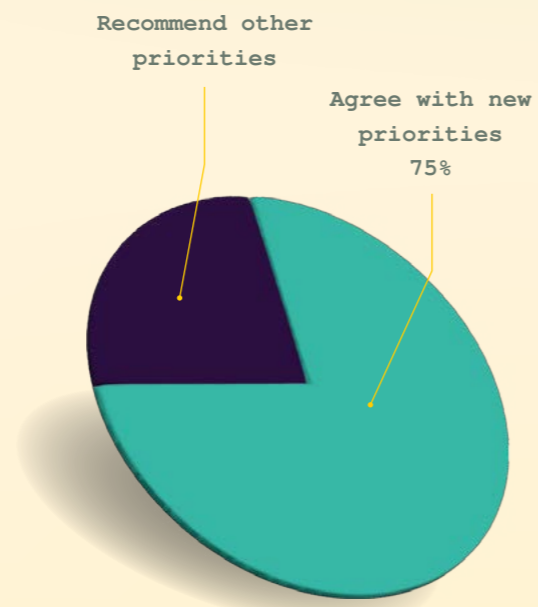
The Mission Statement of Leitrim County Council's last Arts Plan sought

“to nurture and foster the arts in all its diversity; to embrace and welcome new ideas; to create the conditions to help turn those ideas into reality; and to embed the arts and creativity into all aspects of the social, economic and cultural life of Leitrim.”

Of the respondents who expressed an opinion on this statement, the vast majority (87.5%) agreed with it while 7.5% of respondents recommended different alterations such as that inclusion in the arts and equality across the county, and to ensure that artists be prioritised more.



When asked about the emerging priorities of Leitrim County Council's new Arts Plan, 75% agreed with the new priorities being proposed with many respondents specifically noting the potential these would have for either artists, communities or both, while a number of respondents noted other areas that could be highlighted more, including arts & health and artists supports.



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In addition to our open call survey, we also commissioned an external researcher to interview a sample group 11 local and national key stakeholders including representatives from venues, development organisations and funders. Interviews were held on a confidential non-attributable basis and structured around the following flexible framework, tailored to suit the context of each interview:

- Awareness of, or involvement with, the arts service in Leitrim.
- Observations on the quality of the service provided by the Arts Office.
- Relevance of the Arts Plan to interviewees.
- Strong points about the arts in Leitrim, what's working well, what's effective.
- Gaps, weaknesses, challenges for the arts in Leitrim.
- What should a new Arts Plan focus on?
- Views on arts infrastructure in Leitrim.
- Views on the connectedness of the arts service within other services in the County.
- Views on the balance of priority between artists and community.
- Views on the cohesion of arts services in Leitrim – how well does it all work together?
- Any other views or comments or suggestions.

IRON MOUNTAIN LITERATURE FESTIVAL



Sally Hayden, author of *'My Fourth Time, We Drowned: Seeking Refuge on the World's Deadliest Migration Route'* at the 2022 Iron Mountain Literature Festival.

Responses from the interviews are presented here thematically:

1. Perceptions of Arts Office and service

- Accessible, helpful, they listen.
- Good information available, expertise/good advice from staff, if they don't know, they point you in the right direction.
- Connected to the community, they know Leitrim, understand the community.
- They understand what artists need and see the different challenges and contexts that artists have to deal with.
- Ambitious, confident, not shouty, they just get on with it.
- The Arts Office are able to keep many different moving parts in operation, which may be a challenge to maintain.
- The Arts Office is good at making things happen and supporting people who make things happen, their support is about more than money, it includes advice and dialogue and affirmation.

