

Briefing to Councillors

Summary
2026



**Creative
Waikato
Toi Waikato**

Who we are

Creative Waikato is the regional arts organisation for the Waikato region, which includes 10 local authorities – Thames-Coromandel, Hauraki, Matamata-Piako, Waikato, Waipā, Hamilton, Waitomo, Ōtorohanga, South Waikato and Ruapehu.

Our area of activity and engagement also connects with four Iwi – Waikato-Tainui, Hauraki, Raukawa and Maniapoto.

We have been working extensively across Waikato since 2012 and have experience and understanding of the diverse array of artforms found throughout our region. We are navigators who lead the elevation of creativity in our region and collaborate to provide opportunities for cultural wellbeing. We provide creative capability development for artists and arts organisations, strategic direction and support for sustainable arts, culture and heritage in our region.

**Our Vision:
Waikato thrives with diverse
and transformative creative
activity.**

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

The arts, culture and creativity are valued and celebrated in our communities.

Our region has robust and flourishing pathways for participation and audience engagement and our creative and artistic professionals.

Ongoing sustainable development of a range of artistic and cultural activities throughout the region.

The arts, artists, arts and cultural organisations and arts activity are seen as being a vital part of the Waikato region and the wellbeing of its people.

WHAT WE CAN DO FOR COUNCILS, ELECTED COUNCILLORS AND STAFF

Provide localised insights and facilitate connections with front-line community and facilitators.

Deliver regionalised activity that aligns with our regional strategy (which links to community trusts, philanthropy and local government).

Serve as regional sector advisory to support policy, cross-department planning, outcomes and insight, and to support activation of the regional strategy and local action plan.

Continue to deliver our capability building programmes and strategic sector influence in the Waikato Region. Supporting creatives, organisations, and other enablers to work collaboratively to develop and deliver innovative district and regional outcomes.

Next steps

Meet together to share our current insights, work and impact.

Connect with council executive leadership and staff to support future development and strengthen our strategic relationship.

Support council engaging with 'Creativity Every Day' as our koha to you and your staff.

Key Links

<https://creativewaikato.co.nz/>

<https://creativewaikato.co.nz/advocacy/waikato-arts-navigator>

<https://creativewaikato.co.nz/news/understanding-the-value-of-arts-culture-and-creativity>

<https://creativewaikato.co.nz/creativityeveryday>

Please contact

Creative Waikato CEO

Dr. Jeremy Mayall

jeremy@creativewaikato.co.nz

Council-specific areas of consideration

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The following areas are those which relate specifically to the day-to-day work of Council.

There are connections between different areas within Council which facilitate a more holistic and integrated approach to issues and problems and more joined-up solutions.

These sections are matched with local government departments and example initiatives that could be supported through localised investment and activation.

Please note: This will outline a range of local government department areas connected to our sector, and concludes with a specific arts, culture and creativity focus in summary.

Civic Engagement

In the past three decades Aotearoa has undergone a substantive demographic change. This is evident in the ethnic composition of the population, its age structure, and in the increase of those born outside of New Zealand.¹

Globally, voter turnout is declining and this is also a challenge facing local democracy in New Zealand.² Positive participation in communities and local democracy can contribute to the sense of social cohesion.

¹ Civics, Citizenship and Political Literacy Education for a Diversifying Nation in NZPSA 'Our Civic Future Civics, Citizenship and Political Literacy in Aotearoa New Zealand: A Public Discussion Paper. <https://nzpsa.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Our-Civic-Future.pdf> p, 17

² Victoria University of Wellington Panui 'Another local election, another low turnout? Syncing local and general elections could be the answer' <https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/news/2025/09/another-local-election-another-low-turnout-syncing-local-and-general-elections-could-be-the-answer> 24 September 2025

Local government is all about community. Councils make decisions about local activity to ensure a healthy environment, thriving families and businesses, safe spaces for all and a culture that supports every individual's sense of belonging.

