

Westmeath Arts Plan 2010-2016

The Context

In 2002 Westmeath County Council established its first arts office, one year later the local authority published their first arts plan 2003-2009, this was preceded by an extensive consultation and review process under the guidance of the Westmeath arts forum. Since then a steady expansion of the arts service has occurred. All of the 92 objectives of the first plan were achieved over its lifetime. The implementation was overseen by both the Arts Forum and the Housing Social and Culture Strategic Policy Committee, who received quarterly updates of the plan and its implementation. Over a six year period the arts service has increased and extended the grant aid and award opportunities available to artists, arts groups, arts organisations and developmental agencies and venues for the arts, while gathering valuable information about the county's core practices and interest in the arts in order to inform its services and programme.

Westmeath County Council is affirming its position in the development of the Arts and plan to develop a second six year arts plan from 2010. This six-year Westmeath County Council Strategic Arts Development Plan (2010-2016) will provide guiding policies and supporting strategies for the Council as it faces into a period of economic uncertainty.

Mission Statement

“To provide access, appreciation, awareness and enjoyment of the arts for all citizens of County Westmeath”

Defining the Arts

“Arts” as defined in legislation by the Arts Act 2003 means any creative or interpretative expression (whether traditional or contemporary) in whatever form, and includes, in particular, architecture, dance, film, literature, music, theatre and visual arts and includes any medium when used for those purposes.

The Plan

The Plan itself is divided into three main sections:

Key Areas of Support

- Support to the Individual Artist
- Support to Professional & Community Organisations
- Support for Public Art
- Support for Arts Centres, Venues & Spaces

Art form Development

- Architecture
- Dance
- Film
- Literature
- Music
- Theatre
- Traditional Arts
- Visual Arts

Key Areas of Development

- Youth Arts
- Arts & Health
- Arts & Education
- Inclusion through the Arts
- Capacity Building in the Arts

Each section will include guiding policies and supporting strategies. Guiding policies provide the overall policy or goal from which the strategies emerge. Each supporting strategy provides the framework for detailed actions and activities, which form the basis of the Annual Action Plan of the Council's Arts Service. Overall the Strategic Plan is focused on putting in place an Arts Service that stimulates interest and awareness in the Arts and supports sustainable Arts development throughout the County.

Key Areas of Support

Key Areas of Support specifies Guiding Policies and Supporting Strategies for the design and delivery of services to the Individual Artist, Professional and Community Organisations. Policies for expansion of Public Art and a framework for investing in expansion of Arts infrastructure in the County are also identified as Key Areas of Support.

- **Support to the Individual Artist**
- **Support to Professional & Community Organisations**
- **Support for Public Art**
- **Support for Arts Centres, Venues & Spaces**

Support to the Individual Artist

Guiding Policy

Westmeath County Council recognises that the individual artist is central to the development of artistic life in the County. The Council aims to support the individual artist in the making and creating of art and will foster excellence and innovation by supporting the individual artist in their practice and provide opportunities to make the Arts a realistic career ambition for artists living in Westmeath.

Supporting Strategies:

- Support new work and improve financial stability, through awards and bursaries.
- Provide incentives to artists of significant quality to develop artistically.
- Improve the quality and availability of spaces for creating, producing and presenting work.
- Advocate and provide supports to improve continuing professional development.
- Support and develop artist in residence programmes in partnership with existing arts facilities.

Support to Professional & Community Arts Groups and Organisations

Guiding Policy

Westmeath County Council will actively encourage and support Arts organisations to achieve their full potential, while enhancing the artistic life of County Westmeath. The Council aims to support community organisations to fully embrace the Arts as a means of community development, while maintaining high artistic standards.

Supporting Strategies

- Assist with funding or in kind, any events or activities, which would in the opinion of the Local Authority, stimulate public interest in the Arts, promote the knowledge, appreciation and practice of the Arts, or assist in improving the standards of the Arts.
- Produce the Midlands Arts Magazine, which will outline ongoing programmes, funding opportunities and other relevant opportunities for the Arts sector.

- Act as an information and advisory service in relation to the development of the Arts in the County.
- Develop and deliver a needs related capacity building programme for Arts organisation and Arts groups.
- Encourage collaboration and partnership between and with Arts organisations and Arts groups.
- Recognise endeavour in the Arts in County Westmeath, through the Cathaoirleach's Awards.

