



PRIDE AND POTENTIAL:

A Music Strategy
for Sunderland
2025 – 2030





“WHERE PASSION AND IDENTITY ARE STRONG, THERE IS MUSIC. AND SUNDERLAND IS A MUSIC CITY.”

Lewis Atkinson, Member of Parliament for Sunderland Central, speaking in the Houses of Commons on 7th November 2024

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IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE A STRATEGY THAT SUPPORTS OUR MUSIC SECTOR, ENHANCES THE VALUE OF MUSIC IN OUR CITY, AND CHAMPIONS THE GROWTH AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF OUR MUSICIANS.



1. FOREWORD

As the Leader of the Council of our ambitious and beautiful city, I am genuinely excited to see Sunderland's dynamic music scene flourishing. Our city is overflowing with amazing music and wonderful stories waiting to be shared!

I am excited to see more opportunities being created for musicians and local artists, supporting them in earning a good living while boosting our vibrant local creative economy. We are a city that encourages and celebrates music education at every level, ensuring everyone can enjoy and appreciate music.

Over the past few years, and as part of a significant regeneration programme, we have created some wonderful cultural facilities in our city, and now is the perfect time to roll out an exciting music programme, bringing those places to life and showcasing the best of Sunderland.

The benefits of the music economy to the city are substantial. Since it began hosting music concerts in 2009, the Stadium of Light has sold over a million tickets, resulting in significant additional spending on hospitality and attracting visitors from across the globe to Sunderland. The city's evening economy has expanded considerably with the establishment of venues including the Fire Station around our much-loved Edwardian theatre, the Sunderland Empire, creating hundreds of new jobs and opportunities for new businesses. Alongside this, our smaller venues such as Pop Recs are real hives of activity, bringing together music devotees and supporting emerging artists to break through.

Because music is not just an industry – it is a source of social and cultural enrichment that brings people together and delivers real benefits. Music connects people and communities; it bridges cultural and linguistic divides and provides an avenue for identity and expression. Sunderland is blessed with music.

It is important to have a strategy that supports our music sector, enhances the value of music in our city, and champions the growth and professional development of our musicians.

This strategy aims to strengthen and enhance our creative city. It provides a framework for ideas and projects to help Sunderland flourish into an internationally renowned, creative city with music at its heart. It builds on the fantastic foundations we have established in our transforming city, offering even more encouragement for our local artists, and sparking inspiration in the next generation of musicians in Sunderland.

This city is committed to nurturing its vibrant music industry, which is why I support the Sunderland Music Strategy for 2025-2030. I invite you to support this wonderful sector and embrace the excitement of Sunderland's Music City.

Cllr. Michael Mordey
Leader - Sunderland City Council

**Sunderland
City Council**



We are very grateful to all in the music sector in Sunderland and to all the music lovers who have generously contributed their time and feedback to help us develop this strategy.

2. INTRODUCTION

This strategy provides a comprehensive plan to develop Sunderland as a ‘Music City’ by harnessing the power of music, musicians, audiences, and venues to drive significant cultural and economic change.

Its primary objectives are to transform the cultural experiences within the city and the surrounding area, raise cultural standards and ambitions, and position Sunderland as a leading hub for fostering and presenting musicianship and artistry.

The strategy will draw on in-depth insights from successful initiatives in other cities to achieve these ambitious goals. It will provide a detailed roadmap for implementation and a robust framework for measuring success. The strategy emphasises the crucial role of local leadership, incremental progress, and meticulous evaluation at every implementation stage.

The Sunderland Music Strategy (2025-2030) is a comprehensive plan that aims to propel the growth and prosperity of Sunderland’s music scene. It strategically focuses on critical areas of development and emphasises music’s role in driving economic, social, and cultural progress.

By aligning Sunderland with other leading ‘Music Cities’ globally, the strategy seeks to harness music’s impact in enhancing citizens’ lives and fostering vibrant, prosperous communities.

We are very grateful to all in the music sector in Sunderland and to all the music lovers who have generously contributed their time and feedback to help us develop this strategy.

“IT’S TIME THAT SUNDERLAND STARTS TO CREATE AND MAINTAIN A VIBRANT, COORDINATED, AND MULTI-GENRE STRATEGY.”

The new strategy aims to address several significant challenges:

- 1** **Creating a music-friendly environment:** Sunderland is committed to fostering a more dynamic music ecosystem conducive to the growth of music-related businesses.
- 2** **Integrating music into economic development.**
- 3** **Recognising music as a vital component of Sunderland’s economic strategy will underscore its potential as a critical driver of urban growth.**
- 4** **Building stronger networks:** Strengthening connections with the more significant music industry, government, and business sectors will increase collaboration opportunities and enhance funding and visibility for local artists.
- 5** **Enhancing public engagement:** By elevating music’s presence in public spaces and integrating it into city events, Sunderland seeks to enrich daily life and cultivate a more culturally vibrant city.



METHODOLOGY

Sunderland is truly a remarkable city. We were determined to ensure that this strategy highlights the unique challenges, opportunities, and experiences of everyone in the music scene, whether managing venues, performing, or simply enjoying music.

The Sunderland Music Office authored the Strategy (see Appendix 1). We initiated our research with a semi-structured survey distributed across our networks, partners, and social media to collect insights from the music sector about its strengths and weaknesses.

The survey covered various topics, including demographics, employment status, financial sustainability, preferred music genres, specific challenges, and coping strategies. We gathered more than 100 responses from a varied group within the music industry, enabling the team to pinpoint common obstacles in the sector. The team delved deeper into these issues, barriers, and potential solutions through interviews with 18 representatives from the music sector. Appendix 2 includes a list of interview participants and the subjects discussed.

In addition, a semi-structured questionnaire was distributed to local music audiences via social media, asking questions about accessibility, transport links, ticket prices, venue availability, etc. This generated an excellent response from more than 400 people, demonstrating passion, interest, active participation, and pride among Sunderland people for their local music scene.

Desk research was also undertaken to understand the barriers and opportunities in the music sector in other UK cities and within different genres in other Music Cities and nationally from respected music agencies such as UK Music, the Musicians' Union, and the Music Venue Trust, to shed light on workable solutions for the Sunderland scene.

The strategic priorities for Sunderland Music City from 2025 to 2030 are based on feedback gathered during this research and detailed in the report's relevant sections.

3. THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

According to the latest figures, the contribution of UK music to the total UK economy in 2023 was a record £7.6 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA), up 13% from £6.7 billion in 2022. UK music export revenues in 2023 hit a new high of £4.6 billion, up 15% from £4 billion in 2022. Additionally, total UK music industry employment in 2023 reached a record 216,000 (full-time equivalent posts), up 3% from 210,000 in 2022.

The total number of music tourists attending live music events across the UK in 2023 was 19.2 million – an increase of 33% in 2022 when the figure was 14.4 million. Total music tourism spending in 2023 was £8 billion – an increase of 21% on 2022 when the figure was £6.6 billion.

Total employment sustained by music tourism in 2023 was 62,000, an increase of 17% on 2022 when the figure was 53,000. The total number of foreign music tourists in 2023 was 1.014 million, a slight drop from 1.053 million in 2022. The total number of domestic music tourists in 2023 was 18.2 million, which is an increase of 36% on 2022 when the total was 13.3 million

In the North East of England, there were 350,000 music tourists, 330,000 of whom were domestic and 20,000 were foreign visitors. Music tourism generated an annual spend of £165 million and employed about 1700 people.

While domestic music tourism is flourishing, foreign music tourism experienced a slight decline on a national scale in 2023. Sunderland Music City is confident that it could counteract the national trend if it were more effectively connected to other music cities.

NORTH EAST OF ENGLAND 2023

350,000 MUSIC TOURISTS

330,000 DOMESTIC

20,000 FOREIGN VISITORS

GENERATING
£165
MILLION
ANNUAL SPEND

Despite the growth of music tourism in the UK, independent festivals and grassroots venues are still struggling with rising costs and changing ticket purchasing habits. The Association of Independent Festivals (AIF) reports that 60 UK festivals closed completely, postponed, or cancelled in 2024.

The Music Venue Trust (MVT) reports that in 2023, 125 venues either closed or ceased live music operations, with over 350 more at risk of shutting down. UK artists now represent less than 10% of global audio streams, a decline from an estimated 17% share of global music consumption in 2015, as stated by the BPI. Over the past two years, UK Music has conducted surveys with British music creators regarding their experiences with Brexit for its This Is Music report. Among those affected by Brexit, 87% reported a decline in earnings for 2023, a rise from 82% of respondents in 2022.

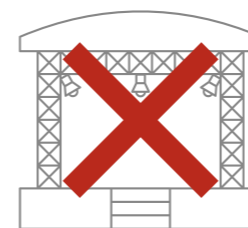
Artists are also facing a crisis in the cost of touring, which is concerning since the artist-fan relationship is fundamental to the entire live music industry.