The arts contribute uniquely to the works of civic engagement, by validating people's stories and perspectives, and bringing people together around shared goals.

Collaborating with local government, artists can facilitate processes that amplify the voices of residents, activate neighbourhood assets, and foster a stronger social fabric, building bridges between city staff and communities.

If we want stronger communities with improved outcomes we need councils to work with local storytellers and trusted voices to enhance our collective civics education and understanding. This means engaging with artists to share information in an engaging and accessible way that can communicate effectively with different communities.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY FOR 2026-2029

Engage planners, regulatory and community services and artists to create a participatory art project on a particular issue i.e., getting to know your neighbour.

Commission work on a central theme to communicate with diverse audiences (see <https://kotahitangallery.nz/> as a local example).

CONNECTED COUNCIL DEPARTMENT AREAS

Community Services and Facilities

Parks and Reserves
Open spaces
Playgrounds
Public Toilets
Cemeteries
Libraries
Heritage
Property Services – Community
Land and Buildings
Housing for the Elderly
Public Swimming Pools
Waste Management and Minimisation
Emergency Management

Venues, Tourism and Events

Infrastructure
Theatres
Community Halls
I-sites

Transport, Roading and Footpaths

Roads
Footpaths and Cycleways
Road Safety Interventions and Education

Plans, Policies and Bylaws

Budgets
Policies
Bylaws
Reports
Strategies

Governance and Corporate

Decision-making functions and support

Communication and Marketing

Provision of information to news media and stakeholders
Internal communications
Supporting engagement and consultation activities
Managing online and print channels

Community Services and Facilities

Libraries, museums, reserves and community amenities are all important services of Council that enable the community to participate and celebrate. These are core facilities that enable opportunities for learning, play and communities coming together.

Arts, culture and creativity can have an integral role in the design of local amenities. By incorporating local history or other elements that represent your community, these amenities can become truly unique assets. They can also enhance public appreciation of arts and connect artists with communities.

Working with artists is also a great way to activate community spaces and encourage participation and engagement. The trend toward the

establishment of integrated community hubs³ and mixed-use developments, provides opportunities for councils to ensure maximum benefit for our communities.

Ensuring facilities include spaces that are accessible to artists and community based arts groups, where they can make and show their work to audiences, is vital for community wellbeing.

³ Hamilton City Council 'Rototuna Village'
<https://hamilton.govt.nz/strategies-plans-and-projects/projects/rototuna/rototuna-village/>

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY FOR 2026-2029

Community houses work with local artist(s) to engage migrant communities about their ‘sense of belonging’.

Encourage the inclusion of creative spaces (workshops, rehearsal rooms, studios, etc) in other civic developments (buildings, libraries, sports facilities etc).

Support staff in council facilities to enable community access to space (activations in libraries, parks, and other council facilities).

Reduce administrative burden on individuals and community groups trying to utilise public spaces for creative activity (event permits, space restrictions, busking permits etc).

Proactively address issues in civic bylaws regarding sound levels in public spaces. Take action to create legislative support (District Plan) that protects creative activity in the central city – this includes noise levels in music/performance spaces in connection with new urban residential developments. (See Ōtepoti Live Music Action Plan 2023 for example).

<https://www.dunedin.govt.nz/services/arts-and-culture/otepoti-live-music-action-plan>

Maintain and increase investment into community providers of service including theatres, venues, and community houses.

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Land and Buildings
Housing for the Elderly
Public Swimming Pools
Waste Management and Minimisation
Emergency Management
Venues, Tourism and Events
Infrastructure

Planning and Regulatory
Building Compliance
Development Engineering
Resource Consents/
Enforcements/Land
Information Memorandums

Plans, Policies and Bylaws
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Parks and Reserves

Parks and reserves provide opportunities for people to play, socialise, and connect with nature. They also provide space for people to engage in activities that foster community wellbeing.

