

# Natural Infrastructure and Growth Scrutiny Panel



PLYMOUTH  
CITY COUNCIL

Date of meeting:

04 February 2026

Title of Report:

**Progress update City brand strategy, Visitor and Culture Plans**

Lead Member:

Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader, and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications)

Lead Strategic Director:

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Your Reference:

Key Decision:

No

Confidentiality:

Part I - Official

## Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the committee on work connected to delivery of the city's Visitor and Culture Plans and new Brand strategy.

The report is in two parts:

### Section I – Visitor Plan and Brand strategy:

2025 has been an incredibly successful year on several fronts for Destination Plymouth and the partner organisations we represent:

- Working with partners across the city we have successfully led the re-imagination of the city brand and creation of new Brand Strategy, narratives and visuals for the city.
- Alongside this we have started the transition from a visitor led to a broader city place marketing organisation championing all sectors nationally and internationally.
- Many of the projects in the 2030 Visitor Plan are progressing effectively across all the different projects areas with some fantastic results which we have highlighted in this report.

Strategic oversight of this work is led by the Board of Destination Plymouth. In 2023 it was agreed that Destination Plymouth would extend its remit to become a broader city marketing and place brand leading organisation with the purpose of:

- Being the custodian of and drive through the objectives for the City's place-based Brand narrative (Britain's Ocean City) improving perceptions of the city in the eyes of residents, visitors, workforce, students and potential investors

- Co-ordinating and amplify place-based activities (marketing, events, projects, fundraising, lobbying, digital) undertaken by Destination Plymouth, Plymouth Culture, National Marine Park, Plymouth Waterfront Partnership, City Centre Company and the City Council into a single and coherent programme.

## **Section 2 – Culture Plan:**

This section of the report provides an update to the committee on the strategic work being undertaken by Plymouth Culture and partners to deliver the objectives set out in the Culture Plan with specific reference to the City of Culture bid.

## **Recommendations and Reasons**

That the Committee:

1. Continues to support the work of Destination Plymouth to lead delivery of the city's Place Brand and Visitor plan strategies working with wider City stakeholders and partners;
2. Supports the continuing transition of Destination Plymouth to a broader remit marketing, growing and positioning the city's 'place' brand going forwards;
3. Recognises the strategic importance, key leadership role and continued significant achievements of the Destination Plymouth, Plymouth City Council, BID and partnership teams in supporting the sector and moving both strategies forwards;
4. Note section 2 of the report.

## **Alternative options considered and rejected**

1. Building on previous work to support the Visitor Plan the emerging new Brand Strategy will amplify the good work growing the city's brand and reputation to date and will start to position the city as somewhere to live and work as well as visit. The aim will be to enhance the city's positive reputation, act as catalyst for increasing and attracting talent and provide an overall direction of travel for the city's brand messaging.
2. Not having the Brand and Visitor strategies will affect the city's reputation through fragmented and disjointed messaging and will not maximise opportunities through partnership working on similar objectives. This in turn will impact on the city's ability to attract talent and investment for the longer term. It is crucial that the city is able to actively promote its vibrant culture and innovative business ecosystem to offset negative external perceptions of the city.
3. Over the next ten years Plymouth has a regeneration pipeline of over £9 billion including an investment of £4.5 billion in the dockyard and defence. The Brand and Visitor strategies will significantly support the need to attract new residents to the city to fill the 25,000 vacancies over the next decade alongside the ambitious Plan for Homes 4 which was launched in March 2024 with the overall ambition to deliver a minimum of 5,000 new homes in the city over the next five years. The strategy will also support the Local economic Strategy and 'Team Plymouth' programmes.

The 2030 visitor plan is now in its sixth year of operation and continues to set a direction of travel for growth of the visitor economy in the city. Not having the Brand strategy and Visitor Plan could potentially affect the city's ability to position itself as a destination not just to visit but also as a desirable place to work, live and invest in. This could have significant impacts on the city's overarching growth strategy, the Plymouth Plan, to 2032. The Visitor Plan has been a strong factor in enabling recovery post Covid19 and will act as a key support strategy in growing and positioning the city's 'place' brand going forwards. Building on this the new Brand strategy will amplify the good

work to date and will start to position the city as somewhere to live and work as well as visit. This will enhance the city's reputation, act as catalyst for increasing and attracting talent and provide an overall direction of travel for the city's brand messaging. Not having the Visitor Plan and Brand strategy will affect the city's reputation through fragmented and disjointed messaging and will not maximise opportunities through partnership working on similar objectives. This in turn may impact on the city's ability to attract talent and investment for the longer term.

Section 2 - The input and overview of the relevant scrutiny committee is essential to maintain openness and transparency in relation to the work of the Council and partners.

## **Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan**

### **Section 1:**

Plymouth is Britain's Ocean City, and the visitor economy is a major contributor to our economic growth, local community and vibrant waterfront city. It supports the city's vision to be one of Europe's finest waterfront cities. The Visitor Plan and new Brand Strategy support the city council's ambition to make Plymouth a fairer, greener city where everyone does their bit, making Plymouth a great place to grow-up and grow old, whilst minimising the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

In particular the Visitor plan and Brand strategy support the City Council's six priorities - green investment, jobs, skills and better education. Through supporting the attraction and retention of talent and investment in an environmentally and commercially sustainable way. The Visitor Plan is a key driver for the current Plymouth Plan 2032 and this along with the new Brand strategy will help to inform the new Plymouth Plan to 2050 process setting out key narratives and a new positioning for the city as a place to live and work.

The Scrutiny review approach embeds the values of democracy, responsibility, fairness and co-operation.

### **Section 2:**

This supports the City Vision to be one of Europe's most vibrant waterfront cities and the City Council priority of a vibrant cultural offer.

The Plymouth Plan remains the City's overarching strategic plan, looking ahead to 2034. The Plan sets out a shared direction of travel for its long-term future bringing together a number of strategic planning processes into one place. The Plan sets out the aspiration to be a healthy and prosperous city with a rich arts and cultural environment. The Culture Plan sits alongside this as a mechanism for achieving the strategic objectives and the Creative Industries Plan is a subset of this.

Policy INT4 is of particular relevance as it seeks to delivering a distinctive, dynamic, cultural centre of regional, national and international renown and sets out how the city will support a thriving arts and cultural sector.

The arts and cultural sector have the ability to have a positive impact across a wide range of topic areas ensuring this Culture Plan also contributes to the following policies:

- Policy HEA1 Addressing health inequalities, improving health literacy;
- Policy HEA2 Delivering the best outcomes for children, young people and families;
- Policy HEA4 Playing an active role in the community;
- Policy HEA7 Optimising the health and wellbeing benefits of the natural environment;
- Policy GRO1 Creating the conditions for economic growth;
- Policy GRO2 Delivering skills and talent development;
- Policy INT3 Positioning Plymouth as a major UK destination;
- Policy INT6 Enhancing Plymouth's 'green city' credentials;

**Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:****Section 1:**

Destination Plymouth Ltd. was formed in 2008 and incorporated in June 2010 as a private/public sector partnership and arm's length company of Plymouth City council. There is currently no provision for Destination Plymouth in revenue budgets going forwards.. UK Shared Prosperity Funding is currently supporting Destination Plymouth until March 2026. From 2026 to 2027 part funding has been secured through 'enterprise funding'. A work stream to explore longer-term strategy and the future sustainable funding options will be prioritised over the next 12 months.

PCC also provides support for city marketing and advertising within the existing Economic Development team and revenue budget. A commitment has also been made to maintain this support going forwards at reduced levels to reflect current local authority budget pressures.

Over the past five years, Destination Plymouth Ltd has helped to leverage over £7.7 million income through grants alone for specific projects related to the visitor plan. This includes £1.62 million from Visit England for product development and international marketing activity and £132k for delivery of a 'Green Tourism' scheme from the Community Recovery Fund. In addition, Destination Plymouth has acted as 'lead body' for a £500k 'Data hub' project for Heart of the South West LEP. UK Shared Prosperity funding was secured in 2023 to support activity connected to developing a new Brand strategy for the city.

In 2024 £25,000 was secured as match funding for UKSPF funds from private sector businesses across the city to develop the new brand strategy and narrative. We are very grateful for the support of Babcock, Princess Yachts, University of Plymouth and The Box for providing the funding to enable the strategy to be developed. No further implications are anticipated for the MTFS at this stage, resource implications are limited to member and officer time.

**Section 2:** No implications identified at this stage of the development plans

**Financial Risks****Section 1:**

Current financial risks regarding delivery of the Visitor Plan and Brand strategy are as follows:

Post 2027 funding for Destination Plymouth is not secure.

Opportunities to secure and leverage grant and commercial funding are restrictive due to limited resources, high levels of competitiveness across the city and economic constraints in the business sector. Opportunities for government grant funding are limited currently.

Waterfront Bid renewal due in 2026.

National re-structuring of tourism which has implemented Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEP'S) has also affected Plymouth's ability to draw down funding directly within the wider county context. Currently there is no national funding for LVEP's.

Strategically and linked to Visitor plan objectives - Gap funding for hotel developments from private sector investment is required to address market failure in developments going forwards.

**Section 2:** – no immediate financial risks

**Legal Implications**

No legal implications anticipated as a result of this report.

**Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:**

**Section 1:** Destination Plymouth Ltd. is accredited to 'Bronze Standard' by the 'Green Tourism' international accreditation scheme. The team are very proud of this achievement which sets standards in line with the UN Sustainability goals. The new Brand strategy for the city has a key strand running through it linked to environment, nature and sustainability.

A Climate Impact Assessment has been completed see link

[Assessment - Climate Impact Assessment Tool](#)

Section 2 - Whilst this report has no identifiable environmental implications, the Culture Plan has the environment as a key driver and will be at the forefront of decision making.

**Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:**

*\* When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

**Section 1:**

The Visitor Plan and new Brand strategy include some activities that relate to the following:

Health and safety - Destination Plymouth as a limited company operates to health and safety guidelines as set out in UK Corporate law. Health and Safety is managed through the Peninsular 'Bright' Health and Safety scheme. Where projects are not led by Destination Plymouth, the Board will seek reassurance that the organisation delivering is compliant through their project governance procedure.

Risk management – Destination Plymouth runs its own organisational risk process alongside a higher-level strategic risk register for the overarching Visitor Plan and Brand strategies.

Where projects are not directly delivered by Destination Plymouth the Board will seek evidence that they are being risk managed through a formal project governance process. Destination Plymouth also acts as 'secretariat' to the city wide multi agency, Destination Operations group which runs a risk register to mitigate against impacts of large quantities of the general public at peak times across the city.

The new Brand Strategy includes a risk register which will be developed over the next 12 months as delivery plans are created. The delivery plans will also have their own project risk registers as part of the development process.

Equality and inclusion – Successful delivery of the Brand strategy and Visitor Plan should help to attract over 25,000 jobs to the city over 10 years. These jobs will provide employment for the local community across a very broad range of roles and in a very accessible way. Destination Plymouth will review projects and activities in the brand strategy on an individual basis to ensure that they promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.

A community wide approach has been taken to the development of the new brand strategy to ensure that it reflects the broader nature of our local community and is reflecting the increasingly diverse nature of our local population and culture.

See Equalities impact statement in separate attachment.

**Section 2 - No other implications identified.**

## Appendices

\*Add rows as required to box below

## Background papers:

*\*Add rows as required to box below*

*Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.*

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Cabinet report City Brand Strategy 13 October 2025							
Perception research report Jan 2025							
Visitor Plan 2030							

## Sign off:

**APPENDIX A.****SECTION I: CITY BRANDING STRATEGY UPDATE**

2025 has been an incredibly successful year on a number of fronts for Destination Plymouth and the partner organisations we represent:

- Working with partners across the city we have successfully led the re-imagination of the city brand and creation of new Brand Strategy, narratives and visuals for the city.
- Alongside this we have started the transition from a visitor led to a broader city place marketing organisation championing all sectors nationally and internationally.
- Many of the projects in the 2030 Visitor Plan are progressing effectively across all the different projects areas with some fantastic results which we have highlighted in this report.

The brand work was launched in October and landed very well across the city with overall very positive media coverage and responses from businesses and communities.

In the first 8 weeks over 200 people accessed the brand home site for content and 65 the media hub with 164 downloads from the hub. Social media reached over 200,000 views for the initial posting on Facebook and is currently being tracked to see how it develops over time.

The branding content is now being adopted by partners across the city with the most recent example being the use for the launch of the City of Culture 2029 bid early January. In addition, Citybus have supported using the insides of the new electric bus fleet and PCC has used the visuals on the 'Civic' hoardings. Princess yachts recently used film footage in their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary film and content, Plymouth Culture used the branding on their new Creative Industries strategy and Plymouth University used it on their recent visioning document at their Civic dinner in November. Babcock were early adopters of the visuals using them for their Devonport open days in July last year.

It seems a priority for the city to now consider how it supports resourcing to positioning itself nationally as a 'must be' place to invest and do business as well as to live, work and visit.

Competition is huge nationally with many of the core cities and mayoral authorities pumping millions of funding into driving growth through place marketing. If you look at all their growth strategies place, culture and visitor are right at the heart of their ambitions.

Their overarching aim in many cases is to attract talent and investment and similar skills to those which Plymouth requires linked to manufacturing, engineering, science, healthcare, creative digital and so on. The investment is huge.

Now is a time for us to use the strengths of our city and the brand narratives which encapsulate this and really use them to shout about what we have to offer here. So, over the next year we will build on the brand foundations you have all helped us to create and we encourage you all to talk, activate and invest in sharing the positive opportunities Plymouth offers for us all. Let's all 'make life an adventure' in 2026.

## **I. City branding and positioning:**

Since the City Brand Strategy, narratives and visuals were adopted by Plymouth City Council in October 2025 the work has been publicly launched and is now starting to be used by wider city partners, communities and organisations. The work to re-imagine the city brand has been completed over a period of two years including a substantial research piece to understand external perceptions of the city and to identify our unique strengths.

Delivery has included:

- Brand visuals imagery and toolkit [Plymouth: Brand home](#)

120 people have visited the brand home site since launch, viewing over 380 pages

- Web home page imagery [Make life an adventure | Plymouth Britain's Ocean City](#)

This is a consumer facing site which has received 367 visits since October, with 691 page views

- Media hub [Plymouth, Britain's Ocean City](#) - 74 users, 412 downloads
- Webinar attended by 60 representatives of city organisations:

- Plymouth City Council, Arts University Plymouth, City College Plymouth, University of Plymouth, Theatre Royal Plymouth, Sutton Harbour Group, Screen Devon, Real Ideas Organisation, Plymouth Marine Laboratory, PureServiced / Pureserviced, Babcock International, Princess Yachts, Great Western Railway (GWR), Homes England
- 2,608 volunteer meeting hours — the equivalent of 372 working days invested across partnership
- Over 250 participants engaged in citywide consultation including students and local community groups
- Total LinkedIn engagements in first week: 18,491 impressions, 12,252 likes, 68 comments, 45 reposts
- Facebook film: initial reach in first week over 114,000 views, 1,400 likes, 293 shares

Next steps rolling out and usage:

- Engagement with city organisations and communities
- Alignment of resources to support wider place marketing activity
- Creation of 'soundbytes' linked to key strands of narratives for social media use
- Creation of a new city website as a digital shop window and global showcase
- Securing funding for broader external talent campaign activity

## **2. Visitor Plan progress report**

### **i. Overview**

The current Visitor Plan 2030 is now in its 6<sup>th</sup> year and has been highly effective in creating strong alignment across the city's supporting partnerships and in delivering several key projects which are cited within it. The plan's objectives are grounded in wise growth of the value of the visitor economy. The focus is on high value markets to drive productivity in the sector that can translate into quality, year-round jobs and opportunities for Plymouthians. That means international and overnight leisure and business visitors who will visit throughout the year and manifests in our targets which grow value at a faster rate than volumes of visits. To

Objectives of the plan are to grow visitor number to 6 million by 2030 and visitor spend to £450 million.

The Visitor Plan 2030 strategy has three key themes:

- Blue-green city
- Brilliant Culture and heritage
- Premier Destination

And is underpinned by a series of enabling activities including:

- Partnerships
- People
- Ocean city infrastructure
- Our distinctive brand

The broader visitor economy including tourism and hospitality is one of the largest employment sectors in the South West region and a key employment sector in Plymouth supporting over 6,200 jobs in the city.

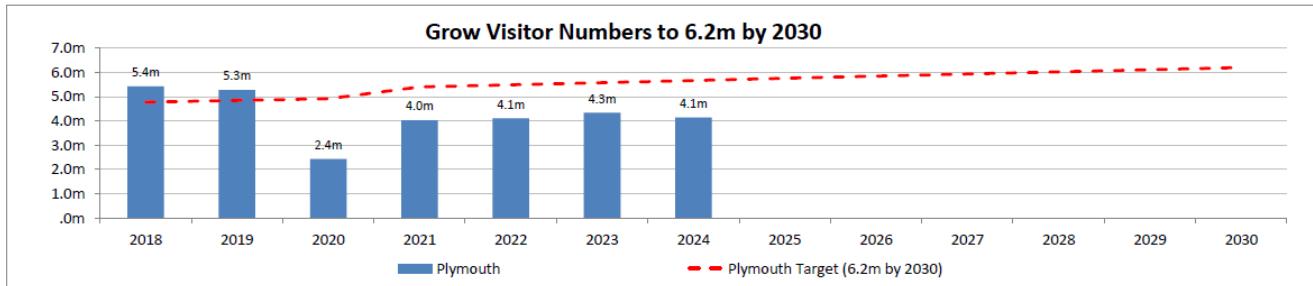
The table below shows the current data for annual visits, visitor spend, and numbers of people employed for the region using 2024 data.

Region	Visitor numbers (annual)	Visitor spend (annual £'s)	Employment (annual)	% of employment
South West	142,342,000	£11,840,925,000	181,500	8%
Cornwall	15,011,000	£1,978,207,000	39,000	14%
Devon	27,050,000	£2,463,281,000	47,100	8%
Plymouth	4,135,000	£346,449,000	6,206	5%

In terms of visitor numbers the sector nationally has not yet fully recovered from the effects of Covid in 2020. Recently released figures from Visit Britain, ONS and IPS data for 2024 show that the region is still under performing versus 2019 in terms of visitor numbers. For example, in Plymouth in 2019 visitors were 5,279,000 versus 4,135,000 in 2024. The same is replicated across Devon, Cornwall and the South West. However, direct spend in Plymouth has improved and has increased to above pre Covid levels at £346,449,000 vs £334,081,000 total spend including secondary impacts is £357,565,000.