Support for Public Art

Guiding Policy

Westmeath County Council will enhance the public space and cultural experience of communities in the County, through assisting and engaging Artists and communities in the development of best practice in public art.

Supporting Strategies

- Maximise the resources available from Per Cent for Art Schemes and other investment opportunities in Public Art.
- Utilise existing roundabouts at principal towns in the County to develop a new network of public art sculptures.
- Encourage active collaboration between, artists, architects, planners, engineers and the Arts Office to deliver best practice in Public Art.
- Explore the potential of artform development within the realm of public art practice in County Westmeath.

Support to Arts Centres, Venues and Spaces

Guiding Policy

Westmeath County Council will foster, promote and present the Arts through the development and support of Arts Facilities in partnership with key agencies and local communities.

Supporting strategies

- Explore and research mechanisms for supporting the development of key venues within the County such as the Athlone Gallery Development, Mullingar Arts Centre, Dean Crowe Theatre and Tuar Ard Arts Centre.
- To work in conjunction with the Board of directors and Management of arts centres and venues to develop a comprehensive arts strategy for venues and spaces in County Westmeath.
- Ensure access to the Arts for all and offer local communities an opportunity to access the showcasing and presentation of the Arts at the local level.
- Provide support to existing art facilities and ensure the development of education and outreach programmes.
- Maximise the use of existing facilities within the County to showcase the arts, including the Library Service of the County.

Art form Development

This element of the Strategic Plan outlines Westmeath County Council's guiding policies and supporting strategies to contribute to the enhancement of the Artforms in County Westmeath and to create increased opportunities for the Arts as a realistic career option.

Artform policies are linked to the Key Areas of Supports for Individual Artist, Professional Organisations and Development of Public Art and Arts Infrastructure, these are further enhanced by the Key Areas of Development.

Artform Guiding Principles

- Architecture
- Dance
- Film
- Literature
- Music
- Theatre
- Traditional Arts
- Visual Arts

The delivery of Artform policies are underpinned by a series of guiding principles,

- Encourage combined art activity and collaboration
- Support professionalism
- Support the individual artist
- Encourage Arts and Education
- Ensure access to the Arts in Communities

Architecture

Guiding Policy

Westmeath County Council will improve opportunities for the public to become aware of and enjoy architecture and to give the public a stronger sense of good architecture and how they can influence the quality of our built environment while positioning architecture firmly within the realm of the Arts.

Supporting Strategies

- Develop an understanding of architecture, its form, role, language and aesthetics.
- Create an awareness of our built environment and explore the artistic opportunities within that space Advocate higher design standards in the physical infrastructure for the Arts in the County.
- Explore the relationship between the Student and the Architect in responding to space, within our built environment, and to give young people a stronger sense of good architecture and how they can influence the quality of our built environment.

Dance

Guiding Policy

Westmeath County Council will promote dance as a vibrant and enjoyable art form and increase the audience for contemporary dance.

Supporting Strategies

- Encourage and support contemporary and traditional dance development in County Westmeath.
- Support professional touring dance in the county and encourage better dance promotion.
- Provide opportunities for the presentation of all forms of dance and examine the physical infrastructure for dance.

Film

Guiding Policy

Westmeath County Council aims to nurture and develop film in Westmeath in partnership with key agencies, individuals and the film sector.

Supporting Strategies

- Provide networking opportunities for film makers and others working through the medium of film in County Westmeath.
- Assist in the promotion of the County as a shoot location for film.
- Ensure that schools have increased opportunities to access and participate in the film making process.
- Further develop the youth film festival as a mechanism for encouraging young people to make films in the county.

Literature

Guiding Policy

Westmeath County Council will nurture and support literature development and provide platforms for writers to further develop and promote their work

Supporting Strategies

- Promote literary readership, enabling creativity, communication, self-expression and critical literacy.
- Enhance literary contribution to festival programmes.
- Improve access to promotional platforms for writers and their work.
- Continue to develop youth literature initiatives.
- Promote and encourage the application of the writers in schools scheme.

Music

Guiding Policy

Westmeath County Council will support and encourage the development of music and music related performance activities in the County and provide opportunities for the engagement and enjoyment of music.