2. Strategic impact, cohesion, effectiveness

- The Arts Office helps create positive environment for artists and the arts.
- Good sense that all the parts work well together – Arts Office, Creative Ireland, strong community focus – it feels like arts are integral part of Leitrim’s plans, but this is not always stated clearly.
- The Creative Frame professional development network is an effective initiative, which needs continuous leadership/stimulation. Will the Arts Office always have capacity to keep this and other initiatives going?
- It’s important that there’s a good fit between opportunities for artists to provide teaching/training/participation and the skills that artists have. It’s essential that the Arts Office always looks at retraining and skills for artists, additional work/career pathways.
- It looks like arts and enterprise talk to each other in Leitrim County Council, there’s a readiness to talk about artistic practice and artistic careers in the same sentence, which is healthy.
- It’s not always clear where the Arts Office fits in terms of the built infrastructure for the arts or whether their focus is more on artists and communities.
- Can the Arts Office be more involved in buildings/spaces for artists?
- Funding is not a contentious issue, there could always be more, but it feels like funding is used well and wisely.
- Is there enough being done to bring people who feel outside of the arts world closer to the arts, so they get the benefits too?
- Leitrim Arts Office plays its part in developing and supporting a robust arts population with good infrastructure, but can Leitrim get more benefit and impact from its resources and location?

3. Gaps, strengths, priorities, opportunities for the new Arts Plan to tackle

- Training and support to increase the number of artists who can work in social contexts, including with children and young people who are not normally engaged or heard or seen in the arts community.
- Greater visibility of arts in age-friendly settings.
- Maintain current level and scope of services. Don’t do anything new if it creates risks for existing programmes.
- Build bridges into the arts for those people who are currently not engaging, or who feel that they are not part of the arts in Leitrim.
- Can multi-annual funding be considered in place of funding already provided through annual/project funding?

Creative Frame workshop on writing funding proposals with Annette Moloney



LEITRIM ARTS PLAN 2024-2027

This new Leitrim Arts Plan looks ahead with confidence in our ability and capacity to support vibrant community engagement and to nurture and sustain an active, diverse and ambitious arts community within, and as a thriving part of, the broader community here in Leitrim.

While Leitrim enjoys a vibrant creative sector, it also faces significant challenges. As a rural county with a small, dispersed population, it is imperative that Leitrim County Council seeks to instil a culture of creativity and innovation in all aspects of society and the local economy. Leitrim’s County Development Plan recognises that the creative sector “serves to encourage creative thinking which can stimulate new ideas and approaches to how we live and work” and further seeks to “develop synergies with other areas.”

Across the Local Authority the role of arts and culture is well understood as a core element of the services that people in Leitrim are entitled to expect. In meeting these civic needs, Leitrim County Council embeds the arts in Leitrim County Council structures and strategic planning, both because the arts help to contribute to achieving the goals of Leitrim County Council, and because the arts are of value and importance in and of themselves.