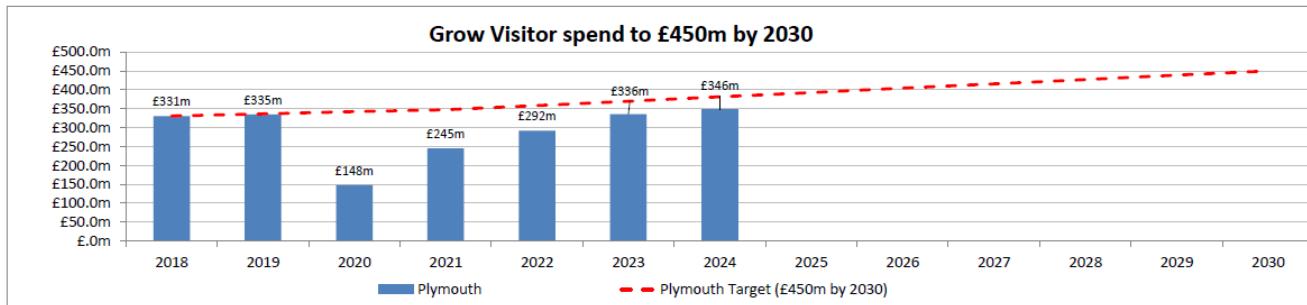
**Grow Visitor Numbers to 6.2m by 2030**

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Plymouth	5.4m	5.3m	2.4m	4.0m	4.1m	4.3m	4.1m						
<b>Plymouth Target (6.2m by 2030)</b>	<b>4.8m</b>	<b>4.8m</b>	<b>4.9m</b>	<b>5.4m</b>	<b>5.5m</b>	<b>5.6m</b>	<b>5.7m</b>	<b>5.8m</b>	<b>5.8m</b>	<b>5.9m</b>	<b>6.0m</b>	<b>6.1m</b>	<b>6.2m</b>



**Grow Visitor SPEND by £450m by 2030**

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Plymouth	£330.7m	£334.8m	£148.0m	£244.7m	£292.1m	£335.7m	£346.4m						
<b>Plymouth Target (£450m by 2030)</b>	<b>£330.8m</b>	<b>£336.5m</b>	<b>£342.2m</b>	<b>£347.0m</b>	<b>£358.4m</b>	<b>£369.9m</b>	<b>£381.3m</b>	<b>£392.8m</b>	<b>£404.2m</b>	<b>£415.7m</b>	<b>£427.1m</b>	<b>£438.6m</b>	<b>£450.0m</b>

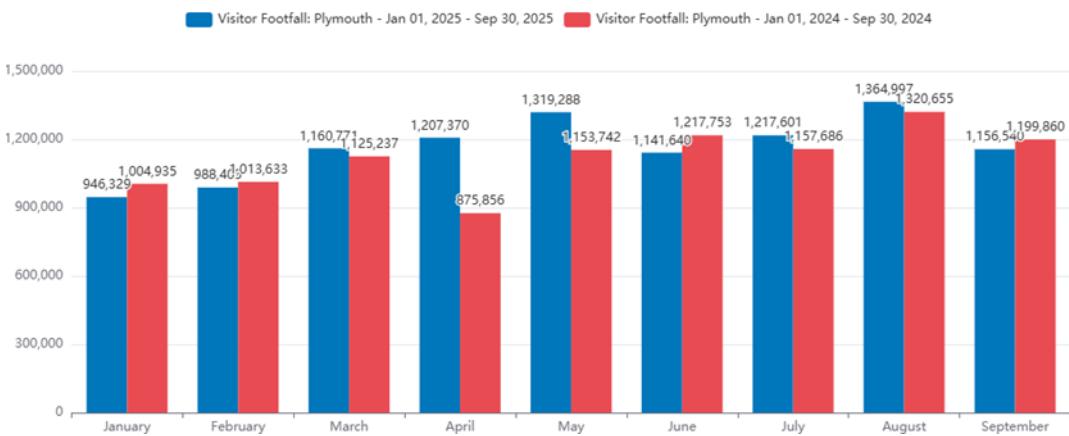
**Overall City Footfall numbers: (using BT footfall data from the South West Data Hub)**

Visitor Footfall (Jan to Sept 2025 vs Jan to Sept 2024) NB. This is combined visitor and local data

2024: 10,069,357

2025: 10,502,941

Growth of 4.3%

**ii. Highlights:**

Over the past twelve months since the last report to Scrutiny committee there has been positive progress on a number of the activity strands connected to delivery of the Visitor Plan 2030. The Visitor Plan 2030 is a shared leadership, shared delivery model with multiple organisations across the city leading in key areas. This includes Plymouth City Council, Plymouth City Centre Company BID, Plymouth Waterfront Partnership BID, Plymouth Cruise Partnership, MEET Plymouth, Plymouth Culture and The Box amongst others.

Progress of the Visitor Plan is monitored by an 'Action Plan'. Currently good progress is being made in relation to the over 20 projects and work streams which are set out in the plan. The plan is reviewed quarterly at Board meetings.

**Marketing and place promotion:**

Over the past year, the Plymouth City Council marketing team have delivered a proactive, digitally led programme that has grown audiences, deepened engagement, and helped strengthen Plymouth's position as a vibrant visitor and investment destination.

## What we're proud of:

- **Growing audiences:** Across Visit Plymouth, What's On Plymouth, Invest Plymouth, and Plymouth Sound National Marine Park, our combined social media following passed 160,000 followers, with content being seen over 41 million times – more than double last year's reach.

 <p>What's On Plymouth Sun 29/6/2025 10:31 am BST</p> <p>The largest-ever exhibition of Beryl Cook's work is coming to Plymouth in 2026! 🎨...</p>  <p>Views 711,382</p>	 <p>Visit Plymouth Fri 22/8/2025 8:00 am BST</p> <p>Last week, Rolls-Royce Motor Cars made a at Plymouth's famous Tinside Lido by subn one of their iconic Phantom cars into the p</p>  <p>Views 596,356</p>	 <p>What's On Plymouth Sat 17/5/2025 10:27 am BST</p> <p>Pirates Weekend has officially begun in Plymouth! Head down to The Barbican, Sutton Harbour, the Waterfront and Roy...</p>  <p>Views 526,868</p>
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- **High-impact video storytelling:** Over 6 million video views and 380 days of total watch time across digital-owned channels, showcasing Plymouth through authentic, visual content that resonates.
- **Influencer collaborations:** Worked with local creators such as CurlyGaz, whose [Plymouth festive food feature](#) drew strong local engagement with over 180k views, 4.5k likes and 540 comments (including Dawn French) – adding authenticity to our place storytelling.
- **Investment brand growth:** Invest Plymouth achieved 127% more website users and a 153% rise in social engagements, driving more interest and awareness in the city's economic growth and impact.
- **Team Plymouth LinkedIn launch:** Since launch in September 2025, generated 80k impressions, a 13.6% engagement rate, and 1,200+ professional followers.
- **Plymouth Sound National Marine Park momentum:** Social audience grew 15%, and newsletter subscribers nearly doubled (+90%), reflecting growing national interest.

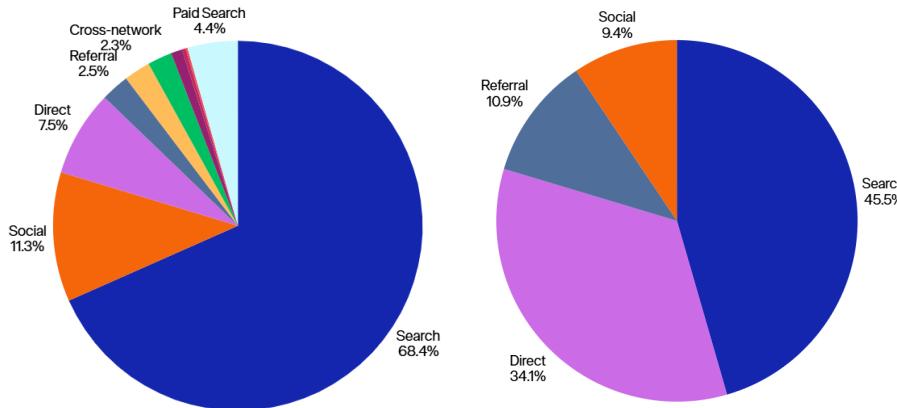
## Where we're having impact:

- **Driving event audiences:** Digital campaigns for PCC's major events delivered 11.7 million impressions and 450k event page views on the website.
- **Website activity:** Visit Plymouth attracted 700k users and 2 million page views, with top interest in events, attractions, and things to do.
- **Email performance:** The Visit Plymouth newsletter grew 30% to nearly 20,000 subscribers, while Invest Plymouth maintains a 40% open rate, and Plymouth Sound National Marine Park 35% open rate which is well above the industry average of 21.3%, evidencing that we have a highly engaged and valuable database.

## Where we're improving &amp; adding value:

- **Higher engagement, fewer posts:** Reduced the number of posts on Visit Plymouth by 23%, leading to a 77% rise in total engagements, thanks to stronger strategy and content quality.

- Authentic visual storytelling: Imagery and video now focus on lifestyle, culture, and major city news – building Plymouth's placemaking identity.
- Building on our user acquisition. Dominant search traffic for Visit Plymouth (68%) aligns with its role in driving broad visitor interest, supported by ongoing SEO efforts like content optimisation for events and heritage. Invest Plymouth's balanced mix, with stronger direct visits (34%), reflects repeat business users and brand loyalty, but lower search share points to opportunities in sector-specific keywords like marine tech or defence.



### Context and challenges:

- Platform shifts: Organic visibility is harder to sustain, increasing reliance on paid activity.
- Tough competition: Regional destinations are investing more in digital, requiring standout content and consistent storytelling.
- Resourcing pressures: Balancing content volume, event responsiveness, and creative quality remains an ongoing challenge, but partnership working is improving capacity.
- Monetisation barriers: Driving income through memberships and digital advertising continues to be challenging. Membership uptake and delivery require significant effort for comparatively low return. Social posts promoting partner deals see limited engagement, and advertising placements, such as newsletter ads, deliver low results.
- Ageing website: With digital discovery increasingly shaped by AI and evolving search behaviour, the Visit Plymouth website performs well but faces the typical challenges of keeping pace with these rapidly changing technologies. This platform is nearly 10 years old now and it is likely it will not be supported for much longer. Work is underway to secure funding to update this digital platform in line with the City Brand Strategy and to create a new website and digital shop window for the city to reflect the changing growth trajectory.

### Links:

- Visit Plymouth – [Website](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [TikTok](#)
- What's On Plymouth – [Facebook](#)
- Invest Plymouth – [Website](#) | [LinkedIn](#)
- Plymouth Sound National Marine Park – [Website](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [TikTok](#) | [LinkedIn](#)
- Team Plymouth – [LinkedIn](#)

### Summary:

Plymouth's digital presence is expanding faster than ever, with clear data showing stronger engagement, better alignment between tourism and inward investment messaging, and a visible shift toward

authentic, place-based marketing. These efforts are helping define how people see Plymouth, not just as a destination, but as a connected, confident city with a distinct identity and story to tell.