Supporting Strategies

- Establish awards and bursaries for excellence and innovation in music.
- Support the career development of performing musicians and composers.
- Enhance the artistic quality of community and amateur music making.
- Enhance partnership facilitation to encourage relevant music residency models in the County.
- Encourage music development in schools.
- Encourage and support professional touring music companies.
- Increase and enhance the audience for music related performances.
- Continue to support the development of the Midlands Youth Orchestra partnership initiative.

Theatre

Guiding policy

Westmeath County Council will nurture and develop the Theatre and Drama Sector and provide opportunities for the public to engage with Theatre.

Supporting strategies

- Increase and enhance the audience for Theatre.
- Enhance the artistic quality of community and amateur drama.
- Encourage and support Professional Touring Theatre.
- Assist in the co-ordination, collaboration and networking opportunities within the Theatre sector.
- Improve the quality of rehearsal and other artist's facilities through grant aid and supports.
- Facilitate and assist in the development of professional, amateur and youth Theatre companies.
- Encourage Drama in Schools programmes through the arts in context residency scheme.

Traditional Arts

Guiding Policy

Westmeath County Council will support and encourage the development of the traditional arts which are defined as comprising of traditional music, song and dance and oral art forms such as storytelling and promote the professional development of traditional artists.

Supporting Strategies

- Establish awards and bursaries for excellence and innovation in the traditional arts.
- Support the career development of traditional artists through the artist's bursaries and awards scheme.
- Encourage traditional arts development schools throughout the County through the Arts in Context Residency scheme.
- Work with existing traditional arts groups and organisations to increase and enhance the audience for music related performances.

Visual Arts

Guiding Policy

Westmeath County Council aims to develop and nurture the vibrant visual arts scene in the County and to foster innovation and excellence in all genres of the visual arts.

Supporting Strategies

- Devise and promote networking opportunities for artists and others working in Visual Arts Development.
- Increase the potential of Visual Arts exhibition spaces in County Westmeath through the Athlone Gallery development and continue to identify alternative spaces and work opportunities for Visual Artists.
- Expand and enhance the Council's Art Collection.
- Improve supports for artists, through direct grant aid to artists and to organisations that provide facilities to artists and represent their needs.
- Ensure access to the visual arts programme to schools.

Key Areas of Development

Westmeath County Council through its research has identified five key areas towards sustainable development of the Arts in County Westmeath. Each Key Area of Development will harness and combine the resources and services of investments in the Key Areas of Support and Art-Form Development. An aspect of Youth Arts development will for example, combine supports to the individual artist and utilise the development of film as an Artform.

- **Youth Arts**
- **Arts & Health**
- **Arts & Education**
- **Inclusion through the Arts**
- **Capacity Building in the Arts**

Youth Arts

Guiding Policy

Westmeath County Council will actively engage young people in meaningful art practice in a safe environment, while encouraging creativity and enriching their participation in the Arts.

Supporting strategies

- Establish a number of combined Youth and Arts projects.
- Develop partnership projects, which will support, develop and enhance a comprehensive Youth Arts service in County Westmeath.

Arts and Health

Guiding Policy

Westmeath County Council will explore the potential of Arts and Health Initiatives to further include all members of the community in arts practice and to encourage a policy based approach to the development of Arts and Health in the County.

Supporting Strategies

- Improve the structures and mechanisms for the delivery and engagement of the Arts in Health care settings.
- Develop partnerships with key local agencies and Arts organisations to develop a comprehensive programme and models of best practice and in the area of Arts and Health.
- Explore the developmental nature of the arts within Health Settings, through implementation of best practice projects through ongoing monitoring and evaluation.
- Expand and develop Westmeath County Council's existing Arts in Context residency scheme with particular regard Health care settings.

Arts & Education

Guiding Policy

Westmeath County Council will work with key agencies and partners to develop and deliver a comprehensive approach to arts delivery in schools, through the implementation of models of best practice.

Supporting strategies

- Encourage collaboration between the arts organisations in County Westmeath to further enhance Arts and Education.
- Develop education programmes in partnership with Key Arts Organisations.
- Improve access to the Arts for schools in the County.
- Provide meaningful access to the Arts for young people inside and outside of the formal education setting.

Inclusion through the Arts

Guiding Policy

Westmeath County Council will design and deliver an inclusive arts programme, which will provide equality of access to and participation in the arts for those experiencing disadvantage and exclusion.