According to a BBC report, bands increasingly omit numerous towns and cities during their tours in the United Kingdom. Presently, artists perform approximately half the number of shows on tour compared to the figures recorded in the 1990s. In a 2024 report, performers are projected to conduct an average of 11 shows on the UK grassroots circuit, in contrast to the 22 dates undertaken in 1994, as indicated by data from the Music Venues Trust.

This trend is not limited to grassroots tours. We have observed that even top artists favour residencies over extensive touring. Consequently, music fans in the UK face higher expenses due to travel and accommodation when attending events that are not local. Sunderland Music City will advocate for our city and region, collaborating with authorities and organisations to support more events across all levels.

A recent change in the UK government could lead to improvements, as Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy has already acknowledged. Sunderland has strong ties to the new cabinet, as the Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson, and the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, Jonathan Reynolds, are from Sunderland. We anticipate that music and the arts will have a prominent role in education alongside the STEM focus of the previous government. Music ecology can serve as a vital driver for sustainable prosperity and future planning in our city.

60 UK FESTIVALS
CLOSED COMPLETELY,
POSTPONED, OR
CANCELLED
IN 2024



125 VENUES
CLOSED OR CEASED
LIVE MUSIC OPERATIONS
IN 2023



87% OF BRITISH MUSIC CREATORS
REPORTED A DECLINE
IN EARNINGS FOR 2023
DUE TO BREXIT



ARTISTS ARE ALSO FACING A CRISIS IN THE COST OF TOURING

**“I will shout from the rooftop,
‘COME TO SUNDERLAND!’
I love it ...people travel, there’s
great transport and hotels.
As a package, it’s great...
Make a weekend of it in
Sunderland. **WHY NOT?** It’s got
an award-winning beach. It’s
special. It needs to be pushed.
I know people love staying
here and discovering
Sunderland.”**

Carly Davidson, International Tour Manager

4. SUNDERLAND’S TRANSFORMATION

Sunderland is undergoing a remarkable transformation characterised by ambitious redevelopment projects and a vibrant cultural evolution. The city is confidently positioning itself as an exciting and innovative place to live and visit, with significant urban developments at key sites such as Sunderland Riverside, cultural infrastructure like The Fire Station and Culture House, and substantial redevelopment of heritage cultural infrastructure, including the Museum and Winter Gardens.

The establishment of Crown Works Studios is set to revolutionise the city’s economy, driving a creative industrial revolution in one of the UK’s most dynamic sectors and delivering substantial benefits for the regional economy. These initiatives bolster Sunderland’s economy and create new spaces for work, leisure, and artistic expression, reinforcing its aspiration to be a destination where music thrives.

With these physical developments, the city has benefited over the last decade from new cultural organisations that help develop and promote music and other cultural genres.

The Cultural Spring was established in 2013 as part of the Arts Council England’s Creative People and Places programme for Sunderland and South Tyneside. It is an exciting, ambitious project aimed at encouraging more people in Sunderland and South Tyneside to experience and be inspired by the arts, making arts and culture an accepted and expected part of people’s lives

Sunderland Culture was formed in 2015 to provide a vehicle for the long-term leadership of culture and the arts in the city. Its work includes improving the city’s profile and reputation, creating a more vibrant creative economy, and increasing the confidence and aspirations of children and young people.

Sunderland’s transformation extends beyond physical redevelopment to promoting a vibrant cultural identity with music at its core. The Music Strategy for 2025-2030 confidently underscores the importance of supporting local musicians, enhancing infrastructure, and positioning Sunderland as a global Music City.



Through strategic investments in its music industry and fostering community engagement, Sunderland is poised to emerge as a dynamic cultural centre where creativity and artistic expression flourish alongside its vibrant and aesthetically pleasing new urban landscape.

5. WHY SUNDERLAND SHOULD INVEST IN MUSIC

Investing in the music industry offers many advantages across various sectors:

5.1. Economic Growth

A vibrant music scene stimulates job growth and generates income from live performances and related businesses, thus significantly enhancing Sunderland's overall economy.

5.2. Music Tourism

Bringing visitors to musical events can significantly boost local spending on hotels, food and drink, and other services, strengthening the local economy. In 2023, the city experienced a rise in visitors, with significant events contributing to increased daytime and overnight tourism. Sunderland welcomed 8.73 million visitors, and the tourism impact was estimated at £596.87 million for the year. This was primarily attributed to Beyoncé's Renaissance World Tour at the Stadium of Light and Pink's two-night event during her Summer Carnival World Tour.

5.3. City Branding

Sunderland can enhance its global reputation by positioning itself as an internationally recognised Music City, attracting worldwide interest and investment opportunities.

5.4. Attracting Industry Professionals

A dynamic music scene attracts musicians and appeals to creative professionals from other sectors, contributing to a robust and innovative workforce.

5.5. Cultural Growth

Music is a medium for artistic expression and cultural diversity, enriching Sunderland's creative landscape and promoting a more vibrant community.

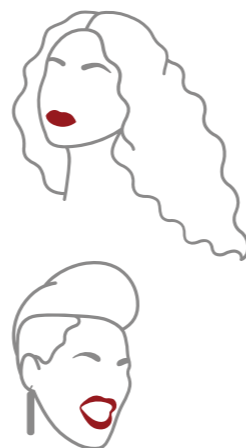
5.6. Social Cohesion

Music can unite people, fostering communal bonds and creating collective experiences that enrich the city's social fabric.

MUSIC CAN UNITE PEOPLE, FOSTERING COMMUNAL BONDS AND CREATING COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCES THAT ENRICH THE CITY'S SOCIAL FABRIC.

2023
SUNDERLAND WELCOMED
8.73 MILLION VISITORS

ESTIMATED
£596.87 MILLION TOURISM IMPACT



Credit: Bruce Springsteen

SPOTLIGHT ON THE STADIUM OF LIGHT

The Stadium of Light, home of Sunderland AFC, has hosted seven international football games since its opening in 1997 and will host the opening fixture of the Women's Rugby World Cup in 2025.

The stadium's capacity for sporting events is 49,000, while for music concerts, it increases to 60,000. Music has always been a part of the Stadium of Light. The first game there featured a concert by Status Quo; now, music from local musicians is part of every matchday.

Large-scale summer concerts have taken place at the stadium since 2009, partnering with the biggest international promoters and artists. These include Take That, Pink, Oasis, Kings of Leon, Coldplay, Bruce Springsteen, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Bon Jovi, One Direction, Rihanna, Foo Fighters, Beyoncé, Elton John, and more. The events at the Stadium of Light significantly impact the regional economy, annually bringing music tourism to the area and, in turn, creating jobs.

Sunderland saw the highest growth in overnight visitors in the North East region, following a summer of live events like Beyoncé, Pink and Bruce Springsteen performing at the Stadium of Light. Leader of Sunderland City Council, Cllr Michael Mordey, said: "I am delighted to see the continued growth in tourism figures for Sunderland."

“We just came out of playing Sunderland last night... hellacious weather. A driving rainstorm, wind blowing, but standing in front of me in the rain, I realised ‘These are my people’. Some of them were young, some of them were children, and some of them weren’t. Many wore lines on their faces of life, hard-weather and well-lived. Those are my people here in the UK, and I love them.”

Bruce Springsteen



SUPPORTING LOCAL MUSICIANS AND INDUSTRY MUSIC EDUCATION AND ARTIST DEVELOPMENT INFRASTRUCTURE AND VENUES BRANDING SUNDERLAND AS A MUSIC CITY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Credit: Von Fox

6. KEY ELEMENTS OF SUNDERLAND'S MUSIC STRATEGY

6.1. Supporting Local Musicians and Industry

Sunderland's Music Strategy strongly emphasises nurturing local talent by providing essential resources, funding, and performance spaces. By encouraging collaboration among the music, film, and tourism sectors, Sunderland seeks to implement a comprehensive cultural development strategy that will simultaneously benefit several creative and cultural sectors.

6.2. Music Education and Artist Development

Our approach focuses on enhancing music education at every level, from primary and secondary schools to professional and accredited programmes. This ensures a seamless transition into the industry. Additionally, mentorship initiatives will link emerging artists with seasoned professionals, fostering career advancement and bridging the divide between academic training and real-world industry experiences.

6.3. Infrastructure and Venues

Recognising that both large-scale and intimate venues are vital for a thriving live music scene, the strategy proposes developing existing venues and establishing new ones. This will enhance music choices and make Sunderland more attractive to artists and audiences, positioning the city as a preferred destination for live performances.

MENTORSHIP INITIATIVES WILL LINK EMERGING ARTISTS WITH SEASONED PROFESSIONALS, FOSTERING CAREER ADVANCEMENT

6.4. Branding Sunderland as a Music City

The strategy aims to elevate Sunderland's profile as a 'Music City' through targeted marketing and digital outreach. By learning from successful models in other 'Music Cities', Sunderland can attract global audiences and artists, enhancing its cultural appeal on the world stage.

6.5. Community Engagement

Integrating music into the daily lives of Sunderland's residents is a crucial aspect of the strategy. By increasing the visibility of local festivals and public music events, the plan aims to celebrate the city's identity and create a deeper connection between the community and its music scene.