### **Events activity:**

The PCC events team delivered and supported 43 major events in 2025 attracting 650,000 attendees. We know that our events are driving economic impact. When we look at data from the South West Visitor Economy Hub we can see that the Fireworks Championships drive over an 80% increase in midweek footfall and that both Armed Forces Day and the Xmas light switch on increased footfall by 30% for example.

Armed Forces Day continues to strengthen our partnership with Babcock and the Rehabilitation Triathlon, sponsored by Aecom grew in popularity with more local schools taking part. VE day celebrations on the Hoe showcased archive material from The Box on a big screen alongside music and dancing and had some great South West media coverage.

The team worked hard to lure Red Bull back to Plymouth and their Up The Mast brought 5,000 visitors to The Barbican (and millions across their global channels online) to witness hilarious scenes of local daredevil's running up a slippery mast and falling into the harbour. The event was such a success that Red Bull are bringing it back for 2026 and the team are exploring a number of other sporting opportunities for the city.

Associated British Ports supported The British Firework Championships once again, good weather meant we had an excellent turnout across the waterfront (80% increase on usual midweek footfall according to SW Visitor data hub) and the event was live streamed on YouTube with over 20,000 views across the globe. Care experienced young people were again at the heart of the event with the Young People's Choice award sponsored by Citybus.

The Summer Sessions, in partnership with Live Nation put on four nights of music with headliners Snow Patrol, James, Pendulum and The Corrs. It was a great opportunity to showcase local music talent (such as music ambassador Grace Lightman) and give University of Plymouth and DBS music students the chance for backstage tours and Q+A's with industry experts. Whilst they attracted good crowds with positive audience feedback, Live Nation were disappointed with ticket sales overall and have pulled out of Plymouth, alongside other regional cities next year. From our perspective, the line up wasn't strong enough to justify the ticket prices. The team have plugged this live music gap and will be supporting Liz Hobbs Group (a music promoter from the midlands) to put on 3 nights of (Radio 2 friendly) music in Central Park in 2026.

FlavourFest (City Centre Company) and Seafest (Plymouth Watership Partnership and Plymouth Sound National Marine Park) also drew good crowds and highlighted the thriving food scene in the South West whilst giving other platforms for grassroots music.

We continue to support third parties who contribute to the growing line up of events across the city such as Britain's Ocean City Running Festival, Winter Wonderland, Pride, Race 4 Life and Market Place Europe's Christmas Market.

As part of our on-going commitment to accessibility we have partnered with the Inclusivity Group to provide BSL services for The Armed Forces Day evening concert and The British Firework Championships stage programme. The Events team chair a quarterly Events Inclusion and Access Group comprising of key city partners such as PADAN, Plymouth Argyle, Theatre Royal, The Box, Barbican Theatre and Plymouth Pavilions. The group supports the Council's work to promote equality and celebrate diversity and will help ensure that events across the city are accessible.

### **National and regional Public Relations activity:**

Number of articles sold in - 177

Opportunities to see (OTS) - 2,179,582,264

Advertising Value Equivalent (AVE) - £ 53,617,724

Increasingly we have been focusing on 'quality' rather than quantity of information and last year started to focus on a broader 'place based' approach to city PR working with the Brand Development Group. This included some great coverage on 'Women in STEM', Culture and community for example.

## MACHINERY

### Plymouth champions Women in STEM

Features | 4 mins read

Plymouth, Britain's Ocean City, celebrates International Women in Engineering Day (INWED) 2025 with some examples of excellence that are redefining the landscape of historically male-dominated industries.



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Plymouth, Britain's Ocean City – a Top 10 City in the UK for engineering and manufacturing employment – is making waves in the UK's defence and engineering sectors, not just through innovation and critical national capability, but by breaking down barriers for women in traditionally male-dominated industries.

One of the businesses at the heart of this transformation is the defence company [Babcock International Group](#) (Babcock). With over 7,000 employees based at [Devonport Royal Dockyard](#) – home to the UK's only site licensed to undertake full-life cycle submarine maintenance – Babcock is a powerhouse not just of engineering expertise and technology, but also innovation.

While engineering has historically been a male-dominated profession, Babcock is redefining the landscape. Women now make up 19% of Babcock's workforce, a promising increase from last year, with 40% representation at board level and 30% in senior leadership roles. And with a bold target of achieving 30% female representation by 2030, backed into company KPIs, Babcock is not just talking about change – it's engineering it.

Kerry Cowdell, Babcock Head of Director of Devonport, commented "Babcock has an excellent range of unique career opportunities available for women in roles that help deliver our nation's critical national defence and energy security programmes."

"We are passionate about raising awareness of the amazing opportunities STEM careers can provide and to breaking down barriers or perceptions that prevent women (and others) from experiencing a successful long-term career in defence, and developing the fantastic skills and training that come with it."

## artsCulture

art > society > culture



Sea for Yourself | coastal creativity in Ocean City

By ArtsCulture | June 13, 2023

Plymouth, Britain's Ocean City, is celebrating its evolving cultural scene with a groundbreaking project aiming to create a unique environment in the city, where arts, technology and environment intersect.

Internationally renowned artist and filmmaker, David Cotterell, will create a major new commission for Plymouth as part of 'Sea for Yourself' – the city's new ambitious cultural programme that will use art and digital innovation to connect people with the UK's first National Marine Park.

The Sea for Yourself programme – supported by funding from Arts Council England and The National Lottery Heritage Fund – also aims to further develop the networks, skills and visibility that will establish Plymouth as a leader for coastal creativity with national significance, offering research, training, development and partnership opportunities across disciplines.

### 4-year programme

The four-year Sea for Yourself programme will use art, storytelling and digital innovation to reconnect people with the ocean. It is linked to Plymouth Sound National Marine Park, which was created to forge a new relationship between the city, its communities and the sea.

David Cotterell, recognised for his visionary public realm and digital work, will develop an exciting new work in Plymouth that will unfold across multiple sites and digital platforms throughout the city.

His past projects include a mysterious 'geyser' in a city suburb, films exploring trauma and memory and a data-driven public sculpture connected to legal recognition of the rights of bodies of water as 'living entities'.

### A new type of relationship

David said: "Sea for Yourself is a chance to build a completely new type of relationship between people and the sea."

"I want to create something open and accessible – something that uses animation, gameplay and narrative to help people experience the ocean with awe and urgency. Plymouth is the perfect city to do that."

Hannah Harris, CEO, Plymouth Culture, said: "Sea for Yourself places world-class creativity in direct conversation with Plymouth's people and its ocean landscape. These commissions are a catalyst for the wider programme, which seeks to create opportunities for interdisciplinary work and explore the use of creative and digital interventions to support people's connection to the sea for mutual benefit."

- **Innovation (all verticals, including Culture), Community, Brand, Strategy - 47 pieces/OTV 209,812,114/ AVE £5,161,378**
- **Cruise - 18 pieces/OTV 84,298,345/ AVE £2,073,740**
- **Groups and MICE - 3 pieces/OTV 322,200/ AVE £ 7,926.**



### Plymouth Showcases Venues For Business Events

BY TDM | UK | WRITTEN BY: TDM EDITORIAL TEAM | PUBLISHED: 16 JUNE 2023



Plymouth, known as Britain's Ocean City, is set to host its annual Meet Plymouth Showcase on 3 February 2026 at Home Park Stadium, the home of Plymouth Argyle Football Club. The event will spotlight the city's growing reputation as a premier destination for meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE).

The showcase will feature over 25 venues, hotels, and event suppliers, offering attendees a comprehensive view of Plymouth's event potential. Notable venues include The Box, the grade-II listed Tinside Lido, and the Plymouth Pavilions, which is expanding its venue hire offering. New additions such as Gidleigh Park, a luxury country house hotel with Michelin-starred dining, and Plymouth Boat Trips' latest vessel, 'The Legend of Plymouth', will also be on display.

Amanda Lumley, CEO of Destination Plymouth, emphasised the city's unique position between a National Park and a National Marine Park, stating, "Plymouth finds itself immersed in the natural beauty of a dramatic coastline, and it's a destination perfect for team-building and outdoor corporate activities."

The event aims to attract local, regional, and national businesses, providing them with the opportunity to connect with Plymouth's MICE community. Attendees can explore a variety of offerings, from upscale coastal hotels to unique visitor attractions and teambuilding activities.

For more information and to secure free tickets, interested parties can visit the official event page. The showcase promises to further cement Plymouth's status as a competitive choice for organisations seeking memorable meeting environments.

Below are some of the press coverage we received from Conde Naste and Traveller:

LIFESTYLE > TRAVEL

## How To Spend The Perfect Weekend In Plymouth

Our guide to the best hotels, restaurants, and things to do in Plymouth—from manor house stays to England's oldest gin distillery.

By [Lewis Nunn](#), Contributor. Lewis Nunn is a Senior Travel Editor...

[Follow Author](#)

Published Mar 09, 2025, 09:35am EDT, Updated Aug 24, 2025, 12:21pm EDT

[◀](#) [▢](#) [0](#)



Coastline by Plymouth to Drake's Island in Devon  
GETTY

**N**icknamed 'Britain's Ocean City'—Plymouth is a bustling, salt-sprayed port city sandwiched between England's spectacular South West coastline and the wild *Dartmoor National Park*. It is steeped in rich nautical history, from *Sir Francis Drake* and the Spanish Armada to the



TRAVEL + LEISURE

### Walking the South West Coast Path around Plymouth, UK

The South West Coast Path runs through Plymouth and it makes a good base for walking the sections on either side.

by Rupert Parker | Jul 9, 2025



At the heart of the city's extraordinary landscape, and providing a connection between the two national parks, is the South West Coast Path National Trail. This 630-mile coastal footpath directly crosses the city and, from Plymouth Hoe, extends across the Southwest of England.