Supporting Strategies

- Develop partnerships with key agencies to further engage all members of the community in the Arts.
- Ensure equal access to and participation in the arts for all members of the community.
- Create a greater awareness and understanding of cultural diversity and social inclusion needs through the Arts.
- Provide mechanisms of support to initiatives, which celebrate cultural exchange between different sectors of the community while enhancing the Arts at the local level.

Capacity Building in the Arts

Guiding Policy

Westmeath County Council aims to raise the standard of Arts practice and management in County Westmeath and to foster best practice standards of governance in the Arts.

Supporting Strategies

- Improve the professional, managerial and organisational development capabilities of Arts organisations and individuals.
- Promote networking, co-operation and the sharing of professional resources.
- Improve the structures for the delivery of the arts at the local level.
- Provide access to information, resource and advice to arts organisations and community groups

Implementation

This element of the Plan outlines Westmeath County Council's approach to the implementation the Strategic Arts Development Plan.

Implementation

The Westmeath County Council Strategic Arts Development Plan 2010-2016 provides an overall framework for the design and delivery of Westmeath County Council's Arts Services and programmes which are specified in the Council's annual arts action plans. Implementation of the Plan will be led by the Westmeath County Council Arts Office, in partnership with key agencies, individuals and local communities. The day-to-day, design, management and delivery of the Arts Office is managed by the Arts Officer who reports directly to the Director Services. Implementation reports will be compiled and submitted to the Council's Strategic Policy Committee for Culture for ongoing policy review and update quarterly. The Arts Office will prepare an Annual action plan based on annual budgets and priorities. At the end of each year the overall implementation of the plan will be reviewed and will feed into ongoing evaluation and will be updated where necessary. Within this structure, an annual Operational Plan allows for flexibility and responsiveness on arts development programme content and delivery for the **Westmeath County Arts Development Plan 2010-2016**.

The Arts Council is the National Development Agency for the Arts and offers direct support to Westmeath County Council through the Arts Office. The Arts Office will continue to engage with the Arts Council to enhance service delivery at the local level.

Core Principles & Aims

Westmeath County Council's Arts Service aims:

- To design and implement key policies in the development of the Arts
- To provide an inclusive and comprehensive Arts service delivered in an open, professional and friendly manner
- To broaden and enrich active public participation in the Arts
- To actively encourage the interaction, networking and co-operation of agencies, individuals and communities to further develop the Arts in the County.
- To work with other sections of the Council in the implementation of a developmental Arts Service.

Role and Function of the County Arts Service

The role of the Arts Office is to foster, promote and develop the Arts in County Westmeath and to maximise the potential of the Arts Service.

Functions

- To promote and encourage Arts activity
- To formulate policy in relation to the development of the Arts service
- To act as an advisory service on the Arts
- To implement a Strategic Arts Development Plan
- To manage the administration of the Arts Act Grants
- To develop and deliver the County Arts Programme
- To promote models of best practice and high standards in the Arts throughout County Westmeath.

Ways of Working

In the day to day design and delivery of the Arts Service, the Council draws on, the resources and skills of all Units, links with partner organisations in the wider Arts community.

An Integrated Approach to work

The Arts Office works with all Units of the Council drawing on their expertise and resources to ensure that the Arts are integrated into the implementation of their Corporate Objectives.

A Partnership Approach to work

The Council is building on its partnership approach to work, working with other agencies to implement a comprehensive and cohesive approach to sustainable Arts development in County Westmeath. The Council will continue to advocate higher standards of interaction by Arts organisations with the community, while building on networking and co-operation of local, national and international resources. The Council will facilitate the involvement of all partners to develop the Arts at the local level to maintain a balance of service delivery between different areas within the County.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The task of monitoring and evaluating the Arts Service is a multi-faceted and complex task. The complexity of evaluating both the intrinsic and the instrumental impact of the arts is acknowledged. A key difficulty in evaluating the arts is that current evaluation methods often rely on 'anecdotal evidence' rather than quantitative data. The arts service will facilitate and nurture cultural inclusion initiatives and to monitor, evaluate and report on progress against agreed Social Inclusion targets and objectives. In this context, the Arts Service will, over the course of the Arts Development Plan embark on a series of initiatives to map, record, monitor and evaluate work; and question, debate and test evaluation methods. The process of evaluation will commence in mid 2010. Evaluation will take place on an ongoing basis. Methods include verbal feedback, questionnaires, customer requests, monitoring and profiling of audiences.