INTEGRATING MUSIC INTO THE DAILY LIVES OF SUNDERLAND'S RESIDENTS IS A CRUCIAL ASPECT OF THE STRATEGY

ACHIEVING THE STATUS OF 'MUSIC CITY' WOULD ENHANCE THE POSITIVE SPIRIT IN SUNDERLAND AND CREATE A WONDERFUL SENSE OF COMMUNITY PRIDE AMONG ALL IN THE CITY.

Credit: Thomas Jackson

7. THE MUSIC CITY CONCEPT

We have looked at other established music cities to discover what truly makes a Music City unique and the benefits it can bring to Sunderland. Our wonderful city is on an exciting journey of transformation, improving both its landscape and vibrant culture. Achieving the status of 'Music City' would enhance the positive spirit in Sunderland and create a wonderful sense of community pride among all in the city.

We discovered exciting themes from thriving music cities like Aarhus, Hamburg, and Bergen and their inspiring impacts. Here are those themes:

7.1. Economic Effects

Business turnover, employment opportunities, revenue growth

7.2. Music Tourism

Attracting external audiences for music events

7.3. City Branding and Place Identity

Civic pride and the attractiveness of the city

7.4. Cultural and Artistic Development

Putting culture at the forefront for both our community and visitors.

7.5. Retaining and Attracting Artists

Retaining and attracting music industry to the city

7.6. Strengthened Social Cohesion

Music catalyses social cohesion and unity

7.7. Validity of Profession

Acknowledging and valuing entrepreneurship, innovation, and business growth

OUR WONDERFUL CITY IS ON AN EXCITING JOURNEY OF TRANSFORMATION, IMPROVING BOTH ITS LANDSCAPE AND VIBRANT CULTURE.



“I think Sunderland has this mentality of **KEEPING YOUR HEAD DOWN** and getting on with it. The DIY thing that **COMES FROM THE PUNKS**”

Kenny Sanger, Owner, The Bunker

8. THE SUNDERLAND MUSIC COMMUNITY

Sunderland’s music community demonstrates a distinctive, vibrant openness characterised by collaboration, inclusivity, and goodwill. Event listings throughout the city often feature mixed-genre lineups, from intimate café showcases to expansive multi-venue outdoor festivals.

Other musicians are particularly supportive during an artist’s development stage, often sharing their experience, expertise, and knowledge to help develop a new individual’s creative ideas.

This is also true of success in the sector: musicians who have enjoyed success will always encourage the next wave of creatives to develop by offering support slots, both in the city and on tour, or by releasing music from an established platform.

This goes hand in hand with the city’s punk mentality of ‘doing it yourself’—an ethos shared equally by DJs and brass bands, as it is by the amateur orchestras and rock bands that have been prevalent for decades.

Sunderland possesses a unique, independent spirit and determination. Proud, hard-working, creative individuals support various projects, turning ideas into reality for everyone’s benefit and fostering personal growth.

For instance, when a band quickly gains popularity but lacks touring gear, established bands with spare equipment often help them. Encouraging more open and frequent discussions among various communities and music genres is vital for enhancing opportunities, fostering friendships, and ensuring broader inclusion.

Our research has highlighted this need, leading us to establish regular social gatherings in the city for musicians from all genres. Here, they can share updates about their projects and plans. This approach will help diminish genre bias and empower a larger group of individuals.

University students in the city often form a community with the potential to organise and participate in events. However, they face challenges such as access and belonging in specific spaces. These issues may stem from their lifestyle, language barriers, or financial constraints. According to the BBC, in 2023, student maintenance loans increased by 2.8%, but this struggled to keep pace with the inflation rate of 10.7%. With existing expenses like rent, food, gas, electricity, and water, many students have had to cut clubbing and attending live music from their budgets.

Genuine lifelong friendships play a vital role in any community, and you can see this in the city’s vibrant collectives, groups, and movements. The heart of any scene is formed by its people and their incredible creativity, driven by their passion for their music and the city that provides the stage.

A recurring theme we notice is how Sunderland shapes the music that emerges here. It is all about the fantastic people, the city’s streets, our weather, the opportunities waiting to be seized, and the rich history that fuels our potential.

Sunderland possesses a unique, independent spirit and determination. Proud, hard-working, creative individuals support various projects, turning ideas into reality for everyone’s benefit and fostering personal growth.

2023



9. PHASE ONE ACHIEVEMENTS

9.1. Establishment of a Sunderland Music City Office and Music Officers

Establishing a Sunderland Music City Office and appointing two Music Officers have created an essential point of contact for musicians and stakeholders within the music industry to engage with official and institutional bodies in the city.

This central hub will provide leadership, coordination, and advocacy for music in the city. It will help support and connect industry professionals, the cultural sector, and the broader community. Additionally, the Music Officers are responsible for building relationships with individuals in the music industry and the cultural sector across the city to foster crucial trust for developing broader initiatives.

9.2. Establishment of the Sunderland Music City Advisory Group

We have established a Sunderland Music City Advisory Group, which brings together key stakeholders from the music industry and the city's broader music sector.

This inclusive group comprises representatives from the University of Sunderland, Sunderland Football Club, and Sunderland music organisations and venues. It also includes representatives from the city's semi-professional and amateur music scene, which covers various music genres and levels.

The group plays a pivotal role in supporting and overseeing the work of the Music Office, developing and planning initiatives, and utilising the members' existing networks to ensure successful delivery.

As the project's lead partner, the MAC Trust has actively identified members from different areas of the city and various parts of the sector to ensure diverse representation. This approach ensures the Advisory Group represents a broad spectrum of voices.

SOCIAL MEDIA

4.8k   
FOLLOWERS
 IN LESS THAN SIX MONTHS

**WE RECEIVE PHOTOGRAPHS
 [REDACTED] ALMOST DAILY
 OF MACKEMS DONNING THEIR
 BRANDED T-SHIRTS ON HOLIDAY,
 TELLING THE WIDER WORLD
 THAT SUNDERLAND [REDACTED]
 IS A MUSIC CITY.**

9.3. Creation of a Sunderland Music City Brand and Website

The Sunderland Music City brand is a badge of pride for Wearside. Walking around Sunderland, we see people wearing our Sunderland Music City t-shirts. Our stickers appear in venues and on the chests of men, women, and children at local music festivals. We receive photographs almost daily of Mackems donning their branded t-shirts on holiday, telling the wider world that Sunderland is a Music City.

Our website, musicity.uk, launched in June 2024 on World Music Day. Our site is used to communicate the incredible value Music City status will bring to our city and people, as well as host the Sunderland Music City Directory. Soon, it will become a central hub for listings, and venues will be able to sell tickets via our website, improving the visibility of all music events in Sunderland.

Social media serves as a window into our vibrant Music City. We launched the Sunderland Music City Instagram as a focal point for musicians, promoters, and venues to collaborate on their content. Additionally, we are active on Facebook and X (formerly Twitter). Thus far, we have amassed over 4.8k followers across our accounts in less than six months, with audience engagement growing daily. This reflects our pride and passion for our city.

Our Music City initiative has been featured in BBC, Music Week, MSN, Business Live, Sunderland Echo, Northern Echo, Prolific North, and NARC Magazine, as well as in the Houses of Parliament during Lewis Atkinson's maiden speech as Sunderland Central MP.



Credit: Thomas Jackson

9.4. Establishment of a Partners' Programme

Sunderland Music City is a collaborative effort that forges strategic partnerships across Sunderland's music sector and beyond. Forming a robust partner programme is key to paving the way for new opportunities and strengthening Sunderland's already thriving music ecosystem. Our programme involves strategic collaborations with various stakeholders, including local businesses, educational institutions, cultural organisations, and government agencies.

Partners are part of a supportive and forward-thinking network, and benefits and contributions include:

- financial support
- identifying potential funding for music education programmes
- instrument purchases
- venues.

In-kind services:

- donating equipment
- materials
- expertise to support music initiatives.