**International and UK domestic trade activity:**

## International:

This year focus has been very much on UK domestic trade activity. Marketing budgets have been significantly lower than 2023 so international activity has focused on e-mail activity into our current database of buyers and PR activity. The exception to this is Britain and Ireland marketplace which was held on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2025. BIM is an annual B2B workshop, organised by the European Tourism Association (ETOA) to showcase Great Britain and Ireland to tour operators and travel buyers from around the world. It involved a series of pre-scheduled, one-to-one appointments – providing a valuable opportunity for us to meet, and do business with, the 200 international travel buyers in attendance. We had 36 appointments and great interest in travel trade accommodation and the National Marine Park. Focus is still very much on Mayflower for the US market and new itinerary ideas.

## UK trade activity has focused on the following:

British Travel Trade Show – 22<sup>nd</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup> March 2025. This is the UK's largest trade show held at the NEC in Birmingham. Tour operators, Coach Operators, Group Travel Organisers, Travel Agents and wholesalers visit the British Tourism & Travel Show each year. They attend to get ideas for group trips, tours and itineraries, to find products and services that make planning simple, and to make their customers' experiences exceptional. We had 5 stand partners who supported us on the stand – Plymouth Boat Trips, Visit Tamar Valley, The Box, Leonardo Hotels and St Mellion Resort.

We are continuing to work on the new Travel Trade area of the visitplymouth website and add new content. In addition, we are helping members to develop new products for the Travel Trade and visiting members to talk about travel trade activities. We have been cleaning our trade database which has 1200 members. We have Created a new Travel Trade pdf for potential buyers and tour operators as well as a heritage itinerary especially for the international and groups trade. We also joined the CTA - Coach Tourism Association with the aim of attracting more coaches and groups business to the city. A new 'Hidden Heritage' itinerary was created for the groups and trade. This year we have also launched a new Travel Trade Campaign for members to buy in which includes all the above e activities. We have seen a growth this year in members buying into Group and Travel Trade Activity.

**MEET Plymouth conferences, meetings and events activity:**

The Meet Plymouth Showcase event was hosted on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2025 at PAFC – 32 stands and 65 delegates attended and over 150 local businesses were invited. We also partnered with the Devon Chamber of Commerce to help engage with more Devon based businesses.

We continued our membership of the Meetings Industry Association (MIA) and have been attending Destination Web Seminars and Pop-Up Discussions as well as making use of the free training sessions for the team. We attended the summer MIA Connect Day and hosted a training workshop with our members after to share the learning about RFP's and Hosting Agents – 8 members attended.

Working the current Meet Plymouth database and regular newsletters are being sent out and a new 'local buyers' database has been created.

Work has been delivered on the Meet Plymouth website, content has been updated, offers being obtained and blog posts going out monthly. We are now seeing more frequent conference enquires coming in as a result.

A new Instagram account has been created, and we are encouraging members to share content on this channel.

121 meetings with Meet Plymouth members took place over the 12 month period to help them create new product and offers

Work on the next Meet Plymouth Venue Showcase – 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb at PAFC - 33 stands and 65 delegates signed up to date).

Working with the SW Data Hub we have created a conference data tool as part of the app. Currently we are encouraging members to sign up and load their data so we can track conferences 'real time' and see forward bookings.

### **Cruise Partnership activity:**

2025 has been the best season to date with 15 ships visiting in total and over 15,000 passengers and crew. Bookings are currently good for 2026 and being placed up to 2029. The Cruise Ambassador volunteers have done a fantastic job welcoming cruise guests to the city and are to be congratulated for their amazing work. A huge thank you to partners Plymouth Waterfront Partnership and City Centre Company BIDS, Cattewater Harbour Commissioners, AB Ports and Citybus who have all contributed to growing cruise business for the city.

Marketing activity has been focused in 2025 around Sea Trade global in Miami in April, Sea Trade Europe in Hamburg in September and the Cruise Britain Winter meeting in December. Good progress has been made in arranging familiarisation visits for cruise buyers and also a bid has been put in to host the Cruise Britain Summer event in June 2026

### **Membership engagement:**

We currently have 49 paying members of Destination Plymouth contributing to £33,152 (Jan to Dec 2025) membership income annually. In addition, all 1600 members of the City Centre and Waterfront Business Improvement Districts are entitled to free membership benefits free as part of their BID levy contribution.

We have regular buy-in opportunities as part of our 'always on' marketing activity, generating an additional £4,033.00 Jan 25 - Dec 25.

We host regular membership meetings with our partner venues and suppliers and update them on activity. 121 members meeting also take place face to face, held with 2-3 members a week. Meet Plymouth activities are supported and attended, including 3 member meetings in 2025. Attention is continually being paid to grow our LinkedIn channel, which has 2,209 followers, and our bi-weekly e-newsletter, which has 702 subscribers.

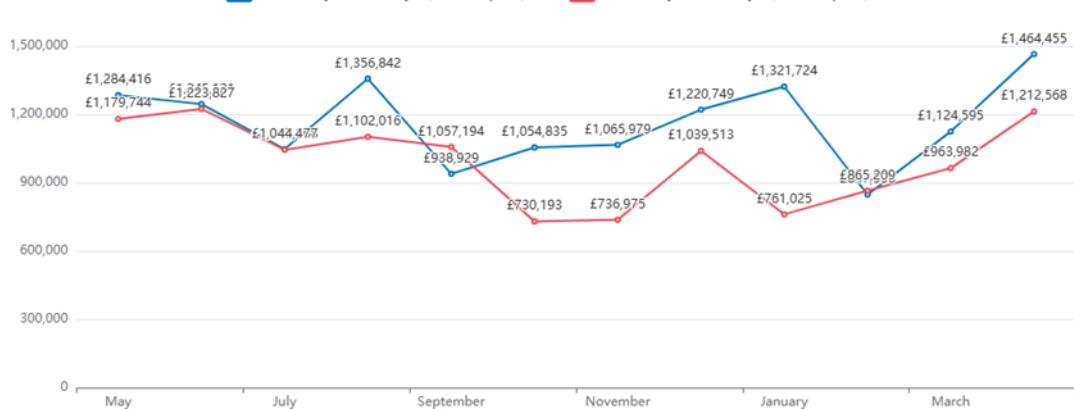
### **Projects:**

**South West Data hub** is actively up and running and has completed its first year of operation across Devon and Somerset. The £500,000 LEP funded hub is now commercially supported by all the Local Authorities across Devon and Cornwall as well as many tourism organisations. It is providing daily, weekly and monthly data to enable us to understand how many people are visiting the city, why they are coming, how much they are spending, how long they are staying and where they are visiting. Below is some year on year data which has been pulled from the hub in sample format to demonstrate year on year activity. The two business improvement districts and a number of other key city partners already subscribe to the hub and receive monthly reports to help them to calculate return on investment for event and marketing activity and understand consumer and visitor dynamics in the city in more detail. Examples of date sets are given below.

### **Visitor Spend (May 2024 to April 2025 vs May 2023 to April 2024) - Tourism**

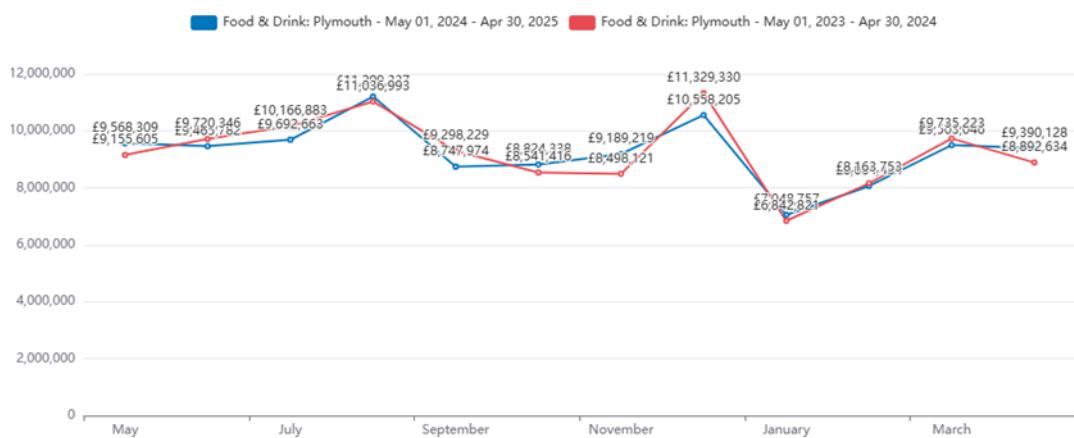
(Tourism includes, transport, holidays and hotels)

2024/25: £13,972,551, 2023/24: £11,916,723, Growth: 17.25%



## Food & Drink - (May 2024 to April 2025 vs May 2023 to April 2024)

2024/25: £111,262,242, 2023/24: £104,545,375, Growth: 6.4%



## Skills and employment:

There are skills and employment challenges across the city. Along with many other sectors including health, adult social care and transport the tourism, retail and hospitality sector is also still having a problem recruiting staff. This has led to many businesses running at lower capacity levels and reduced service capability. It is fair to say that this is not just a Plymouth problem it continues to be a national issue.

There is some positive news, however, here in the city. Destination Plymouth and the Employment and Skills team at PCC have been exploring the challenges further along with a sector-based task group over the last two years have been trying to address the issues. In the short term DWP funded a development manager to support the sector. This role has significantly increase engagement among young people and the local community to support people into jobs in the sector in a similar way to the 'Building Plymouth' model. Within the initial 18 months contract, the Visitor Economy Coordinator exceeded expectations of the Department for Work and Pensions. Key statistics are below:

Of the 432 individuals supported to date (at 31/07/2025), 357 have been claimants (compared to 200 target), and a further 75 non-claimants have received 1:1 help, preventing the need to claim Universal Credit. This contract delivered positive outcomes for 61% hard of all claimants supported, with 240% (168 compared to a target of 70) of the target number of individuals progressing into employment (or increasing their hours). Similarly, 153% (92 compared to a target of 60) of the target number supported went into training, education and volunteering, therefore exceeding the contract targets for both into employment (35%, 70 individuals) and into education, volunteering and training (30%, 60 individuals)

outcomes. Including social justice outcomes, there were positive outcomes for 76% of claimants supported. Taken as a percentage of the total number of individuals engaged (claimants and non-claimants – including those who didn't engage), 46% achieved an employment outcome and 25% went into training, education and volunteering outcomes.

