



Corporate Plan

2026–2030

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Museums at the heart of culture and community

As the lead development body for local museums across Northern Ireland, the NI Museums Council is committed to fostering a vibrant, inclusive, and resilient museum sector that enriches the lives of individuals and communities across the region.



Museums are fundamentally about people

They hold the power to inspire, educate, and entertain, while also playing a vital role in enhancing well-being, strengthening community identity, and creating welcoming spaces for dialogue and reflection. Whether through storytelling, exhibitions or outreach, museums help shape better places to live, work and connect.

In partnership with the Department for Communities, we are actively contributing to the development and delivery of the new Museums Policy 2026. This shared vision champions a dynamic and sustainable museum landscape that serves the whole of society. Together, we aim to ensure that museums are equipped to meet the evolving needs of their audiences, embrace innovation and remain accessible and relevant in a changing world.

Through our work with local museums and members across Northern Ireland, the NI Museums Council empowers local museums by supporting UK Museum Accreditation standards, facilitating grant programmes, offering tailored training and professional development, providing expert advice and advocacy, and facilitating strategic partnerships. We help museums strengthen their connections with communities, encouraging greater participation in cultural and heritage activities and ensuring that museums continue to thrive as inclusive spaces for learning, creativity, and civic engagement.



Our vision

Museums are at the heart of people and place.



Our mission

To champion a resilient, connected museum sector that inspires curiosity, fosters innovation, and safeguards Northern Ireland's cultural heritage for future generations.



Our values

- ✓ **Excellence** – Upholding the highest standards in museum practice, governance, and delivery.
- ✓ **Collaboration** – Building strong partnerships across the sector and with communities.
- ✓ **Innovation** – Encouraging creative approaches to engagement, interpretation, and access.
- ✓ **Resilience** – Supporting museums to adapt, thrive, and remain relevant in a changing world.

Our values are at the heart of who we are, what we do and how we work.

About NIMC

The NI Museums Council was established in 1993 to support local museums (i.e. non-national museums) in Northern Ireland in maintaining and improving their standards of collections care and service to the public, and to promote a coherent framework of museum provision.

Overview of our activities:

- Managing the Accreditation Scheme in Northern Ireland
- Providing Grant Assistance
- Training and Learning opportunities
- Promotion and advocacy
- Research and Publications
- Guidance and Information
- Building Strategic Partnerships
- Securing external project funding

Foundation of the NIMC Corporate Plan 2026–2030

The NI Museums Council Corporate Plan is closely aligned with the needs of the museum sector and the priorities set out in the Department for Communities' new Museum Policy 2026. It focuses on strengthening collections and sector capacity, widening connections through access and participation and supporting innovation, all core themes of the departmental framework.

Through targeted investment programmes, skills development, accreditation support and a commitment to inclusive,

community-centred practice, the Plan provides the practical mechanisms needed to deliver policy ambitions on the ground.

At the heart of the plan are four pillars that guide the NI Museums Council's work to develop the local museum sector: **Support, Empower, Strengthen and Harness**. This framework helps ensure that museums are equipped to safeguard heritage, enhance public engagement and contribute meaningfully to cultural, social and economic outcomes across Northern Ireland.

Museums **policy**

Museum policy focus:



Strengthen

Building resilience, growing capacity and ensuring long term sustainability.

Where we will target our efforts:

- ✓ Upholding sector standards
- ✓ Gathering quantitative and qualitative data
- ✓ Funding facilitation and infrastructure development



Connect

Realising the potential of creative connections, intersections and partnership.

- ✓ Strengthening community engagement
- ✓ Fostering vibrant and inspiring cultural spaces
- ✓ Supporting initiatives which promote tangible and intangible cultural heritage



Innovate

Fuelling innovation and propelling growth, impact and reach.

- ✓ Enhancing collections development, management and care
- ✓ Fostering innovation and the use of digital technologies
- ✓ Improving digital access to collections

Programme for Government

The NI Museums Council will continue to work to ensure that the local museum sector contributes to and enhances key indicators within the Programme for Government Wellbeing Framework wherever it can make a meaningful difference. This includes areas such as cultural identity, participation in arts and cultural activities, reducing loneliness, developing skills and strengthening community relations.

Programme for Government focus:



People

Where we will target our efforts:

- ✓ Advancing Education and youth participation



Peace

- ✓ Advocate the work of the sector



Planet

- ✓ Encourage sustainability practices and programmes



Prosperity

- ✓ Deliver skills development and leadership programmes



Pillar 1: Support

NIMC will support museums to safeguard cultural heritage by advancing excellence in collection care and management, research and adherence to accreditation standards.

Our collections are living archives of identity, memory, and meaning. By caring for them with intention and respect, we safeguard the narratives that shape who we are and pass them on to future generations.