Networking opportunities:

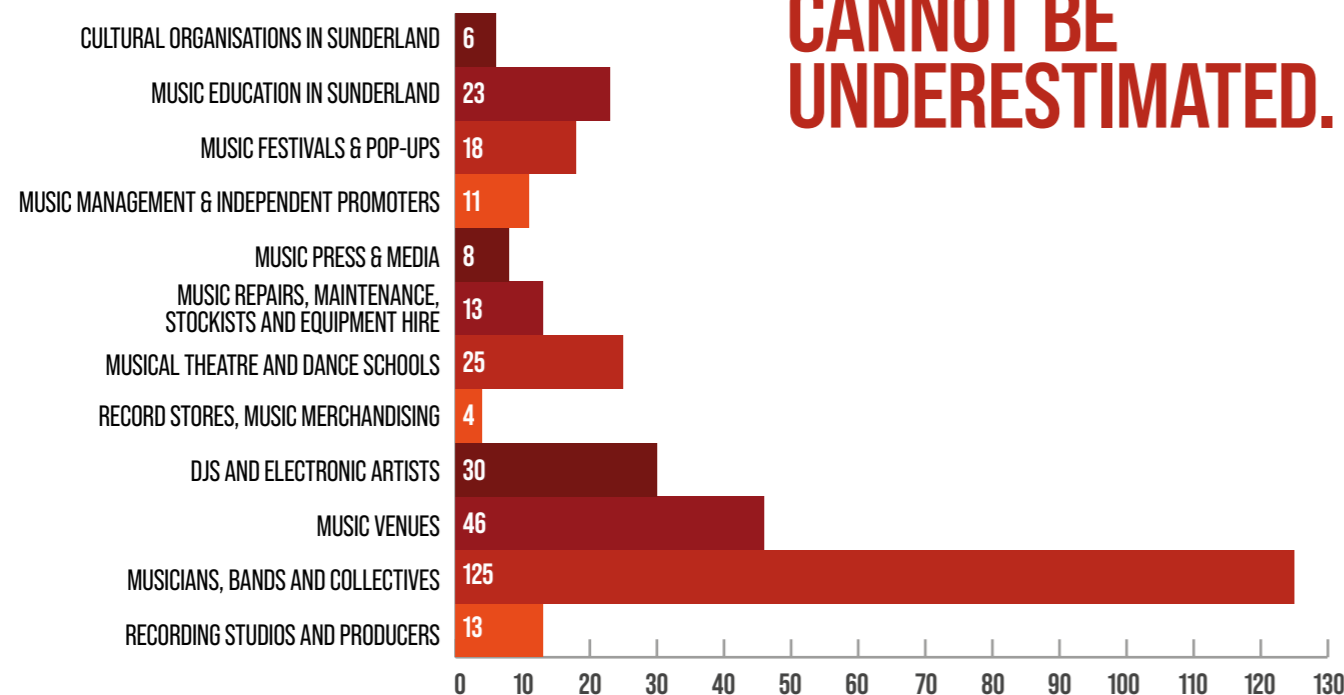
- connecting Sunderland Music City partners with industry professionals and potential collaborators.

Community engagement:

- participating in outreach programmes and events to promote music education and appreciation.

By building strong partnerships, Sunderland Music City can strengthen its resources, broaden its influence, and foster a more dynamic and sustainable music community.

Results from 2024 Audit by Sunderland Music City



9.5. Mapping of Musical Activity within the City

The Music Office has completed an extensive audit of musical activities in the city, recognising the pivotal role of musicians and artists in shaping a vibrant and creative city. The audit provides a detailed music industry overview, focusing on understanding the networks and relationships that drive Sunderland's music sector.

From now on, the Music Office will create and suggest policies and initiatives to assist the music industry in partnership with the Advisory Group and will oversee the implementation of these policies.

These policies will be informed by thoroughly understanding the local community's needs and will establish measurable outcomes at each stage.

THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF MUSIC CANNOT BE UNDERESTIMATED.



9.6. Music Against Child Poverty

The first major music event planned and delivered by the Music Office took place on Sunday, 8th December 2024 – Music Against Child Poverty Live, at The Fire Station in Sunderland.

Based on the theme of Live Aid, this successful fundraiser galvanised the music sector in Sunderland to volunteer their time free of charge to put on a show and raise funds for children and families living in poverty in the City.

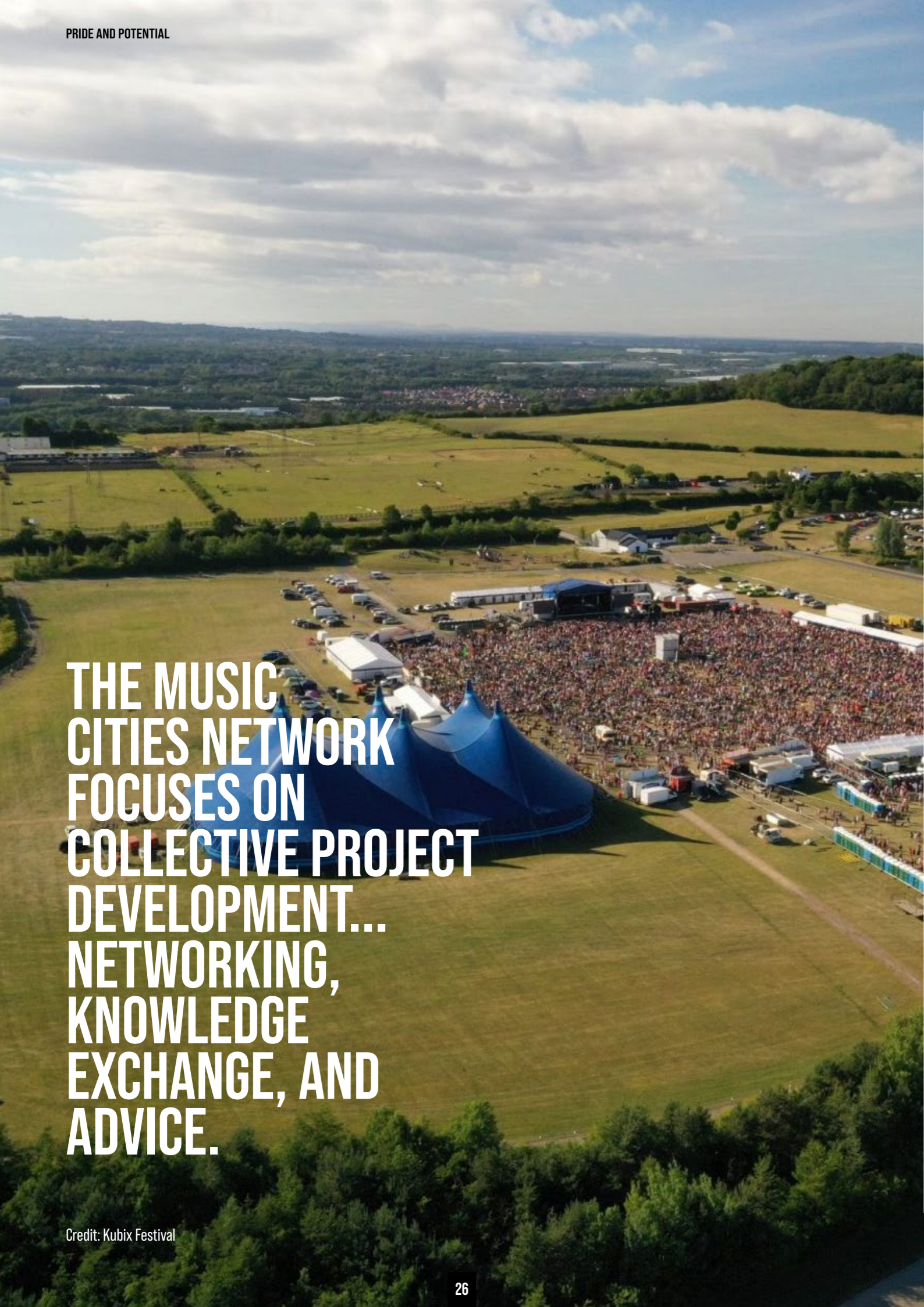
Alongside the sold-out gig, the Music Office partnered with local musicians to run a new Sunderland Christmas song competition. The winner, Callum O'Neil won the opportunity to have his track recorded and produced at Birdland Studio in Sunderland by NAME's Barry Hyde

Christmas song-writing sessions were also held in local primary schools. Over £50,000 was raised by Sunderland's generous, music-loving people and donated to Love, Amelia, a local charity for disadvantaged children and families in Sunderland.



£51,955

RAISED TO COMBAT CHILD POVERTY IN THE CITY



THE MUSIC CITIES NETWORK FOCUSES ON COLLECTIVE PROJECT DEVELOPMENT... NETWORKING, KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE, AND ADVICE.

Credit: Kubix Festival

10. PHASE TWO PLANS

10.1 Music Cities Network Membership

Sunderland was officially accepted into the Music Cities Network on January 21st 2025, as we launched our five-year plan for music in Sunderland.

The Music Cities Network brings together vibrant member cities such as Aarhus, Aalborg, Bergen, Berlin, Düsseldorf, Gothenburg, Groningen, Hamburg, Manchester, Nantes, Reykjavik, and Sydney. The network fosters collaboration among cities to promote artists, business, and urban development through the advancement of the music industry.

The Music Cities Network focuses on collective project development, shaping music policies, collaborative research, presentations of Music City ecosystems, networking, knowledge exchange, and advice. It signifies a growing, influential network of cities embracing the 'Music City' paradigm in their development plans, with symbolic value attached to member cities.

Being accepted into the Music Cities Network is a remarkable achievement for our city, reinforcing our identity as a vibrant cultural community where music thrives. We are delighted to be recognised internationally as a Music City. It's a title that Sunderland will wear with great pride.

The Music Office aims to discover sustainable options for the future while also introducing the Sunderland audience to diverse music genres and creating new opportunities for musicians.