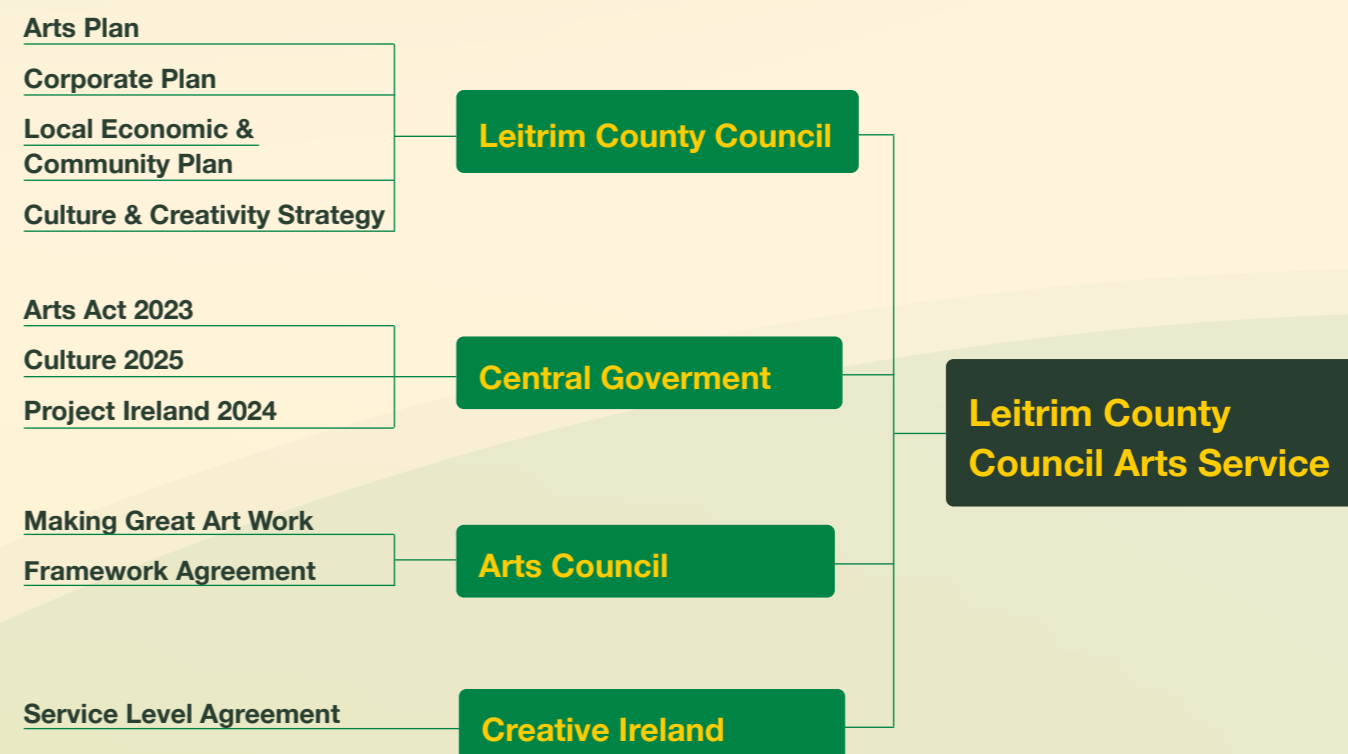
Support for arts is embedded in the thinking and practice that underpins our new Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP), is at the heart of our recent (2023) Leitrim Culture & Creativity Strategy agreed with Éire Ildánach/Creative Ireland, and will be central to our multi-annual Framework Agreements with An Chomhairle Ealaíon/Arts Council. This Arts Plan also looks to common objectives with other council strategies including our county’s Economic Development Plan, Age Friendly Action Plan, Library Strategy and wider council objectives to do with quality of life, the environment and the public realm. This level of cohesion within Leitrim County Council creates a valuable opportunity to ensure consistency across broader planning and operational frameworks, balancing the needs of the diverse strategic objectives of the council, and helping to ensure that due attention and consideration continues to be given to implementing the Council’s objectives for arts, culture, and creativity.

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STRUCTURE

The Arts Service operates within a governance structure comprising of all the services strategic partners. We adhere to good governance principles by maintaining clear and transparent objectives and practices and by maintaining positive, constructive engagement with partners, artists and the broader public.



Through collaboration and partnership, the Arts Service has established much common ground with local, national and international organisations and agencies. Working with these partners, we are able to implement arts development objectives in Leitrim.



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PRIORITIES & ACTIONS

The Mission of Leitrim County Council's Arts Plan for 2024 - 2027 is to contribute to the social, cultural and economic development of Leitrim by placing the arts at the centre of everything we do.

Our three core priorities in this new Arts Plan are:

Community Engagement

this is how we serve communities in Leitrim.

Children and Young People

this is how we make sure children can make, share, and enjoy the arts.

Professional Development

this is how we support artists.

We will also introduce two cross-cutting priorities across all our programmes looking at:

how we

respond to the climate emergency

how we

promote Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

through our work in the arts.

These priorities are deliberately high-level, and we have designed them to interweave through the wide spectrum of arts activity that we support and develop in Leitrim. Our priorities also intersect with other areas of Council activity and with the activities of other organisations and agencies. What we want to achieve for the arts is going to be achieved in tandem with other developmental objectives in Leitrim. This approach is in tune with Leitrim County Council’s belief in the strategic interdependence of social, cultural, and economic development, and this approach is shaped by our understanding that if we are to have success in any of these areas, we need to be successful in all three.

Our approach in setting out our priorities for the Arts Plan also takes account of the influence and impact of the partnership arrangements that Leitrim County Council, through its Arts Service, has developed with An Chomhairle Ealaíon/Arts Council and with the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media through the Creative Ireland programme.