Since August the contract has been extended through further DWP funding with the following outcomes:

06 eligible DWP claimants have engaged to date, of those 5 claimants have already been supported to transition into employment and a further 6 claimants are in volunteering, training and/ or education. All 106 claimants have received/ are undertaking social justice interventions (defined as careers and pre-employability support/ financial, mental health support/ into work experience), with the Skills and Workforce Coordinator (Rhianne Greaves) continuing to work closely with this remaining caseload to support transitions towards employment in the visitor economy.

Plans ahead include encouraging these individuals to take part in English Tourism Week's 'Behind the Scenes Insight Programme' being organised for March 2026 and also participating in dedicated employer and training provider sessions, alongside the wider Skills Launchpad Plymouth 'Launch 2026 by Connecting to Work' programme underway at Cobourg House throughout January.

### **Partner led projects highlighted within the activity plan which are moving forwards at pace include:**

- Horizons Project led by Plymouth City Council which has nearly completed year 1 of the delivery phase. Capital projects linked to this include Tinside Lido which is on schedule to be completed early 2025.
- Funding of £700k has been secured successfully by Plymouth Culture and the Horizons project to develop a 'digital' park (Ses for yourself' which commenced early 2025.
- Plymouth Cruise and ferry port development in partnership with ABP and Plymouth City Council has also moved ahead successfully, and initial works including a new passenger gantry and refurbishment of the ferry terminal are completed with shore power facilities expected to be up and running by the end of 2026.

#### **iii. Challenges:**

##### **Local businesses:**

Over the past five years post and despite Covid 19 business growth in the visitor economy has been positive with 11% growth in businesses overall between 2021 and 2025, this is much higher than the regional and national average which is 7.1% and 7.7% respectively. Over the ten year period between 2015 and 2025 growth overall has been 13.1% which is slightly lower than the South West region at 14.1% and nationally at 19.9%

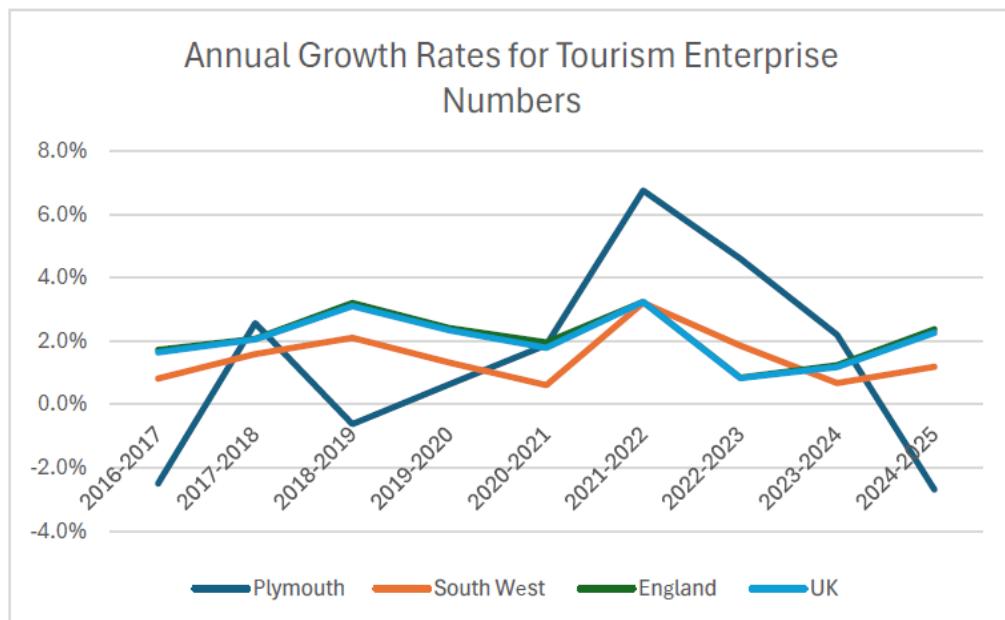
The business climate for the sector remains challenging with multiple impacts affecting trading and bottom line profits including:

- Increased costs of energy, food and supplies with inflation continuing to stay high particularly in the food supply chain.
- Increased employer costs including national living wage and national insurance threshold changes.
- A reduction in the number of visitors taking holidays in the UK due to inflationary pressures on cost of living generally.
- A reduction in the amount that people are spending overall with the subsequent loss of income.

- Competition for recruitment across the city.
- In the short term let's sector businesses have been impacted by changes in fire regulations and the abolition of 'Furnished holiday lets' tax relief.

These factors continue to cause impacts to the businesses within the sector and across the supply chain. Many businesses have been affected by the rising NI payments required post April 2025 and there are high levels of anxiety for many as to whether they will be able to continue trading.

Given the ongoing challenge for businesses in terms of profitability it is likely many will continue to see reduced opening hours over the winter months and in some cases businesses may 'mothball' until spring. Restaurants, wet led beverage businesses including pubs and short term rentals seem to be the worst hit with 25 businesses closing between 2024 and 2025.



### **Destination Marketing Organisations and Local Visitor Economy Partnerships:**

In addition to the challenges facing businesses local tourism organisations including DMO's and Local Visitor economy Partnerships are also declining due to reduced local authority spending, lack of commercial income due to cost pressures on businesses and almost no government grant funding identified to drive growth in the sector. This has led to reduced marketing activity at a time when businesses most need it and, in some cases, the total demise of local DMO's including but not limited to Cornwall, Visit Kent, Visit Dorset, Visit Hampshire and Visit Lincolnshire.

A recent survey conducted by Destination Plymouth on behalf of the Great South West Tourism Partnership showed that over half of the DMO's and Local Authority Tourism teams are funded by UK Shared Prosperity Funding which ceases end of March 2026. There is currently no solution to replace this funding which will mean even less support for businesses on the ground. Destination Plymouth is not immune to this and has no funding solution post 2027 currently.

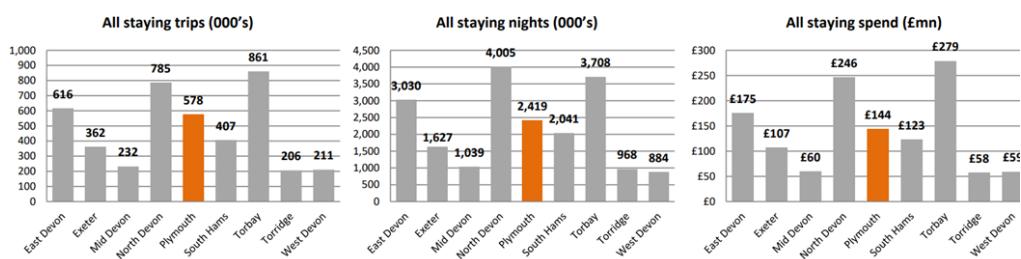
A wider more national impact connected to this is that market share is increasingly being drawn to the North West and North East and away from the South West. Historically the South West was the number one UK domestic tourism market outside of London it has now slipped to fourth place.

## Wider city challenges:

### Accommodation in the city:

Currently the city has insufficient accommodation for a similar city of its size per capita. This has been a challenge for the last decade, however, is increasingly exacerbated through the requirement of growing businesses sectors in the city which require accommodation and venues for business including recruitment, training, conferences and meetings. Although there have been some developments going 'live' in the city during the past three years and there has been great success with the opening of Premier Inn, Oyo and 'Moxy' in 2024 Plymouth is still underperforming in relation to its nearby competitors and as a city nationally. The chart below based on 2023 data shows how we compare to other destinations in the county and particularly noticeable is that Torbay and North Devon have significantly more overnight stays and therefore spend. This is due to the high volume of self-catering and holiday park capacity in North Devon and the much higher level of serviced accommodation for Torbay which has over 4,000 serviced rooms compared to Plymouth at just over 2,000.

#### Plymouth - Staying visits in the county context



Area	Domestic trips (000's)	Overseas trips (000's)	Domestic nights (000's)	Overseas nights (000's)	Domestic spend (millions)	Overseas spend (millions)
East Devon	574	42	2,695	335	£154	£21
Exeter	316	46	1,057	570	£67	£40
Mid-Devon	212	20	897	142	£51	£9
North Devon	733	52	3,660	345	£220	£26
Plymouth	510	68	1,750	669	£100	£44
South Hams	374	33	1,781	260	£106	£18
Torbay	781	80	3,203	505	£236	£43
Torridge	188	18	832	136	£49	£9
West Devon	190	21	741	143	£49	£11

Without further accommodation capacity there is a very high risk that growth targets will not be met by 2030. Currently 87% of the visitor economy is lower spending day visitors (average spend approx. £54 per visit) compared with much higher spending UK and International overnight staying visitors (average spend £207 and £720 per visit respectively.) In addition, data shows that the 'seasonality' of the city is flattening out with much higher occupancies 'off peak' than previously. This is positive from an investment perspective and is being driven significantly by the business sector.

Clearly there is a great opportunity here to significantly grow the visitor economy as well as increase GVA through higher spending staying visitors. A focus on hotel development will also support the forthcoming 'Team Plymouth' activity, Devonport development and support growing businesses across the city.

Short term rental accommodation is also facing challenges which are impacting on supply of Air BnB and licensed short term rental operators. This includes new fire regulations, the new short term lets registration scheme and multiple other factors (see schematic from Professional Association of Self

Caterers). This has seen numbers drop from 769 in 2021 to under 500 active listings in 2024 which contributes towards the loss of bed stock and accommodation capacity in the city.