The NI Museums Council delivers a focused programme of work to strengthen museum collections and support high quality professional practice. Central to this was the Museum Collections Capital Grant Programme 2025/26, which invested in the essential infrastructure needed to safeguard Northern Ireland's collections for the long term.

Alongside this, funding secured from the Esmé Mitchell Trust enables our three year Collecting for the Future programme, supporting accredited museums to acquire cultural and artistic objects that reflect the diversity and richness of our shared heritage.

To reinforce this strategic approach to collecting, the NI Museums Council will continue to deliver targeted training in collections care and management, equipping museum staff with the skills required to steward collections to recognised standards. Our ongoing support through the museum accreditation scheme has further strengthened sector wide commitment to excellence, ensuring collections remain well cared for, accessible and relevant.

We are also expanding our focus to include the identification and protection intangible heritage, such as traditions, practices and skills alongside the tangible heritage held within museum collections.

Support museums

Empower museums

Strengthen the sector

Harness potential

Over the next five years, the NI Museums Council will deliver programmes to:



Uphold Sector Standards

Ensure that museums across Northern Ireland consistently meet and maintain recognised professional standards for safeguarding and providing access to their collections through the UK Museum Accreditation Scheme.



Enhance Collections Development, Management and Care

Advance the care, management and strategic development of museum collections through targeted support of grants, training, and adherence to best practice in collections stewardship.



Support Initiatives Which Promote Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage

Support initiatives such as the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage programme to protect and promote the diversity of intangible heritage across the UK.



To put this into effect, we will:

- ⚙️ Administer the UK Museum Accreditation Programme
- ⚙️ Continue to implement grant programmes focused on collections acquisition, care and management
- ⚙️ Hold training days, site visits and promote case studies and best practice on collections research, care and management
- ⚙️ Seek additional funding to facilitate audits to benchmark and protect collections, staff and visitors
- ⚙️ Support the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage programme as a Community Hub for Northern Ireland

Pillar 2: Empower

NIMC will empower museums to enhance the transformative power of collections to spark creativity, bridge diverse perspectives and enrich lives through wellbeing and lifelong learning.

Museum collections are more than objects, they are catalysts for connection and trusted sources of knowledge and research. By reimagining how we use them to engage with our audiences in an authentic way, we can inspire new partnerships and cultivate meaningful intersections across disciplines and communities.

One of the NI Museums Council's most transformative initiatives has been the Global Voices, Local Choices project, which introduced a creative and community-led approach to decolonisation. By actively involving marginalised groups in the interpretation of artefacts within collections, the project ensured that diverse voices were not only heard but meaningfully integrated into museum narratives.

In a parallel effort to deepen youth engagement, we established a strategic partnership with Scouts NI to sponsor a redesigned NI Challenge Badge. This initiative

encourages sustained interaction between young people and local museums.

Early years engagement has also remained a priority through the Playful Museums Festival, which continues to support museums in delivering developmentally appropriate programming for children under five.

Building on this foundation, the NI Museums Council is continuing the creative literacy project exploring the intersection of early years education and museum engagement through storytelling. Two bespoke children's books have been created and more are on the way.

We continue to champion innovation, inclusivity, and community engagement through impactful programmes and partnerships designed to broaden the reach and relevance of museums across the region.

Over the next five years, the NI Museums Council will deliver programmes to:



Strengthen Community Engagement

Enable the facilitation of meaningful connections between museums and the communities they serve, ensuring that institutions remain responsive, inclusive, and reflective of local identities and interests.



Foster Vibrant and Inspiring Cultural Spaces

Support museums in becoming dynamic, valued, and engaging environments that stimulate curiosity, creativity, and public appreciation of heritage to support the health and wellbeing of all users.



Advance Education and Youth Participation

Promote lifelong learning through targeted educational programmes and outreach initiatives, with a particular emphasis on engaging children and young people as active participants in cultural life.

To put this into effect, we will:

- ✿ Continue to sponsor and promote the under 5s programmes
- ✿ Hold training days, site visits and promote case studies on best practice for education and outreach programmes
- ✿ Research potential future initiatives and partnerships around education, youth participation and health and wellbeing which could be rolled out
- ✿ Assist museums with programmes that support health and wellbeing, audience engagement and development
- ✿ Facilitate Access Audits and seek additional funding to administer museum inclusion audits which focus on improving engagement beyond physical access.

Pillar 3: Strengthen

NIMC will strengthen the sector's foundations by enhancing skills, expanding resources, fostering collaboration and building long-term resilience.

A thriving museum landscape depends on robust infrastructure and empowered people. Investing in capacity-building ensures museums can adapt, grow, and continue to serve society sustainably.

Professional development remains central to our mission. Our comprehensive training programme spans all facets of museum practice from collections care to leadership development, empowering participants to enhance their skills, well-being, and career prospects. In addition to its core offerings, the NI Museums Council partners with external organisations to deliver specialised training and peer learning events, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange.