Other national or overarching priorities and themes that will have an impact on our work include the Government’s Climate Action Plan in response to the climate emergency, and the various policy and operational measures being put in place to improve equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in all spheres of life, including the arts.

We know that ambitions and expectations are high within our communities here in Leitrim, particularly within the arts community, and every effort will be made to meet those expectations.

Community Engagement

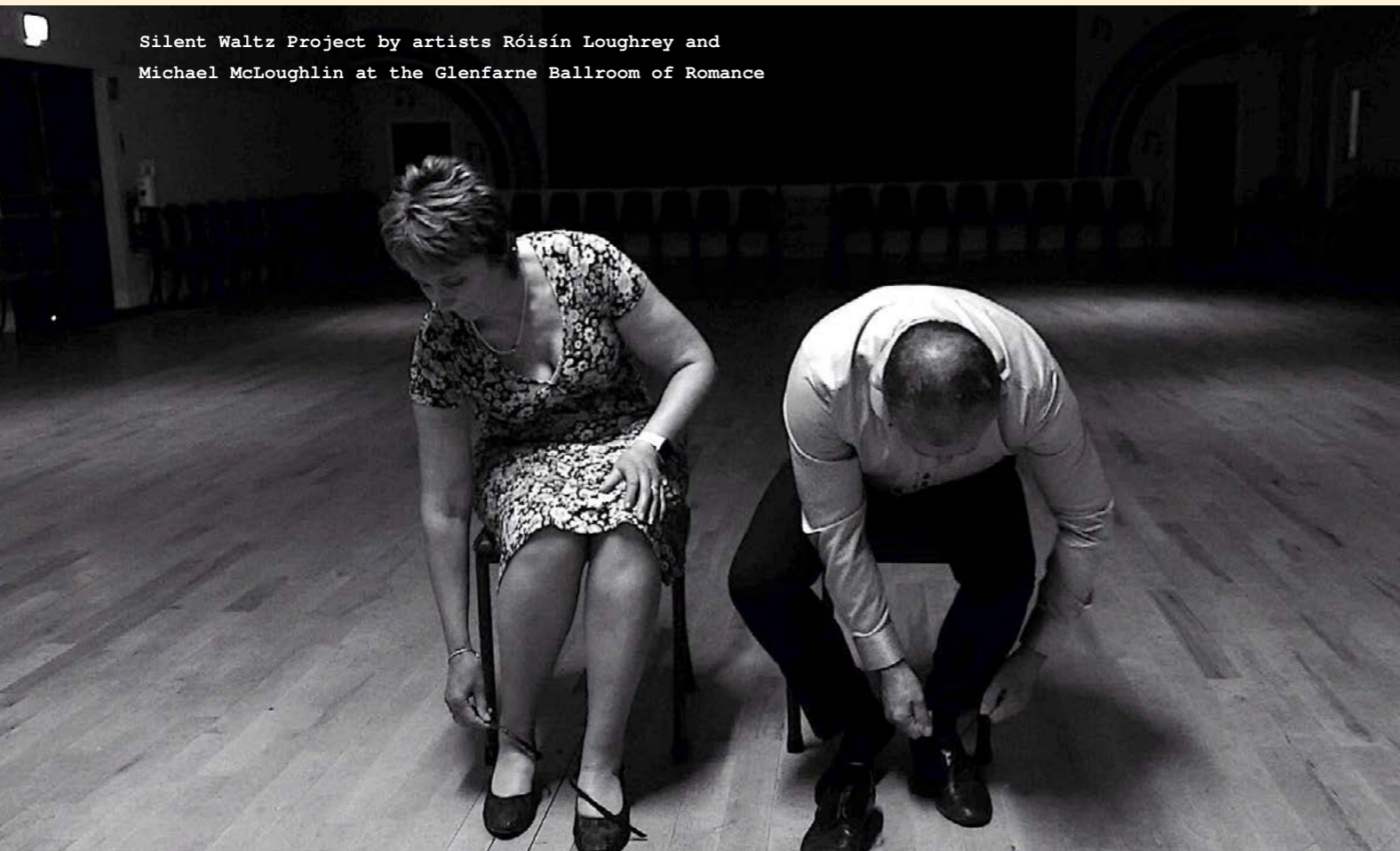
Leitrim County Council views the arts and creativity as essential skills and a mindset that every person can explore. Communities and individuals of all ages can develop confidence, a sense of self, and a shared understanding through creative expression and every effort should be made to provide that opportunity.