### Factors affecting Destination Plymouth delivery:

Reduced capacity of Destination Plymouth and future funding:

Destination Plymouth currently employs 3 full time staff and hosts the National Marine Park (NMP) CEO. In addition, the organisation contracts additional support from two contractors for specialist work including cruise and travel trade/ (MEET Plymouth) conference activity. The two contracted staff and one of the permanent staff are self-financing through the Destination Plymouth Membership scheme, Cruise and Conference partnerships and the NMP CEO is funded through Mayflower legacy and Horizon project funds until 2026 at which point it is anticipated that alternative funding will be secured.

Funding was reduced in 2023 by £100,000 per annum, however, UK Shared Prosperity Funding has been secured until March 2027 which will keep Destination Plymouth viable until then. Resources remain tight and a longer-term funding strategy is currently being discussed to see what options available are.

## SECTION 2 – Culture Plan Update

### **1.0 Context**

The Culture Plan ([https://plymouthculture.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Plymouth-Culture-Strategy\\_REV\\_P08\\_fulldraft.pdf](https://plymouthculture.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Plymouth-Culture-Strategy_REV_P08_fulldraft.pdf)) was adopted by PCC in March 2021 and published in May 2021. This strategic plan, and those that have come before it, have successfully steered the growth and development of the cultural sector over the last 10-15 years.

Against a backdrop of funding cuts Plymouth has maintained its investment from Arts Council England, seeing 8 organisations share £4.1m per year, an investment of £12.34m over the three-year contract.

In 2024 PCC asked Plymouth Culture to commission a Creative Industries Plan, acknowledging that culture is connected but distinct from the creative industries, and just one part of the wider creative economy. This plan was published in May 2025 and launched at a Roundtable event in Westminster in November 2025 (<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6690e58861d9417a21427245/t/6911ac93e95f980a16a46eaf/1762765971607/Creative+Industries+Plan+2025.pdf>)

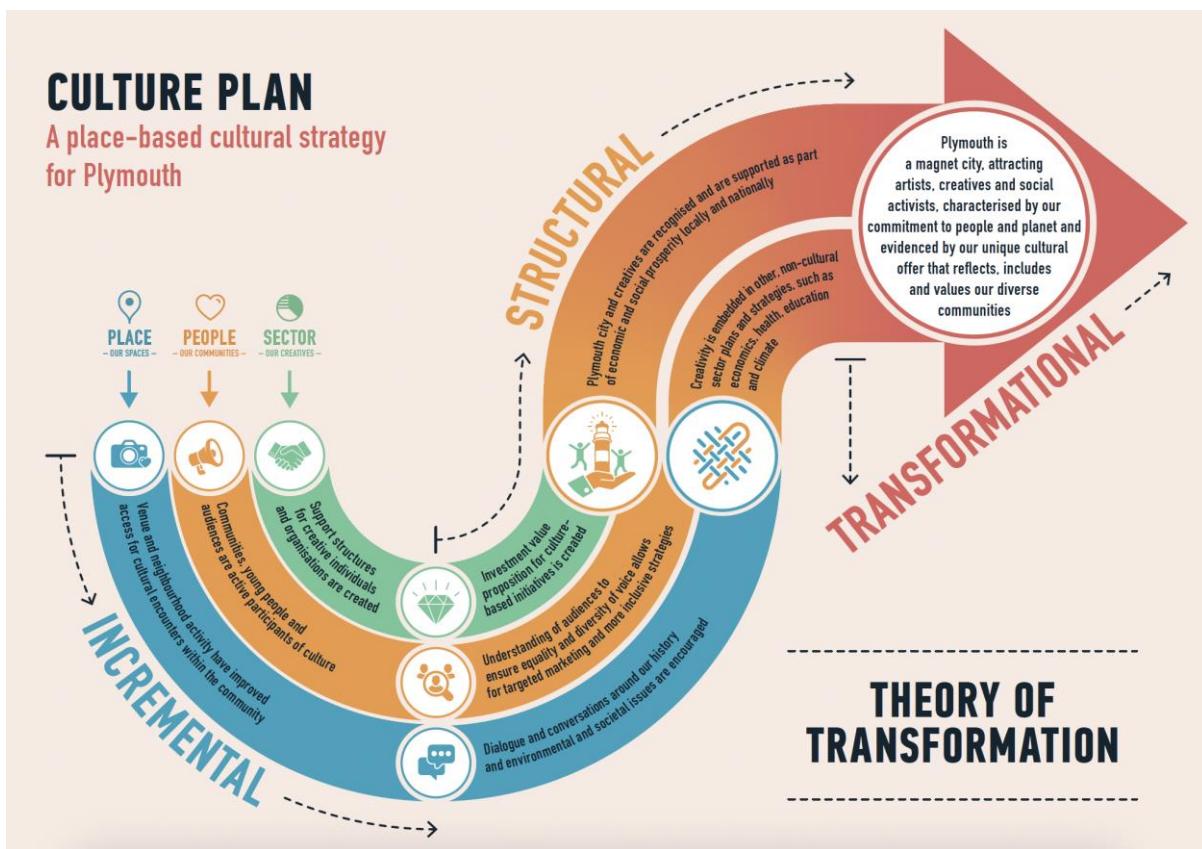
These plans outline the creative and cultural ambitions of the city and set out key priorities for implementation. Both plans work on a distributed model, whereby the responsibility for delivery does not sit solely with Plymouth Culture but across a partnership of organisations.

## 2.0 Culture Plan Ambitions

The Culture Plan does not list projects but rather focuses on creating the conditions needed for culture to thrive in the city. In particular, the plan speaks of the need for connection and alignment with wider city agendas so that investment can be unlocked and the role of Culture in supporting the city ambition is clearly understood and valued.

Following the publication of the Culture Plan Plymouth Culture developed a Theory of Transformation model (Table 1). This acknowledges that the delivery of the Culture Plan does not sit with one organisation but within and across an ecology. It also acknowledges that to realise the scale of the cultural ambition we need to move beyond project delivery to system and policy change. The following report shares some highlights of activity that are operating specifically within the strategic space to achieve long-term, sustainable change.

**Table 1 – Culture Plan Theory of Transformation**



## 3.0 Sea for yourself

Sea for Yourself is a creative collaboration inviting everyone to connect with our greatest natural asset, Plymouth Sound National Marine Park.

The programme seeks to celebrate Plymouth as a city defined by the sea, powered by creativity, and reimagining what a coastal community can be.

It uses creativity to reshape how we understand, celebrate, and protect our marine environment for generations to come, making the sea accessible to all through shared digital and cultural experiences.

Importantly it positions creativity as a catalyst for economic, social and environmental change; reaffirming Plymouth as a city where creative talent thrives in collaboration with scientists and technologists, and where our marine identity drives innovation, wellbeing and sustainable growth in every neighbourhood.

The four-year long programme is comprised of a commissioning programme, commissioning creative and digital interventions from artists, a data insights strand and a talent development programme. The programme delivers the 'Digital Park' element of the wider PSNMP Horizons programme led by PCC and is funded by NHLF and Arts Council England Place Partnership.

Sea for Yourself is an example of how we are working to position culture as a driver for change working across sectors, in this instance connecting culture, communities and nature. It directly responds to the PSNMP's ambition to reconnect citizens to the sea by building on the Marine Citizen model and research connecting place-based attachment to better economic and social outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

### 3.1 Commissioning Programme

David Cotterrell is the first commissioned artist developing work entitled *Intertidal*. Inspired by the porous, dynamic and shifting relationship between city and sea, *Intertidal* will make the movement of water in/out/under the city visible and felt within daily urban rhythms. The work will comprise of the following and will show April-May 2026:

- Public realm interventions using water/light/sound
- A distributed screen-based work
- Venue-based presentation and engagement programme

The second commission worked with a community panel to select artists Hanna Kubutat-Byrne and Leila Gamaz. They set out a clear but flexible proposal for a digital 'patchwork' that will invite creative input from a range of communities in both analogue and digital forms. Physical and digital outputs will emerge from the engagement activity and will be visible before the end of 2026.

Four further micro-commissions have been awarded to artists as part of a residency programme creating opportunity for community storytelling and uncovering people's connection to the sea.

- Megan Roberts' 360 Immersive Film 'And Breathe' is showing at Real Ideas Market Hall from 19 January 2026.
- Let's Sea Your Tatts will be presented at Grow Studios from 27 February 2026.
- Agnieszka Blonska and Tori Cannell's outdoor audio work, made in collaboration with 'migrant mothers' will be presented in July 2026.
- A project drawing on the history of Mountbatten by Kayla Parker and Stuart Moore will be presented in the interpretation space at the Mountbatten Centre from June 2026.

### 3.2 Data Programme – Cultural Index

We have commissioned the Social Research Unit (SRU) at University of Plymouth to review and revise the Cultural Index. First published in 2017 but never implemented, this will provide a baseline for the cultural health of our city and a blueprint for other cities to use. This is working hand-in-hand with data infrastructure developments that will better facilitate the collation of cultural data so that we can monitor audience behaviour and develop data-led insights which will inform more targeted audience development strategies.

## 4.0 Creative Industries

The Creative Industries Plan was adopted by PCC in May 2025 and made five key recommendations to build on the strengths within the city and identified opportunities:

- Embed the creative industries in all council policy areas.
- Designate culture and creative clusters (CCCs) around existing anchor organisations as the primary mechanism for partners to deliver business support services, to stimulate clustering and neighbourhood

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<sup>1</sup> <https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/376324/1/376324.pdf>

regeneration and make Plymouth's creative identity more visible.

- The initial CCCs should be –
  - Culture Cluster around The Box, Arts University and University of Plymouth
  - Createch Cluster focusing on a screen and immersive training cluster around the Market Hall focused on collaboration with the marine, defence and health sectors
  - Production Park with the opportunity to increase capacity at Theatre Royal's TR2 production base and build a supply chain in close proximity with a view to developing a production park
  - Performance Cluster around TRP, extending from the Guildhall to the Millennium building supporting the Evening and Night Time offer in the city centre.
- Nurture regional and national partnerships to attract investment and deliver the business support.
- Build a pipeline of creative businesses by providing support and investment mechanisms for creative businesses at each stage of their growth.
- Stimulate the tech sector with mechanisms including early-stage investment to double the number of businesses and IT professionals in Plymouth over the next 10 years and stimulate R&D collaborations with other sectors.