The NI Museums Council continues to oversee the UK Accreditation Scheme in Northern Ireland, a cornerstone of quality assurance within the museum sector. By maintaining this framework, we ensure that museums remain accountable to both their audiences and professional obligations, while fostering continuous improvement and sector-wide excellence.

A key component of strengthening the sector is the delivery of Grant Programmes which provide essential funding to improve infrastructure and support the long-term sustainability of accredited museums. These capital investments enable institutions to enhance their facilities, safeguard collections, and improve visitor experiences.

Finally, to inform strategic decision-making and advocacy, we gather both quantitative and qualitative data from the sector. This also highlights areas of strength and identifies gaps in provision; insights that are critical for shaping future support and investment. This is an area that requires more investment to ensure we are collecting the right information and that it is effective in demonstrating the sector's cultural, social, and economic value.

Over the next five years, the NI Museums Council will deliver programmes to:



Gather Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Build on current research to provide a robust evidence base to demonstrate the sector's cultural, social, and economic value to meet Government and Departmental priorities and unlock further resource in future.



Advocate for the Sector

Champion the value and impact of museums by engaging proactively with governing bodies, policymakers, and funding organisations. Collect relevant data to show the sector's contribution to cultural, educational, social, and economic development through evidence-based evaluation and strategic dialogue.



Fund Facilitation and Infrastructure Development

Act as a conduit for Department for Communities (DfC) and unlock external funding streams to deliver grants that enhance infrastructure, drive innovation, and promote long-term sustainability.



Develop Leadership

Scope the need and potential to deliver training programmes that strengthen leadership capacity across the sector. Encourage strategic succession planning to ensure continuity, resilience and the cultivation of future leaders within museum organisations.

To put this into effect, we will:

- Secure additional funding to examine current data held about the sector and enlist additional help to improve the scope and focus of data collection
- Represent the sector to governing bodies, government departments, local councils, elected officials and funding organisations, ensuring that the voice of museums is heard at every level of decision-making.
- Continue to implement grant programmes, initiatives and partnerships which improve infrastructure and support the long-term sustainability of accredited museums.
- Explore the potential of additional resource for leadership training and succession planning.

Pillar 4: Harness

NIMC will Harness the potential of collections to drive innovation, amplify impact, and extend our reach.

Museums are increasingly using their collections as catalysts for innovation and as platforms for widening access through digital technologies. By digitising objects, creating interactive online resources and experimenting with new digital tools, museums can share their collections with broader audiences and support new forms of research, creativity and engagement. This approach not only enhances public access but also enables museums to explore innovative ways of interpreting, sharing and connecting people with heritage in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

In addition, as we reimagine the role of collections, we must also embrace their potential to drive environmental sustainability by rethinking materials, practices, and narratives to foster a more responsible and regenerative future. In doing so, collections become not only vessels of memory and meaning, but catalysts for ecological awareness and action.

Over the next five years, the NI Museums Council will deliver programmes to:



Foster Innovation and the Use of Digital Technologies

Drive sector transformation through the adoption of emerging technologies, including virtual and augmented reality and data-driven tools that enhance visitor experience and engagement.