Any cohort of people that comes together because they share a common place, interest or characteristic can be said to be a community, and as such, any group of people who come together to engage with the arts, to explore their own creativity, or to explore themes that are important to them through the arts are central in this context.

Among the actions we will pursue under this priority will be:

- **To develop a comprehensive communications strategy to broaden awareness of the arts service generally and promote the diversity of opportunities for groups in the community to engage with the arts.**
- **To celebrate community engagement in the arts as a means to encourage and enable further communities to seek out new opportunities for themselves.**
- **To enhance the experience of Culture Night by working with partners to broaden the range and depth of events and activities conducted as part of the programme.**
- **To utilise the Percent for Art scheme to ensure that diverse art projects are developed within communities in Leitrim and that communities can be actively involved in commissioning new art.**
- **To work with the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media through the Creative Ireland programme to enhance engagement in the arts and creativity throughout Leitrim to the greatest extent possible.**

Silent Waltz Project by artists Róisín Loughrey and Michael McLoughlin at the Glenfarne Ballroom of Romance



Children and Young People

When we invest in young people's creativity, we are investing in the future creativity of our society. Children & Young People continue to be a key priority for Leitrim County Council as children account for approximately 27% of the population. Moreover, Leitrim is also one of the most rural counties in Ireland with one of the highest dependency rates at all ages with, for example, the highest percentage of young people providing unpaid help at home. This is reflected in school attendance where Leitrim has one of the lowest rates of absenteeism at primary level but one of the highest at secondary level. As a grouping, young people are more dependent on parents or other adults to access creative activities; they have complex and diverse needs that change continually throughout their 18 years; and as they often don't get to make their own decisions about participating in creative activities, greater attention must be given to providing those opportunities and ensuring that they are accessible and known about.

Among the actions we will pursue under this priority will be:

- To work with Leitrim Childcare Committee, preschools and others to develop projects specifically for children aged 0 to 4 years.
- To assist primary schools and other partners to enable arts engagement among children aged 4 – 12.
- To work with a range of partners to enable young people aged 12 – 18 years with an interest in different aspects of the arts to explore their own creativity in depth, particularly in the areas of youth theatre, music and creative writing.
- To develop skillsets of artists to work with children and young people, to facilitate such projects and to enhance the sustainability of those working in the creative sector.
- To deliver meaningful engagement in the arts and creativity for children and young people through Cruinniú na nÓg, the national day of creativity, throughout Leitrim to the greatest extent possible.

Professional Development

Over a number of years, Leitrim County Council has placed a strong emphasis on the professional development and sustainability of artists. The stimulus for this is twofold. In the first instance, the percentage of people working in the creative sector in Leitrim is one of the largest in the country and continues to rise. The membership of Creative Frame, Leitrim County Council's Creative Sector Professional Development Programme, has grown each year, with over 400 current members.

Because the creative sector represents such a significant proportion of the workforce, it is essential that we seek to ensure that the practice and livelihoods of those that work in it are sustainable and, in any event, the initiatives we seek to develop as part of the Arts Service require highly skilled individuals capable of facilitating those projects.

Moreover, while Leitrim enjoys a vibrant creative sector, it also faces significant challenges. As a rural county with a small, dispersed population, it is imperative that Leitrim County Council seeks to instil a culture of creativity and innovation in all aspects of the local economy. Leitrim's County Development Plan recognises that the creative sector "serves to encourage creative thinking which can stimulate new ideas and approaches to how we live and work" and further seeks to "develop synergies with other areas."