In line with the implementation plan set out in the document, the University of Plymouth are working with a consortium of Universities across the South West to develop a submission for the AHRC Creative Clusters Fund<sup>2</sup>.

## 5.0 Creative Defence Collaboration

In November 2025 Plymouth Culture alongside PCC and cultural partners from the city hosted a Roundtable discussion in Westminster. The event was chaired by Caroline Norbury, CEO Creative UK, and attended by representatives from ACE, DCMS, MHCLG, Homes England, DBTI, AHRC, RSA. The event saw the launch of the Creative Industries Plan and was an opportunity to open discussion about the role of culture and creative industries within the defence-driven growth agenda.

We put the case forward that Plymouth's ambition for Defence driven growth is a once in a generation opportunity to deliver unprecedented regional transformation, but that the creative and cultural sectors are a critical component in ensuring this investment achieves genuinely inclusive growth, where innovation is prioritised to transform the fortunes of residents across the city and wider region, now and in the future. The spillover and multiplier attributes of the creative and cultural sector mean that investment in the creative economy is an investment in an inclusive economy. Plymouth's unique creative and cultural assets, situated alongside His Majesty's Naval Base (HMNB) Devonport, have the potential to achieve long-term transformation through purposeful investment in a creative defence collaboration of national importance and global significance.

What, to some, might seem an unlikely partnership across sectors, is in fact a unique opportunity and has the potential to set Plymouth apart on the national/global stage. Defence, culture and creativity can be complementary, and the creative economy should be a core component of the city strategy to support the ambitions for innovation, inclusive growth, cultural regeneration, and a resilient economy and workforce.

The discussion focused on how the Creative and Cultural sector can contribute significantly to two broad programmes of work aligned to Plymouth's growth agenda, and in turn the national growth agenda; 1) business & innovation and 2) cultural placemaking.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/creative-industries-clusters-round-two-outline-stage/>

There was strong agreement in the room and a desire to work together to create a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that would continue to take this work forward.

## 6.0 UK City of Culture 2029

On the 12<sup>th</sup> January 2026 Plymouth formally announced its intention to bid for UK City of Culture 2029. The response has been overwhelmingly positive from partners, stakeholders and communities across Plymouth, with many actively supporting the bid.

As in previous years the process involves several stages including an Expression of Interest, longlisting with an invitation to full application and shortlisting. Unlike other years, this time there is £10m prize money guaranteed for the winner, with a £125k resource grant for up to three runners up. There is also a £60k development grant available for up to eight longlisted places to support the costs of developing a full application.

Applications are judged by an independent panel against the criteria published by DCMS. Previous winners have included [Derry/Londonderry](#), [Hull](#), [Coventry](#) and Bradford.

### 6.1 Rationale for Bidding

Careful consideration was given to the benefits and risks of bidding and overall it was agreed that:

- The timing and context of the city right now is a critical factor and makes it a 'now or never' moment. The Team Plymouth inclusive growth agenda, city centre development and National Marine Park provide a backdrop for which culture-led transformation is a common thread and connecting force. The cultural offer, through a city of culture programme, provides the content needed to engage communities, build civic pride, reimagine coastal futures and attract people to live and work in Plymouth.
- Being a serious contender in the competition shows Plymouth's level of cultural ambition. It mirrors the ambition shown for Team Plymouth and New Towns and positions Plymouth, once again, as a leading force for change nationally and globally.
- A significant proportion of the criteria is concerned with deliverability and we can demonstrate the existence of cultural infrastructure, built over many years through our commitment to culture driven transformation, meaning we are equipped to deliver high quality partnerships and art. The alignment with other investment into the city will be seen as an advantage.
- There has never been a South West winner (Cornwall were longlisted and Southampton shortlisted for 2025) and with Plymouth currently positioned as the urban capital for the region we can clearly demonstrate impact beyond the city.
- The work already started by Plymouth Culture and cultural partners to position a creative X defence conversation with key national partners provides a good foundation to build support and visibility for the bid.
- Evidence suggests there are benefits to bidding even if you don't ultimately win the competition. We all acknowledge the importance of cultural placemaking within the Team Plymouth and City Centre growth agendas and the UK City of Culture competition provides a framework to articulate the role and value of culture in a way that will impact positively on communities, the sector and partners even if we don't win.
- Similarly, the UK City of Culture model is well understood in and beyond the sector so it is likely to be better received than other initiatives.
- This is an opportunity for those communities and areas of the city who may feel neglected or left behind to benefit from investment and cultural programming eg the north of the city.
- The UK City of Culture bid represents a clear next step on the cultural journey of the city and is a mechanism for delivering the Culture Plan objectives whilst amplifying wider city agendas.

### 6.1 Benefits of bidding

Evaluation reports have been developed to show the impact of winning<sup>3</sup> and the impact of the bidding process alone for unsuccessful cities<sup>4</sup>. Impact and legacy are clearly evident in terms of cultural infrastructure, tourism, economic outputs, profile and reputation, educational attainment, health and wellbeing gains, civic pride and community participation. Some of the benefits of the City of Culture title are reported to include:

- Additional investment of over £1 billion which can be linked to the title into the local economies of the host cities, with roughly 25% of that investment coming from the private sector demonstrating that the UK City of Culture attracts additional investment.
- Over 3,800 events and activities have made up the respective programmes of the titleholders.
- Based on evaluation data, it is estimated that 539,209 citizens from host cities have engaged and participated with the UK City of Culture (UK CoC) programme. In addition, an estimated 2 million visitors from across the UK and further afield visited host cities for events and activities.
- Across the three titleholders, a cumulative media value/advertising equivalent value of £596 million has been generated, celebrating the unique cultural and heritage identity of the titleholder, and contributing to the UK's soft power.
- Economic impact for host cities included:
  - Within Derry/Londonderry – 2,740 additional full time equivalent (FTE) job years created, leading to £97.1m in GVA (constant 2010 prices). The 535,500 additional visitors over the year spent £25.2m.
  - Within Hull – tourist visits to Hull increased by 9.7% in 2017 compared with 2016, reaching 6.2 million visits. Jobs in the visitor economy grew by over 27% between 2012 and 2017, increasing from 5,297 to 6,735. The broader creative industries sector, including the cultural sector, experienced steady growth, with employment rising from 1,850 jobs in 2015 to 2,135 jobs in 2017, amounting to a 15.4% increase.
  - Within Coventry – there was £20.9m (at 2023/24 prices) net additional off-site and organisational expenditure in Coventry and Warwickshire, 225 1-year net additional FTE jobs from off-site visitor and organisational expenditure in Coventry and Warwickshire, and, £11.6m net additional GVA (at 2023/24 prices) arising from this expenditure in Coventry and Warwickshire.
- Over £100 million in additional GVA across two of the titleholders to date (Derry/Londonderry and Coventry).
- Tourism within host cities has increased by an average of 22% across the point of bidding and delivery.
- Taking into account standard growth patterns in tourism for each host location, it is estimated that the UK CoC title has led to an additional 3,100 jobs within the tourism and hospitality sectors of host cities.
- The cultural infrastructure within host cities has been left more secure because of the title:
  - Between the 2018-2022 and 2023-2026 funding rounds for Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio Organisations (NPO), there was an increase of 35.7% in funding for organisations in Hull.
  - In Coventry the increase in funding between NPO rounds was 79.3% with organisations in both cities having benefitted from the increased partnerships and opportunities the title brought.
  - Both figures are significantly higher than the 24.6% increase in the annual cash sums invested across the 25 Key Cities in England in 2023-2026 compared with the previous NPO round.
- Education programmes in both Hull and Coventry have engaged more than 200 schools, which have benefitted from outreach work and taking part in projects initiated as a result of the UK CoC.
- Based on evaluation data, it is estimated that over 10,000 school children have benefited from projects and events that were part of the UK CoC programmes.
- An estimated 7,500 volunteers have been trained due to the UK City of Culture programme, and they have given just over 374,000 volunteer hours. These volunteers have developed new skills, improved their levels of subjective wellbeing, and improved their social connections.
- 90% of volunteers feel a sense of pride or belonging to where they live – significantly higher than the general population.
- 70% or more of citizens/attendees feel a greater sense of pride from living in a host city or attending UK CoC events.
- Increased cultural participation, particularly by neighbourhoods and communities that are more deprived: 83% of residents living in the most deprived parts of Derry/Londonderry attended a UK CoC 2013 event.

<sup>3</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67fce7e5694d57c6b1cf8cb4/Paper\\_1\\_-\\_Evidence\\_Review\\_UK\\_Cities\\_of\\_Culture\\_Final.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67fce7e5694d57c6b1cf8cb4/Paper_1_-_Evidence_Review_UK_Cities_of_Culture_Final.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67e3e2cb7fd10a62fac3ea7f/ACCESSIBLE\\_Copy\\_for\\_publication\\_Dr\\_Garcia\\_-UKCC-Interviews-FINAL.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67e3e2cb7fd10a62fac3ea7f/ACCESSIBLE_Copy_for_publication_Dr_Garcia_-UKCC-Interviews-FINAL.pdf)

Increase of 14% in regular cultural participation in Coventry between 2018 and 2022; in key neighbourhoods the increase was 36%.

- Notable uplifts in wellbeing scores for participants engaging with the UK CoC (these increases are not mirrored at overall population level). In Coventry, beneficiaries of the Caring City programme saw scores (using the ONS 4 Subjective Wellbeing measures) for life satisfaction increase from an average of 6.71 to 7.56, for feelings of life being worthwhile increased from 7.08 to 7.77, feelings of happiness increased from 7.00 to 7.54, and levels of anxiety dropped from 4.42 to 4.11.7.