10.2 The Sunderland Year of Music 2025-2026

The Sunderland Year of Music will begin on World Music Day (21st June 2025) and run through to 21st June 2026. It will celebrate the city's heritage and diversity of music. Complementing established events such as Summer Streets, Kubix, Waves and Monument Festival, the Music Office will create and test new events based on feedback from the music sector and Sunderland residents, highlighting underrepresented genres and activities.

In this year, the Music Office has a unique opportunity to explore various financial models for festivals and events, and discover sustainable options for the future while also introducing the Sunderland audience to diverse music genres and creating new opportunities for musicians.

The impact of Aarhus's Year of Music in 2022 was a sense of strengthened cohesion in the music industry and the creation of a framework for further development. Kirklees Council's experiences in West Yorkshire's Year of Music in 2023 and their involvement in similar initiatives have provided valuable insights for future planning. A key element in the success of both cities was the significant support from their Mayors and City Councils, which enabled them to leverage sponsorship and external grant funds.

The Music Office will collaborate with partners and the local community to incorporate activities from other art forms, such as theatre, dance, and the visual arts, as well as heritage, health and wellbeing, food, and education, to provide an eclectic celebratory year that will create enjoyment, employment, opportunity, pride, and confidence in our city.



11. PHASE THREE PROPOSALS - ADDRESSING SUNDERLAND'S CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This stage of the strategy focuses on creating interventions that effectively meet the needs of Sunderland's music industry and the broader sector identified during the research phase.

11.1. Spaces and Places

The city has made significant progress in a relatively short period regarding venues and places to hear live music. Our in-depth interviews with longstanding musicians have emphasised the difference in access and choice. Twenty years ago, music collectives used function rooms at sports clubs and upstairs rooms in pubs to host and attend gigs, often needing to provide their own PA system. Lighting was not an affordable consideration; when the event started, the room lights were simply turned off or dimmed. Acts from Sunderland would have to travel to neighbouring cities to find venues with appropriate capacities and technical requirements for significant events.

Since then, **Sunderland has developed numerous purpose-built music venues hosting events regularly.** The capacities of these venues vary widely, accommodating a few dozen to tens of thousands of attendees, as exemplified by places such as Independent and the Stadium of Light.

While venues such as Pop Recs, Independent, The Fire Station, and The Point can accommodate the demand for touring acts, many other places in the city play host to more intimate scenes for developing acts, such as The Ship Isis, The Museum Vaults, The Peacock, The Engine Room, Vaux Taproom, Sheepfolds Stables, Stack Seaburn, and more.

Summer Streets is an annual festival on the cliff tops of Roker, offering a stunning view of the North Sea. Herrington Country Park hosts large-scale summer festivals like Kubix and Monument Festival, and the city's parks and bandstands also host events.

Music has become an integral part of the city, venues such as The Fans Museum host monthly music nights for individuals affected by dementia, and The Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens as well as 17Nineteen welcome the folk music community into their buildings. Now more than ever, the city's authorities are interested in hearing innovative ideas for performing music in more spaces and locations.

From our research, we know that these musical moments live in the memory of the city's people and can have a legacy. Successful large scale events in the past such as Radio 1's Big Weekend, and the much loved Split Festival highlight the need for a larger venue in the city, with a capacity of 1,000 to 5,000.

After this, we examined the potential of utilising overlooked spaces. Examples include the Beacon of Light and the abandoned Crowtree Leisure Centre. We will seek out promoters to assess the feasibility of using these venues.

The Music Venues Trust reports that 43% of grassroots venues in the UK operated at a loss in 2023. We understand these venues' difficulties and will actively support and celebrate these critical spaces.

This initiative will involve a concentrated profile spotlight using podcasts and recording sessions of performances for YouTube in these specified locations. Additionally, **we will share all activities through a centralised platform and our social media channels.** Furthermore, we will promote this messaging throughout the city at every opportunity, using digital screens and online channels.

Sunderland boasts a historic rehearsal venue known as The Bunker. Although the music community acknowledges its vital facilities, research suggests it requires greater visibility in the city. We recognise the challenges faced by The Bunker and are committed to supporting its fundraising efforts and promoting this important cause.

As a music community, we must create more sustainable and suitable rehearsal spaces. We have had the opportunity to consult with the Sunderland Symphony Orchestra about their challenges regarding a suitable home, and their insights are valuable for our understanding of such problems.

The city offers various studio spaces for musicians to record, and our research indicates that genre-specific studios are available citywide. Expanding access to these studios on a regional and national level could prove beneficial in economic, cultural, and social terms.

Many studies have found that opening their doors to nurture emerging artists can create beautiful opportunities for growth and collaboration.

One excellent example of this can be found in the Young Musicians Project based at Field Music's Studio, highlighting just how meaningful and inspiring this approach can be!

We also discovered numerous practitioners operating in homes or small space setups. While this can be very appropriate for some projects, it is a limiting factor in some instances. We want to encourage more studio spaces in the city to be created with community in mind.

2023
43% OF GRASSROOTS VENUES OPERATED AT A LOSS



SPOTLIGHT ON POP RECS

Pop Recs is a vibrant music and arts venue, café, and community hub in the heart of Sunderland. It all started with the Sunderland band Frankie & The Heartstrings, who set up a pop-up shop to share their second album, *The Days Run Away*, directly with the wonderful people of Sunderland.

Initially, it was housed in the city's old tourist information office, where it delighted audiences during its pop-up phase by showcasing artists from around the world.

The enthusiasm from the local community was incredible, and they were so eager to see the project continue that Pop Recs has blossomed into a beloved spot that thrives today. This success is primarily thanks to the dedication of Dave Harper, the Heartstrings' drummer, who achieved great things before his early death.

Now, Pop Recs serves as a well-loved venue with a capacity of 250 and boasts a bustling café known as Sonny's café.

Accessibility has always been at the heart of what Pop Recs stands for. Frankie & The Heartstrings aimed to make it as easy as possible for anyone in the city with an idea for an event, gig, club night, or exhibition to approach a venue and turn that idea into reality. The venue is now run by Michael McKnight and Dan Shannon, who have seen it evolve from serving coffee and hosting gigs to it facilitating regular community activities such as King Ink spoken word night, Stitch & Bitch, and Little Pops.

The enthusiasm from the local community was incredible, and they were so eager to see the project continue that Pop Recs has blossomed into a beloved spot that thrives today.



11.2 Music Education

Music education plays an essential role in enriching the cultural fabric of our city, bringing so many benefits to everyone involved. The music programmes available in our schools, college, and university, along with the fantastic extracurricular groups, truly serve as the foundation for creating a lively and vibrant music scene. **Music education supports personal growth, strengthens community connections, boosts civic pride, enhances health and well-being, and contributes positively to economic development.**

As we look forward to the launch of a new National Strategy for Music, Sunderland Music City and its partners are excited to take the lead in promoting and supporting music education. **Our goal is to ensure that every child, young person, and adult can explore their musical creativity, express themselves, and enjoy the wonderful benefits that music brings to our lives.**

Sunderland Music City focuses on setting inspiring goals and promoting our community's existing networks and opportunities. Anyone passionate about making music should have access to top-quality music education and meaningful opportunities to connect with music and the broader community.

The City of Sunderland is home to various traditional music education programmes offered by established institutions, including the City of Sunderland College, The University of Sunderland, and the Sunderland Music Hub. Additionally, the city provides a wide range of highly regarded extracurricular music groups that host workshops and performance opportunities and develop practical skills and music industry knowledge for emerging musicians.

Furthermore, Sunderland features a strong network of professional private music tutors, peripatetic musicians, and freelance facilitators who cater to individuals of all ages and skill levels.

“MUSIC ISN'T EXTRA. MUSIC ISN'T ADDITIONAL. MUSIC ISN'T DISCRETIONARY. MUSIC ISN'T AN ADD-ON. AND MUSIC ISN'T DISPOSABLE. MUSIC EDUCATION IS CORE. IT'S FUNDAMENTAL. IT'S NECESSARY. IT'S AN IRREPLACEABLE COMPONENT OF A HOLISTIC AND MEANINGFUL EDUCATION. THAT'S WHAT MUSIC IS”

Vaughan Fleischfresser
Music Educator, Conductor, Clinician

Below is a selection of the many varied and high-quality educational offers in the City of Sunderland. A comprehensive list is available in the Sunderland Music City Directory under the 'Music Education' section.

Sunderland College

Sunderland College's Bede Campus is home to a fantastic £11 million Arts Academy. **This vibrant space features a 200-seat commercial theatre, a sound and lighting studio, a recording studio, music practice rooms, and a selection of professional-grade instruments.** Students can choose from various exciting courses, including the Foundation Degree in Music: Performance, Production & Industry, Level 2 and Level 3 options in Music: Performance, Production, and Industry, and a BA (Hons) in Music: Performance, Production & Industry.

Sunderland College also offers a selection of Performing Arts courses including Level 2 and Level 3 programs in Performing Arts: Theatre, Voice & Movement, which are perfect for those who love to express themselves through performance.