Among the actions we will pursue under this pillar are:

- To continue to develop Creative Frame as vital networking and professional development platform for creative practitioners in Leitrim. To support artists to pursue their own professional development through direct funding.
- To develop platforms for Leitrim artists to engage internationally, growing their networks and creating links to potential future career opportunities.
- To support recent graduates and early career artists to gain valuable work experience in the creative sector as a strategic priority of the Leitrim Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023-2027, supported by Creative Ireland.
- To further develop the online professional development resource www.socialpracticetoolkit.com.
- To work with secondary schools to broaden awareness of careers in the arts.

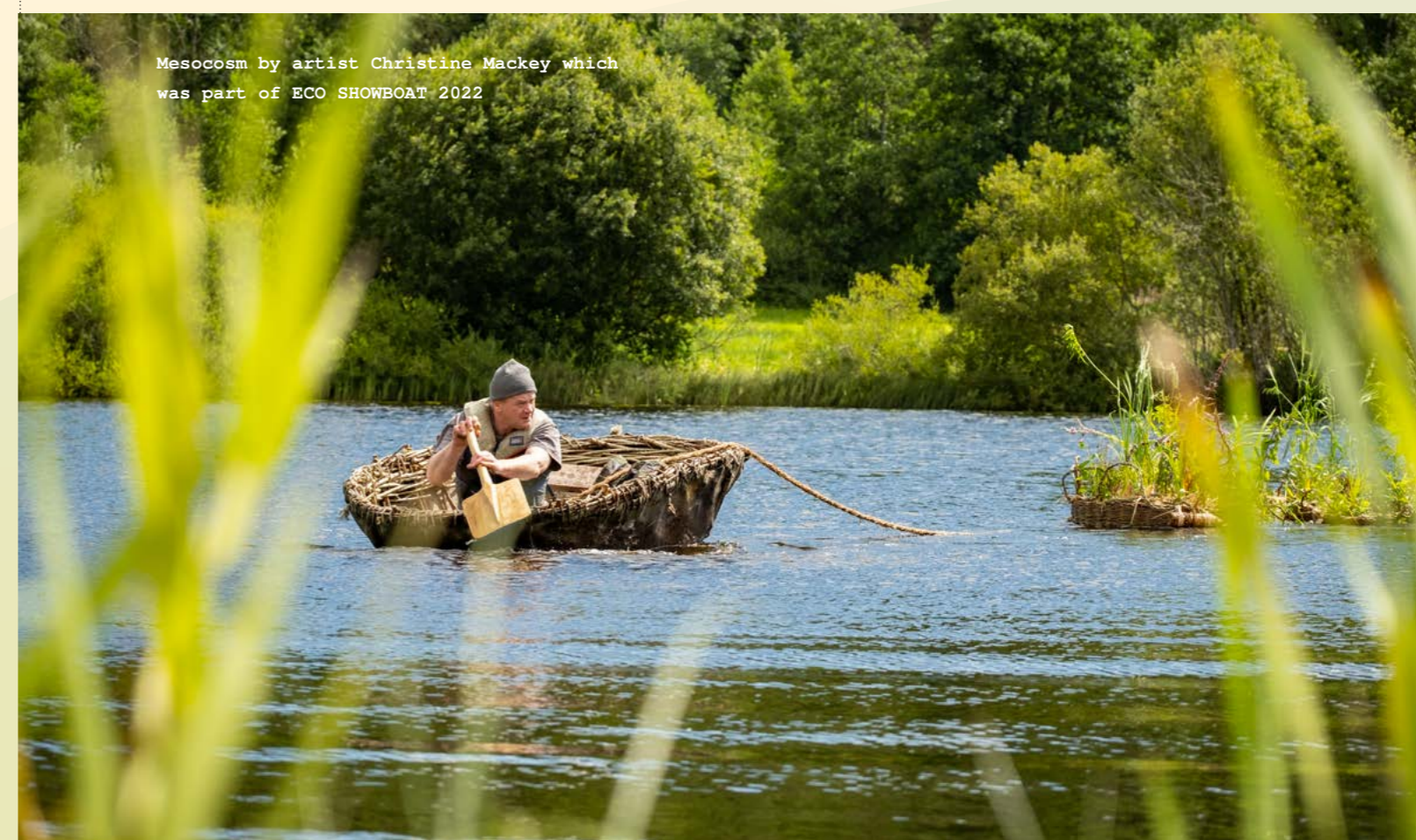
Climate Change

As the global impact of climate change has become increasingly apparent, the pressing need for collective action has become increasingly urgent, and along with science, technology and education, the arts have a significant role to play in helping us address climate change.