Arts and culture connect us with our stories, landscapes and places, and New Zealand's history and heritage.⁴ These spaces serve as a hub for community gatherings and events, and often include amenities such as playgrounds, walking trails, and seats.

⁴ Ministry for Arts, Culture and Heritage 'Briefing to the Incoming Associate Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage – February 2023' p.2 <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2023-03/BIM%20-%20Assoc.%20Minister%20for%20Arts%2C%20Culture%20and%20Heritage.pdf>

Artwork in parks can often perform a dual function, such as a seat, fence, or bridge. The opportunity to integrate art into these functions can make this equipment engaging and interesting.

The Waikato community values greater programming and promotion of youth and family-friendly events.

Storytelling through signage, interpretation, and art can provide educational opportunities and protect the unique cultural heritage of the Waikato region.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY FOR 2026-2029

Support local artists and practitioners to create a strong sense of cultural identity, by integrating history and Māori, Pasifika and other communities into the design.

Engage with local artists to create environmentally aware light-based artworks that provide opportunities for storytelling alongside positive safety outcomes for communities.

Work with local artists on the design and development of art-informed play environments. For more ideas around this, please contact Creative Waikato for information, including the 'Play with Arts, Culture and Creativity' strategy.

CONNECTED COUNCIL DEPARTMENT AREAS

Community Services and Facilities	Plans, Policies and Bylaws
Parks and Reserves	Budgets
Open spaces	Policies
Playgrounds	Bylaws
Public Toilets	Reports
Heritage	Strategies
Property Services – Community Land and Buildings	Communication and Marketing
Planning and Regulatory	Provision of information to news media and stakeholders
Building Compliance	Internal communications
Development Engineering	Supporting engagement and consultation activities
Resource Consents/Enforcements/Land Information Memorandums	Managing online and print channels

Growth

Cultural storytelling, and in particular when created in collaboration with Mana Whenua, can be pivotal in expressing place-specific identities and ideas.

Culturally relevant art can increase engagement with public spaces and aid urban revitalisation.⁵

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) can help to protect infrastructure from damage. Public art can contribute to social cohesion, community care, and connectivity, key elements of CPTED.⁶

Public Art can contribute to feelings of safety and security, and so support engagement and community care within spaces.⁷

Arts, culture and creativity can be woven into key hard infrastructure projects, to provide distinct places of interest and increase community ownership.

Hard infrastructure provides ‘third spaces’ which can be activated in support of community wellbeing, and it is people who create activity and connection in these spaces. There is a demand for this activation, as growing communities look for things to do and ways to connect with one another.

5 Siti, Oma, Siti Rasidah, Norizan Mt Akhir ‘Bringing the New to the Old: Urban Regeneration through Public Arts’, *Procedia—Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol.234, pp.515-524. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042816315245>

6 The International Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design Association, ‘Primer: What is CPTED?’ <https://www.cpted.net/Primer-in-CPTED>

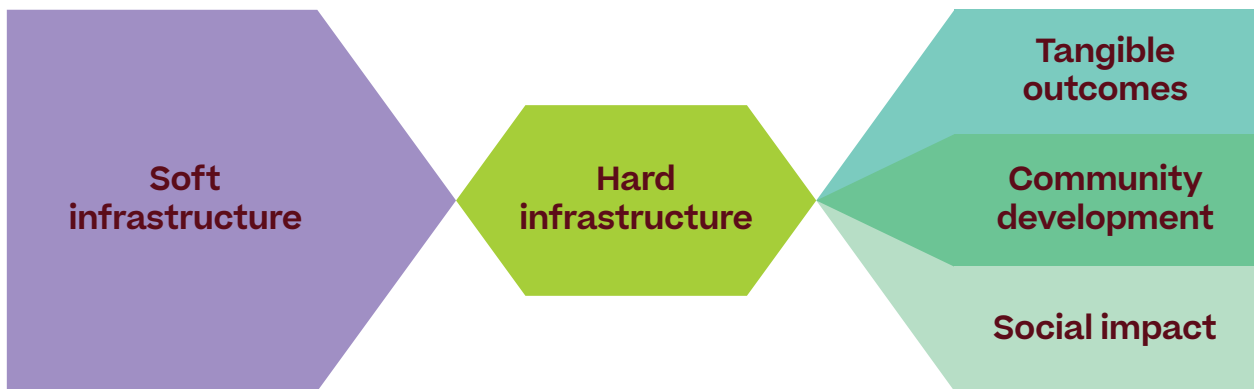
7 Partners for Livable Cities, ‘Public Art: More than Just a “Picture on the Wall” — a Vehicle for Crime Prevention’, <http://livable.nonprofitsoapbox.com/component/content/article/9-livability-live/474-public-art-more-than-just-a-picture-on-the-wall-a-vehicle-for-crime-prevention>