The University of Sunderland

The University of Sunderland offers various full-time degrees in Music and Performing Arts, including Music (Top-Up) BA (Hons), Performing Arts BA (Hons), Performing Arts with Integrated Foundation Year BA (Hons), Professional Dance BA (Hons), and Media Production BA (Hons). Additionally, it provides several full-time and part-time courses, such as Audio Podcasting 101, Podcasting, and Creative Audio Production, along with the MA in Radio, Audio, and Podcasting for those interested in behind-the-scenes roles.

The University has outstanding facilities, including a 4k-UHD virtual studio and a broadcast-standard HD TV studio. It also hosts the student-run Spark Sunderland radio station in newly refurbished studios in its Media hub.

Sunderland Music Hub

Sunderland Music Hub is a partnership between Sunderland City Council, schools, and music education providers that delivers high-quality music education to young people across the city. The Hub offers a variety of music programmes, including instrumental tuition, pathways to ensembles and choirs, and opportunities for young people to participate in music festivals and live shows. **Professional community musicians with decades of experience in the music industry and education facilitate all Sunderland Music Hub activities.** Sunderland Music Hub is part of the more expansive North East Music Hub Consortium.

In addition to providing high-quality music education in the city's schools, Sunderland Music Hub partners with and supports several music groups that cater to various age ranges and abilities. These groups include the Sunderland Youth Choir, Sunderland Youth and Community Orchestra, Young Sounds: Connect, Little Pops, Soundabout Singing Space, Houghton Area Youth Band, Young Musicians Project, The Bunker, Sunderland Empire Academy, The Rock Emporium, and Sunderland Symphony Orchestra.



SPOTLIGHT ON THE NORTHERN ACADEMY OF MUSIC EDUCATION (NAME)

Three years ago, Barry Hyde, lead singer and guitarist of Sunderland band The Futureheads, teamed up with Dan Donnelly, known for his lengthy career in bands like Levellers, The Wonder Stuff, and The Celtic Social Club, to establish The Northern Academy of Music Education (NAME). With their wealth of experience, they are among the best qualified to inspire and teach tomorrow's music makers.

The college has three campuses: The Fire Station's top floor, Birdland Studios above The Peacock pub, and the University's St Peter's Campus. In partnership with the University of Sunderland, it offers an advanced higher education course in modern music industries to revitalise the north-east music scene through a new higher education music programme perspective. At the heart of this groundbreaking Academy is the support and encouragement of individual creativity and autonomy among students. Rather than creating indistinguishable musicians, NAME recognises each learner as an artist with a distinct musical path. Students are guided throughout their journey to reach their utmost potential.

As the only independent music college led by musicians, NAME offers professional musical expertise. The teaching team includes members from bands like The Levellers, The Futureheads, and Field Music, production managers from significant festivals and guitar specialists from Lick Library and Guitar Interact magazine.

NAME's real strength comes from its continuous engagement in today's music industry. Students benefit not only from the tutors' extensive musical knowledge and experience but also from their previous missteps: "We believe that art is subjective and that artists should explain their creative process ... and

then we support them. That is why the learning originates with the students themselves." NAME teaches essential music tools, such as how to register your work, which other courses often overlook but are vital to musicians.

Dan and Barry are accessible to students daily, creating a friendly and collaborative environment at the academy. As Dan says, "Unlike large colleges or universities that require a request to the finance department, if students need something purchased or repaired, we handle it immediately." This approach contributes to NAME's ranking as the top choice for student satisfaction in music courses across the North East.

The future looks even more promising for students as NAME outlines ambitious plans involving various initiatives led by students and graduates. This development is expected to catalyse dynamic growth and create the necessary infrastructure to enhance the music scene in the North East.

“We believe that art is subjective and that artists should explain their creative process ... and then we support them.”

Sunderland Empire Academy - Creative Learning

Delivered by a local team of Performing Arts professionals, Creative Learning delivers a weekly Performing Arts Academy that offers training and skills development in key musical theatre disciplines – acting, singing, vocal technique, and dance. **The Academy is one of the many providers in Sunderland offering an Inclusive Special Educational Needs Provision, with relaxed and inclusive sessions tailored to the needs of participants with special educational needs.** The sessions take young people on a journey of creativity, self-expression, and confidence-building to develop their performance skills. Creative Learning activities also provide unique access to and opportunities for learning about many sensational touring shows that visit the Sunderland Empire.

Culture Start

Culture Start is an initiative designed to support children and young individuals from low-income families in Sunderland. **The programme seeks to enhance access to cultural and creative resources, improve life opportunities, and broaden choices for these children and youth.** Additionally, it aims to mitigate the long-term effects of poverty. Sunderland Culture leads Culture Start as part of a city-wide collaboration that includes Children North East, Gentoo, Inspired (Sunderland Local Cultural Education Partnership), NE Youth, Sunderland All Together Consortium, Sunderland College, Sunderland Music, Arts & Culture (MAC) Trust, Together for Children, and The University of Sunderland.

Culture House

Culture House is an ambitious new cultural hub in Sunderland city centre. **The modern learning and community building will act as new civic landmark within the wider regeneration of Sunderland.**

The project includes performance spaces, exhibition and gallery spaces, libraries for children, young people and adults, a local studies and archives centre, creative labs, a roof garden and spaces for instructed learning and play.

“I STARTED TO VOLUNTEER AND SUBSEQUENTLY WENT ON TO BE EMPLOYED AT THE BUNKER WHERE I DEVELOPED PERSONALLY, SOCIALLY, AND TECHNICALLY.”

Liam Huitson
Sunderland Music Hub

CONCLUSION

The elements listed above, along with the strong community of dedicated private music tutors in the city and the more comprehensive music education offerings, all listed on the Sunderland Music City Directory, make music education an essential part of Sunderland’s vibrant cultural scene.

However, funding for music education is an ongoing issue. Several of our sector and public survey respondents and our case study interviewees emphasised the importance of genre representation and clear, safe pathways into music as an essential development area.

Several of the organisations mentioned above are successfully broadening their offerings to include more genres and styles of music. **They highlight safe, accessible, professional pathways for emerging musicians interested in increasingly popular genres like electronic music and hip-hop.**

Sunderland Music City’s targeted support for the abovementioned organisations fosters an environment and forum for increased conversation and collaboration while raising awareness. This support is vital to improving the uptake of the city’s wide range of music education offerings and pathways. The aim is to highlight to the city’s young and emerging musicians the many varied, high-quality options and clear, safe pathways to pursue their passions, thus increasing music participation across all levels and avenues.

Schools, colleges, universities, and community organisations can foster individual development, community engagement, and economic growth by providing opportunities for emerging musicians to learn, create, and perform music. **A strong music education plays a vital role in musical success and is the foundation for building a vibrant and dynamic music scene in the city.** Sunderland Music City is committed to supporting the city’s music education providers. It will seek out opportunities for funding, collaboration, the highlighting of pathways, and the showcasing of the city’s next generation of musicians.

A STRONG MUSIC EDUCATION PLAYS A VITAL ROLE IN MUSICAL SUCCESS AND IS THE FOUNDATION FOR BUILDING A VIBRANT AND DYNAMIC MUSIC SCENE IN THE CITY.

11-year-old Isaac Crawford, a pupil learning to play drums at The Bunker

11.3 Career Progression

Sunderland Music City aims to have Sunderland recognised globally for its contributions to the world of music. **Central to this vision is a commitment to supporting local emerging and established musicians by providing opportunities to develop their skills and showcase their abilities.** Several sector and public survey respondents and our case-study interviewees highlighted this as a critical priority for the city. They remarked that artists still need to overcome several barriers, particularly regarding participation and awareness of progression routes.

Sunderland Music City will collaborate with local music education and industry partners to highlight and create precise, safe, inclusive, and accessible pathways for artists to grow and thrive in our music community and beyond. By signposting these routes, both emerging and established artists can develop their skills, set realistic goals, and track their progress in a supportive and collaborative environment

Clear and accessible progression pathways help artists recognise areas for improvement and empower them to seek exciting opportunities.

This often leads to meaningful connections with fellow musicians and industry professionals, fosters collaboration, and enables the creation of new and exciting work, enriching our vibrant music scene.

A Typical Progression Route

A well-established path for a young or emerging musician often begins with learning their chosen musical discipline through formal education or self-teaching via private lessons or in class. They may join a band or ensemble in a traditional educational setting or as part of an extracurricular offering. The next step typically involves performing live with a band, ensemble, or as a solo artist, showcasing the works of their favourite artists. After this, the emerging artist should feel confident in their abilities and be open to more advanced musical progression, such as original songwriting and composition.

This typical progression route demonstrates skill advancement and reflects growth in musicality, coordination, teamwork, and essential live performance abilities, including confidence and composure.

Awareness of progression routes can benefit musicians and help them discover their unique styles and creative voices. Emerging musicians often open themselves to exciting new opportunities when connecting with like-minded individuals through a known progression route. This journey helps them develop their skills and expand their musicality but also guides them in finding their voice.