Artists in Leitrim have traditionally been to the forefront in matters pertaining to the environment, bringing the conversation about fracking, water and forestry centre stage. It is more important now that artists are supported to challenge, inform and engage audiences in conversations about the pressing challenges regarding climate change. It must also be recognised that our arts infrastructure, festivals and arts projects all have carbon costs, and these too need to be managed and minimised.

Among the actions we will pursue under this pillar are:

- To encourage, support and highlight the work of artists that seeks to bring about positive change with respect to our impact on climate and the environment.
- To provide training to artists, arts festivals and organisations in how to minimise their carbon footprint.
- To adapt our funding models to incentivise actions and approaches that minimise our impact on the environment.



Mesocosm by artist Christine Mackey which was part of ECO SHOWBOAT 2022

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

While engagement in the arts can have positive impacts on any member of society, the inability to be able to access those activities because of economic, geographic, language, physical or any other form of barrier, can have an adverse impact on wellbeing, not only because of the absence of that activity, but also for the compounding sense of isolation and stigmatisation that such barriers place on people when taken as a whole.

Leitrim County Council is committed to providing equitable access and opportunity for artists and audiences/participants regardless of gender, sexual orientation, civil or family status, religion, age, disability, race or membership of the Traveller community, or socio-economic background. In all its work Leitrim County Council wishes to ensure that professional artists who are representative of the diversity of Irish society, and/or artists whose work seeks to deliver equitable opportunities or outcomes for such participants/audiences are supported and that the arts are accessible to everyone in our society.

Among the actions we will pursue under this pillar are:

- To work with relevant agencies and organisations to identify specific groups and cohorts that encounter barriers to participation in the arts; to develop a greater understanding around these barriers; and to devise strategies and approaches to help overcome them.
- To develop awareness and skills among our own staff and other professionals in the creative sector in relation to EDI.
- To redesign our financial supports criteria and processes to ensure equitable access to funding opportunities for all professional artists, community groups and organisations.
- To ensure that information about our work, activities and opportunities is accessible to people with disabilities and jargon-free.

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Together these strategies endorse the idea that while the creative sector plays a central function in the cultural wellbeing of the county, it also has vast implications socially and economically, the three strands of which are inherently intertwined.

Moving Together by Undercurrent Dance Theatre at The Dock



UNDERSTANDING OUR IMPACT

Our plans for 2024-2027 include having a consistent framework for describing and measuring the impact of our work in supporting artists, serving our community, meeting our local and national objectives, and describing the difference that our work makes to the lives of people in Leitrim.

We value and have a strong commitment to hearing and understanding the voices and experiences of people in our community who participate in diverse ways in arts activities in Leitrim, and we are particularly interested in hearing from, and understanding the needs of people who currently feel that the arts are not for them.

To make this happen we will work to develop consistent, practical, and easy-to-use systems for:

- **Gathering testimonials and feedback from the public and from artists as they describe their experiences of the arts in Leitrim and the impact this has on their lives (social, cultural, economic etc.)**
- **Gathering information and stories about how people find out or know about the arts in Leitrim.**
- **Asking people to tell us their levels of satisfaction, enjoyment, and anticipation, and understanding of what motivates them to come to be involved in the arts in Leitrim.**
- **Asking people if they experience any change in intention or behaviour as a result of getting involved in the arts in Leitrim.**

Using this information, we will establish clear, practical indicators and practical ways to describe and measure this impact consistently over time. This will create knowledge and insight to inform our planning and to enrich the material that we can provide to our stakeholders to help them understand the impact that the arts in Leitrim has on the quality of life of our community, and our impact on artists.

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Manorhamilton Intercultural Music Project, part of
Leitrim County Council's Creative Ireland Programme



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