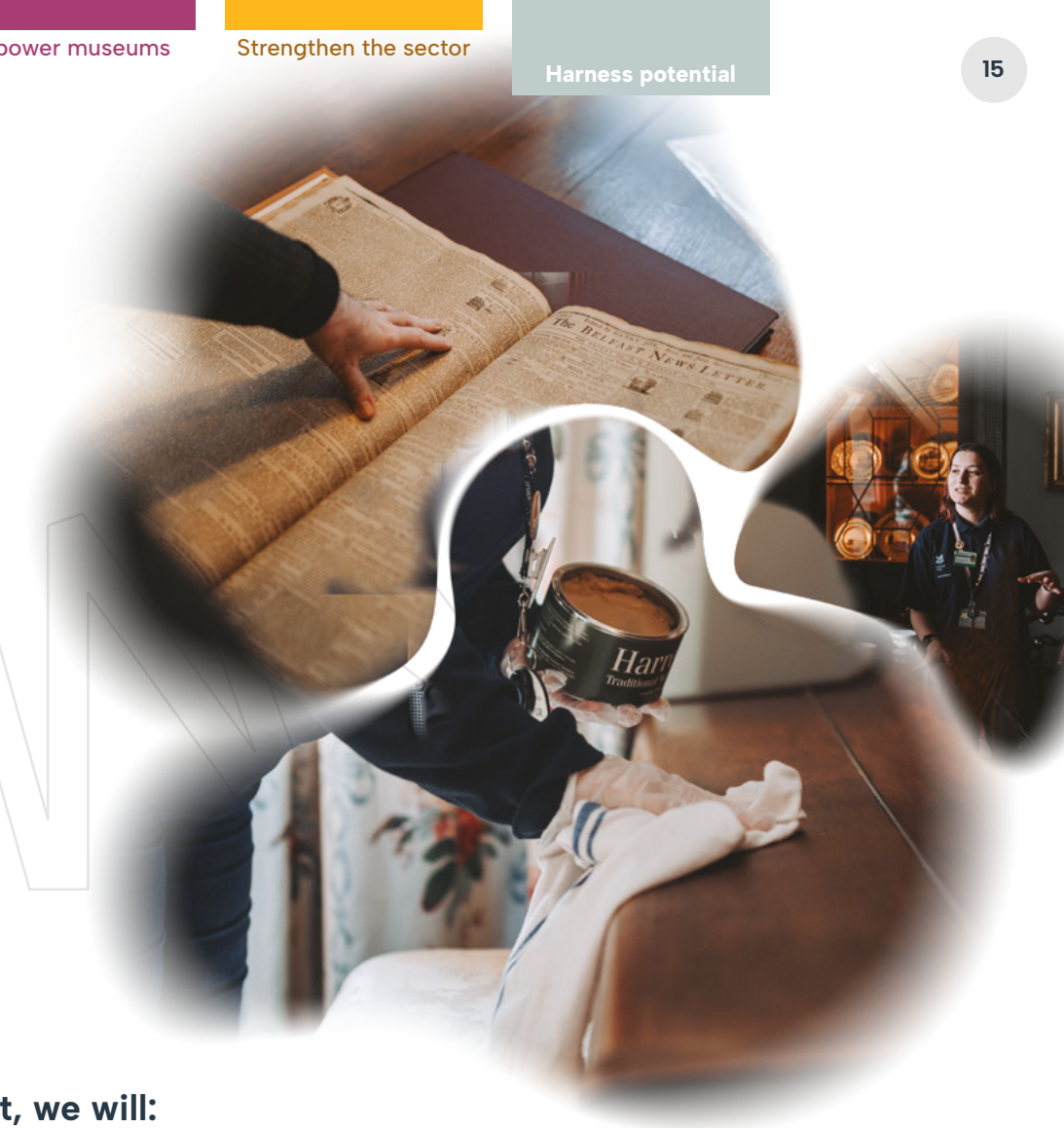
Encourage Sustainability Practices and Programmes

Embed environmental responsibility into all areas of operations by promoting sustainable practices, supporting climate-conscious initiatives, and undertaking sector-wide audits to guide long-term ecological resilience.



Improve Digital Access to Collections

Digital access to collections is essential for widening public engagement and unlocking the full potential of museum heritage. By digitising objects and creating high quality online resources, museums can reach audiences who may never visit in person, support new forms of research and learning, and enable creative and innovative uses of collections.



To put this into effect, we will:

- ⚙️ Seek external funding and partnerships to develop and deliver projects which employ digital technologies to engage audiences.
- ⚙️ Seek additional funding to develop and deliver projects that enable museums to digitise more of their collections to make them more accessible.
- ⚙️ Seek additional funding to facilitate Sustainability Audits in Accredited museums across Northern Ireland.

We will measure the success of this Plan by:

- ✓ Ensuring the number of accredited museums remains stable while aiming to attract more museums to become accredited.
- ✓ Continuing to hold grant programmes for infrastructure and collections-based improvements and monitoring the improvements achieved.
- ✓ Providing effective professional development training which tracks participant satisfaction and skills improvement.
- ✓ Securing additional funding to develop projects that focus on effective data collection, digitisation of collections and the use of digital technologies to promote access to collections.
- ✓ Increasing the type of audits we commission to include collections care, inclusion, security and/or sustainability parameters.

Delivery principles



1. Effective

The NI Museums Council is committed to delivering optimal outcomes for museums through the development of dynamic, responsive, and agile operational processes. We will ensure that our organisational structures and resources are strategically aligned to support our core priorities. By fostering a culture of professionalism and harnessing the dedication of our team, we will uphold standards of excellence across all policies, procedures, and practices in accordance with recognised best practice.



2. Evidence-based

The NI Museums Council will utilise the most reliable and relevant information available to guide our strategic direction and operational delivery. In collaboration with sectoral partners, we will undertake research and gather intelligence to advance collective understanding of museum practice. This evidence base will inform our continuous improvement and ensure our work remains responsive to sectoral needs.



3. Impact Orientated

We will maximise the positive outcomes of our work through the design and delivery of targeted, high-impact programmes and initiatives. The NI Museums Council will establish and maintain a robust evaluation framework to assess the effectiveness of our activities, measure the impact of our support, and ensure accountability to stakeholders. This commitment will enable us to refine our services and enhance our contribution to the sustainability and success of the museum sector.



Museums at the Heart

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