Signposting

Sunderland Music City aims to guide and support both emerging and established artists in developing the skills necessary to thrive in the city's music community and beyond if they choose to do so. Several Sector Survey respondents reported that, in the past, they had to leave the city to pursue their musical ambitions.

“I LEFT SUNDERLAND TO FOLLOW A CAREER IN PROFESSIONAL CLASSICAL MUSIC PERFORMANCE. THIS KEPT ME AWAY FOR 35 YEARS.”

Sector Survey Respondent

One critical goal of the Sunderland Music City initiative is to help Sunderland's musicians discover exciting opportunities and creative career pathways in our vibrant city.

By collaborating with local and regional partners, **Sunderland Music City aims to connect passionate music makers with organisations and individuals who can support, empower, and nurture their abilities and guide them to achieve their goals.** Sunderland Music City is committed to ensuring that if any musician decides to explore new horizons on their musical journey outside of Sunderland, they will feel prepared, inspired, and confident in their skills, thanks to the valuable experiences gained here in our city.

The landscape for a sustainable music career has changed dramatically over the last few decades. However, this is an opportunity for Sunderland Music City to collaborate with partners to highlight the many diverse methods by which the modern musician can build a sustainable portfolio career in music and connect the providers of these initiatives to musicians and the wider public.

“WE KNOW IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE A MUSICIAN IN SUNDERLAND BECAUSE WE ARE SURROUNDED BY PEOPLE WHO ARE BRILLIANT MUSICIANS. BUT I THINK THE REALITY OF BEING A MUSICIAN NEEDS TO BE COMMUNICATED BETTER AND THAT A PORTFOLIO CAREER IS AN OPTION.”

Laura Brewis
We Make Culture



Progression Route Providers

As well as the formal music educational bodies in the city covered in the Music Education section of this strategy, there are also a number of local organisations and programmes that play a crucial role in nurturing emerging musicians in our city outside of formal education. Here is a small selection of the many and varied organisations in Sunderland that provide progression pathways to emerging musicians.

- **Independent’s ‘Brand New Club’:** offering a unique space for fledgling musicians to experiment, collaborate, and perform in a professional music venue. Independent’s ‘Brand New Club’ provides a supportive environment where emerging artists can gain real-world live music experience and build their confidence, meeting like-minded peers in the process at Sunderland longest-serving venue renowned for championing new original music.
- **We Make Culture’s ‘Young Musicians Project’, ‘Peer to Peer’ and ‘Next Steps Programme’:** these pioneering projects aim to inspire and empower young people through music, offering a variety of activities, including songwriting workshops, recording sessions, and live performance opportunities at professional music venues such as Pop Recs, Independent, The Firestation and beyond.

‘Next Steps’ and ‘Peer to Peer’ build upon the ‘Young Musicians Project’ foundations to provide and highlight professional pathways, industry connections, access to professional recording studios, trusted advice and mentorship, as well as performance opportunities and more with like-minded organisations and individuals in other cities with a focus on career progression, networking, and professional development.

- **Young Sounds Connect:** this partnership between Sunderland Music Hub and national charity Young Sounds UK helps musicians from the earliest stage in their musical journey. Formerly known as Furthering Talent, the programme is specifically designed to help young people from low-income families sustain their musical learning after initial state-funded whole-class lessons end, so they can keep on progressing and making music well into their teens and beyond.
- **The Bunker:** this renowned and much-loved music community hub provides a platform for emerging artists to connect with each other, create new work, develop their sound and musical skills, record, as well as showcase their work on stage, all under one roof. The Bunker offers instrument tuition, rehearsal spaces, recording studios, and artist development programmes and pathways, supporting the development of local musicians, most recently via the introduction of the ‘Summer Sessions’ programme.
- **‘Right Track’ at Washington Arts Centre:** this programme focuses on using music to engage young people wishing to learn more about performing, songwriting, and recording. It provides a safe and creative space for young people to express themselves and develop their musical skills, as well as performance opportunities across the region in professional venues and at live music festivals.

CONCLUSION

Sunderland Music City aims to bring together educational providers, music industry professionals and bodies, and music-minded organisations in our community to foster a cohesive, safe, inclusive, and accessible ecosystem with clear progression routes for emerging musicians. **By promoting and supporting a sustainable environment for collaboration and sharing resources, ideas, and connections, Sunderland Music City aims to highlight the wide range of opportunities and support services available to emerging artists in Sunderland and the wider region.**

By collaborating with local music education and industry partners to highlight the many progression pathways available in our city and beyond, Sunderland Music City will strive to break down barriers and bring together passionate music makers, facilitators, and industry professionals to enhance the skills and opportunities of our vibrant music community. This will empower musicians to develop the diverse skill sets needed to thrive in today’s music industry.

Sunderland Music City aims to provide information, foster connections, break down barriers to access, make introductions, signpost work experience, give trusted advice, and highlight real-world music industry opportunities. This ensures that emerging musicians in the city have the best chance of achieving their goals within a safe and professional framework that is accessible to all.

“BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER AND HAVE MORE CONVERSATIONS BECAUSE THAT’S HOW THINGS HAPPEN. THE MORE WE ARE IN A ROOM TOGETHER, THE MORE WE UNDERSTAND WHAT’S GOING ON, MAKING LIFE EASIER AND BETTER AND ELEVATING THE VOICES OF WHAT WE ALL DO.”

Laura Brewis
We Make Culture



Lottie Willis from We Make Culture’s hugely successful Young Musicians Project

SPOTLIGHT ON WE MAKE CULTURE’S YOUNG MUSICIANS PROJECT

The Young Musicians Project, from We Make Culture, is one of Sunderland’s most popular and prolific music organisations. Founded by Laura Brewis, it supports young musicians (13-19) in developing skills, writing, and playing together, and taking the first steps towards gigging, recording, and releasing their music. The project currently runs three weekly music groups from Field Music Studio in the centre of Sunderland.

The groups are diverse, and young people from all backgrounds are welcome at the Young Musicians Project. The groups are youth-led and as responsive as possible to the members’ interests.

An instrument library is available for the young musicians and groups who perform regularly at Pop Recs Ltd in Sunderland and record in studios like Harbourmaster Productions, and Blank Studios, supporting them in releasing their work

For young people who want to, there are also a variety of (paid) performance opportunities, including local and regional support slots at venues like the Fire Station, the Cumberland Arms, Alphabetti Theatre, and Independent, as well as at local festivals such as Summer Streets, A Stones Throw Festival, and Waves.

The Young Musicians Project is led by a fantastic team of musicians, including Beccy Young, Marty Longstaff, Holly Rees, Robyn Walker, Lesley Roley, David Brewis, Elizabeth Liddle, Eddie Scott, and Natasha Haws. It has an active peer support system.

Founder Laura Brewis said:

“The Young Musicians Project is important because, as simple as it may sound, it gives people a place to come where they can meet other musicians. You can receive support from professional musicians and other young musicians and learn how to collaborate. It’s good to develop music skills, but fostering a creative community of young people who support each other is vital. We also believe it’s important to be linked to a professional music venue in Pop Recs, where we can put on gigs and make the most of the space!”

17-year-old singer-songwriter Sara highlighted the Young Musicians Project’s importance to her:

“It’s a great creative outlet. You get to work on songs with others and have fun. I come back every week because I enjoy it. You make progress on the songs you write and enjoy collaborating with others, taking ideas from everyone and continuing to improve progress.”

The group has a fantastic sense of community, creating a rare space for young people to share their most intimate feelings and creative thoughts without fear of judgment. The level of support from peers and group leaders alike is excellent to see, and the recent addition of the “Mental Health Check-In” board cements the idea that this group always has the best interests of young people at the forefront of its thinking and contributes to their health and wellbeing.

We Make Culture, notably the Young Musicians Project, has transformed Sunderland’s cultural regeneration. Laura and the Young Musicians Project team unite people through music-making and creativity, developing skills, building community, and enhancing creative confidence and wellbeing.

For Sunderland to be recognised both nationally and internationally as a ‘Music City’, it is essential to develop the confidence of young musicians and performers to ensure that music flourishes in the city in the future. The aim is to make Sunderland an even more vibrant and attractive place to live, and this involves nurturing and encouraging young people from all backgrounds, showing them that there is a path to a successful career in music while remaining in their home city. The Young Musicians Project plays a vital role in the city’s ambitions.

11.4 Professional Development

As in any sector, taking advantage of opportunities and reaching your potential requires keeping your knowledge and professional contacts relevant and current. Like any start-up, working in the music sector necessitates planning and skills development. However, there is a perception that advisers and guidance could be improved in the North East, leading musicians to believe they must move away from Sunderland.

“...travelling to bigger cities for music industry activities, such as recording, publishers, production, manufacturing, gigs, banking”.

Sector Survey Respondent

Additionally, short-term thinking is expected in the music sector, where the focus often shifts to the next gig or project instead of embracing a longer-term strategic plan.