In the community space, much of this activity, connection and positive outcomes are enabled by volunteers and community groups, who donate their time, skills and energy to serving their communities.

Council and community activation of third spaces is referred to as soft infrastructure. This is the central and measurable driving force behind the diversity of cultural expression, the quality of creative output, and the continuously

growing local, national and international reputation of the creative storytelling of this region.

It is essential to gather data around the use of community space, and what activities take place within them, and by which local groups. It is also vital that there is civic investment in and support for the growth and maintenance of all facets of soft infrastructure – with a central focus on people.



Soft infrastructure	Hard infrastructure	Tangible outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artists/Creatives • Volunteer groups • Creative career support • Production • Capability building for creative organisations • Sponsorship • In-kind contributions • Bylaws and policies • Investment • Business partnerships • Support for funding applications • Event permit applications • Regulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community spaces • Venues • Galleries • Theatres • Workshops • Creative spaces • Community hubs • Rehearsal rooms • Marae • Fale • Halls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations • Events • Exhibitions • Shows • Performances • Festivals
		<p>Community development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased neighbourhood activation • Connection to CBD • Placemaking in civic spaces
		<p>Social impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased liveability • Social cohesion • Thriving communities • Community wellbeing • Economic development

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY FOR 2026-2029

Combine elements of placemaking with civic infrastructure, such as through using light sculptures on public areas, in order to provide safety, community interest and storytelling.

Establish a Creative Ambassador to promote and facilitate connections and opportunities around infrastructure developments.

Prioritise strength-based investment into the soft infrastructure already delivering in your community. Consider implementing multi-year granting, and streamlining reporting requirements.

Work in partnership with creative leaders in your community to activate council spaces, and provide creative communities with spaces and places to make and create.

Explore the development and support of creative hubs in your communities. Examples include: The Incubator (Tauranga), Toi Pōneke (Wellington), Te Atamira (Queenstown).

Support the incorporation of creative elements into essential infrastructure in order to create vibrant urban environments. This plays 'an important role in supporting social and economic regeneration'.⁸

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Land and Buildings
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Public Swimming Pools
Waste Management and Minimisation
Emergency Management

Venues, Tourism and Events Infrastructure

Theatres
Community Halls
I-sites

Transport, Roding and Footpaths

Roads
Footpaths and Cycleways
Road Safety Interventions and Education

Planning and Regulatory

Animal Control
Building Compliance
Development Engineering
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⁸ Lisa Wilkie, 'What is Arts & Creativity in Infrastructure?', Ara Toi Ōtepoti, <https://hail.to/ara-toi/publication/jhKgoah/article/H4HUAhc>

Plans, Policies and Bylaws

Plans, policies and bylaws affect all citizens, including those working in the arts and culture space. It is important to have a strategic vision for how city growth may impact and engage the creative sector.

This includes capacity for events in public spaces, development of CBD residential and required sound level consideration and mitigation, provision and support for street performance/busking, public art development and activation.

Creative Waikato is available to support as a strategic advisory partner, in order to provide sector-informed and evidence-based insight to assist council in these developments.

For initial information, see our community-led, regional arts and culture strategy, the Waikato Arts Navigator (WAN).⁹

The WAN, alongside the Waikato Performing Arts strategy¹⁰ have been developed to support collective impact in the wider region, while supporting each council to identify their own priorities and focus areas with their communities.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY FOR 2026-2029

Meet with Creative Waikato to explore how arts, culture and creativity can meaningfully connect with council planning and bylaws.

Adopt the Waikato Arts Navigator as council's arts and culture policy, and then develop a targeted action plan.

Appoint a Creativity Officer or Creative Ambassador with a purpose to support and deliver positive outcomes for the arts, culture and creative community.

Consider how red tape around live performances and public events can be simplified.

Explore engagement with arts, culture and creative providers for social procurement and positive wellbeing outcomes.

Support the delivery and expansion of the Creative Communities Scheme funding.

CONNECTED COUNCIL DEPARTMENT AREAS

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⁹ Creative Waikato, 'Waikato Arts Navigator', https://creativewaikato.co.nz/site/uploads/Waikato-Arts-Navigator-Regional-Strategy_2023.pdf

¹⁰ Creative Waikato, 'Performing Arts Strategy', https://creativewaikato.co.nz/site/uploads/CW094-Performing-Arts-Strategy_FULL-A4-Documents_04.pdf

Arts, Culture, Creativity and Ngaa Toi Maaori

Arts, culture, creativity and ngaa toi Maaori can and should be woven through all facets of the core work of local government in the vision and delivery of a productive, thriving and flourishing district and region into the future.

In exploring the work of councils supporting all communities to thrive and be connected, we must acknowledge the vital role of our creative ecosystem in being a contributor to that.

Arts, culture and creativity should be activated by all components of local government as an essential contributor to human capital, social cohesion, positive impact and wellbeing.¹¹

Local governments can support local activity by advocating to ministries and the central government for increased regional investment in this sector.

Arts, culture and creativity are a core public good that provides measurable benefits for the mental and physical health of all New Zealanders.

The creative ecosystem contributes to innovation, and to our regional storytelling, both to ourselves and to international audiences.

Artists are skilled practitioners whose work should be utilised to help develop innovative pathways for future success.

¹¹ For national and international evidence of this impact, see: Creative Waikato, 'Briefing to Incoming Ministers, 2023/2024', <https://creativewaikato.co.nz/site/uploads/Creative-Waikato-Briefing-to-Incoming-Ministers.pdf>

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT?

Increase investment in the creative ecosystem in a sustainable way that supports community impact, and acknowledges the importance of accessibility and wellbeing.

Develop lasting strategic partnership relationships with Creative Waikato as the regional arts organisation, to grow capability and utilise sector-specific insights and impacts.

Embed the Waikato Arts Navigator as a council strategic document and commit to developing a council-specific Arts Action plan in alignment with your LTP, this briefing advice, and community consultation.

THIS STRATEGIC APPROACH SHOULD INCLUDE

Vibrant and diverse arts, culture and creativity that starts in flax roots community activity and develops through into sustainable creative careers.

Telling our stories and embracing te ao maaori and nga toi maaori in all its forms as the unique expression of this country.

Enabling accessible creativity and daily creative expression for all people in our communities.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY FOR 2026-2029

Engage with artists and local advisors, alongside Creative Waikato, to explore the possibilities to embed creative activations across all core council business.

Maintain and increase council investment in the areas of arts, culture and creativity – both within council operational activity, and in community granting and support.

Invest in Creative Waikato as a strategic regional arts organisation (alongside other regional sector organisations in Sport, Economic Development, Tourism etc) to support localised activity, capability and strategic regional impact (in partnership with community trusts and central government).

Work collaboratively to enhance community arts activity and infrastructure through a regionalised partnership approach.

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