“I THINK SOMETIMES IT CAN FEEL A BIT INSULAR. IF YOU’RE NOT INSIDE IT, IT CAN BE A BIT DIFFICULT TO NAVIGATE AND GET IN THERE....”

Dr Becky Allen
University of Sunderland

Over 30% of music sector respondents cited a need for more networking and support for musicians as crucial obstacles to progressing in a music career in Sunderland. Responses indicate that input from mentors or successful professional musicians would also be precious for those starting their careers.

“IT’S STRANGE BEING A PROFESSIONAL ARTIST BECAUSE YOU ARE NOT BUSINESS MINDED.BEING IN THE FUTUREHEADS THEN WAS LIKE BEING ON A TRAIN. WHERE ARE WE GOING TODAY? WE ARE GOING TO JAPAN!? WE WEREN’T LOOKING AT THE BANK BALANCE; WE WERE ON THE TRAIN.”

Barry Hyde
The Futureheads/NAME

The music sector highlighted the following three critical areas for improvement:

Networking and collaboration

Over 40% of the Music Sector Survey respondents discussed the need for meaningful networking opportunities in the city.

“Create more opportunities by linking venues and musicians with networking nights and mixers”

“Help introduce artists to the ecosystem and foster collaboration opportunities.”

Sector Survey Respondents

Skill development and industry advice

Many respondents to the Sector Survey mentioned common issues musicians face, including finance, accessibility, and specific training related to a broader awareness of aspects of the music industry and music-adjacent career options.

“Advice on career progression and how to get paid fairly.”

“Mentoring support system in which experienced professionals guide others.”

“Access to education from individuals specialising in parts of the industry like managing, tech, touring, and promotion.”

Sector Survey Respondents

Specific areas related to music knowledge gaps mentioned included:

“Opportunities to learn about marketing and promotion.”

“Legal advice for musicians and related businesses.”

Sector Survey Respondent

Funding and Financial Support

While our sector survey and case-study respondents showed incredible resilience and passion for their music and creative activities, they also expressed the harsh financial realities of pursuing a full-time career in this field.

Many respondents balance artistic endeavours with jobs to support themselves.

“I couldn’t call it a career; it’s a spare-time job.”

“I had to give up my professional focus on music and arts because it wasn’t possible to support myself in doing it full time.”

Sector Survey Respondents

Several recommendations were proposed to remedy these issues:

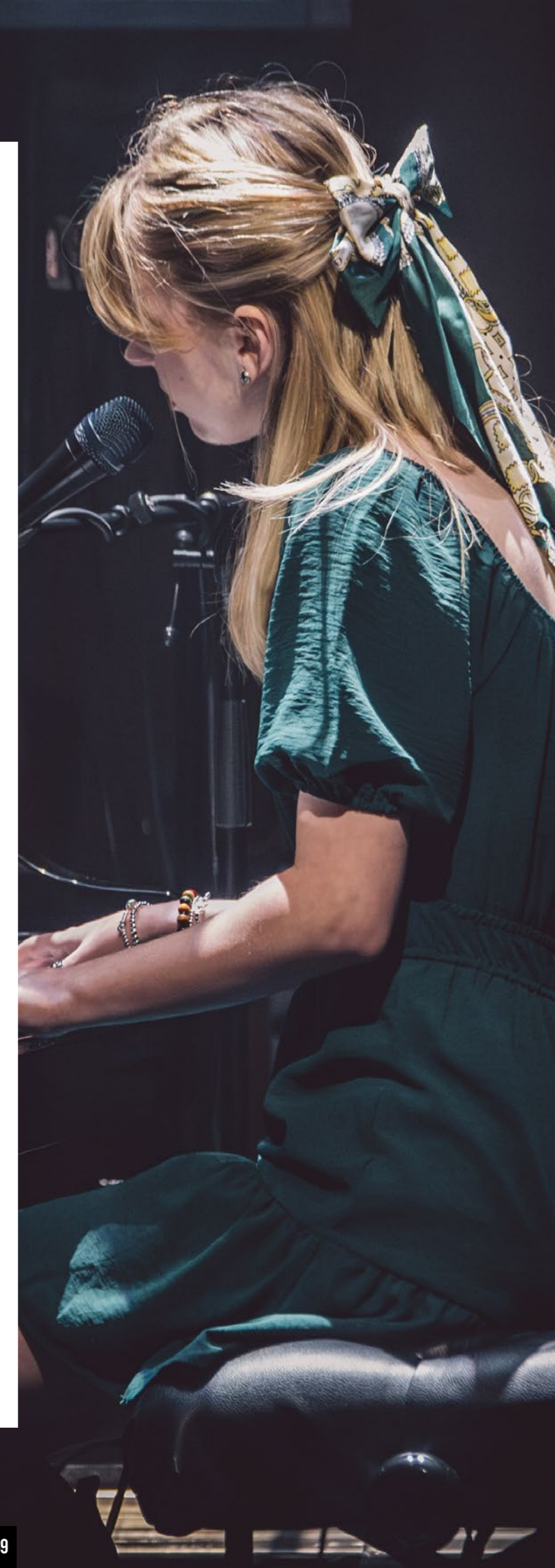
“Leverage additional funding to offer bursaries, commissions, or event backing.”

“Financial backing to help young musicians and non-profit organisations.”

Sector Survey Respondents

Sunderland Music City aims to address these areas and more. It intends to assist those with musical ambitions achieve their goals by highlighting sustainable pathways, signposting funders and business support organisations, and fostering connections with wider music industry support bodies. These organisations specialise in issues related to musician income advice, gender equality, mental health, and support specific to various genres. They also point to industry-specific support bodies catering to all ages and abilities.

Over 30% of music sector respondents cited a need for more networking and support for musicians as crucial obstacles to progressing in a music career in Sunderland.



“I THINK ALL VENUES COULD INVOLVE DISABLED PEOPLE MORE REGARDING THE BUILDING DESIGN. OR IF THE BUILDING IS ALREADY THERE, THEY COULD CONSULT DISABLED PEOPLE WHEN THEY MAKE CHANGES. IT’S IMPORTANT TO INVOLVE DISABLED PEOPLE OF ALL TYPES IN THE DESIGN OR MODIFICATION OF BUILDINGS TO IMPROVE THEM AND MAKE THEM MORE ACCESSIBLE. SO, MORE REPRESENTATION, NOT JUST DISABLED PEOPLE, PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE.”

Professor Peter Smith,
University of Sunderland

The Fire Station, one of the most accessible venues in the North East of England

11.5 Accessibility

This report defines accessibility as removing barriers related to disability, ethnicity, income, and gender that may restrict a person’s ability to engage with and enjoy music. Factors such as ticket prices, transportation, the physical layout of a venue, and ticketing systems can all contribute to this.

Regarding accessibility for individuals with disabilities, The Fire Station has, for example, made significant progress by working towards the best practice outlined in Attitude is Everything’s Live Event Access Charter. This charter offers guidance on how cultural organisations can maximise accessibility, including facilities, marketing, and staff training. From a venue perspective, the opportunity to diversify audiences has economic benefits and drives sustainability and survival.

From an educational perspective, concerted efforts are being made to make music-making more accessible than ever, and research on this issue is already being carried out in the city. Dr Becky Allen from Sunderland University and Liam Huitson from Sunderland Music Hub highlight the role AI and new music technology can play in breaking down barriers to access.

“FOR EACH RESILIENT AND DETERMINED INDIVIDUAL MAKING MUSIC IN SUNDERLAND, THERE ARE COUNTLESS OTHERS WHO WOULD HAVE LIKED TO PURSUE MUSIC AS A CAREER, BUT THEY CANNOT, DUE TO THE SHEER NUMBER OF BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION THEY FACE.”

Liam Huitson
Sunderland Music Hub

“I hear examples from across the country of the musical achievements of young people with a physical disability who are progressing musically using adaptive instruments and music technology... We need more relaxed performances; we need to engage more with families who have children with a learning disability through already established and trusted communication channels such as children’s services. Putting on the performance opportunity is just the beginning; we then need to let families know they are welcome and safe in the space.”

Liam Huitson,
Sunderland Music Hub

“...ACCESSIBILITY TO MUSIC. THAT’S AN AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT, I.E. PEOPLE WHO CAN’T ACCESS OR USE TRADITIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS. IMPROVING THAT PROVISION WOULD GO A LONG WAY BECAUSE MANY ACCESSIBLE INSTRUMENTS ARE EXPENSIVE. FUNDING OR GRANTS FOR THAT IS WHAT I’M LOOKING FOR WITH MY RESEARCH. IT’S AROUND REMOVING THOSE BARRIERS AND MAKING THINGS MORE ACCESSIBLE, CHEAPER, AND PERSONALISED. I THINK THERE’S SCOPE FOR INVESTMENT IN THAT AREA.”

Dr Becky Allen
Sunderland University

11.6 Health and Wellbeing

Music has always been celebrated as a wonderful way to boost health and well-being. From ancient civilisations to our modern world, music has been a source of comfort, joy, and healing for our minds and bodies.

In the UK, with its vibrant musical history and rich cultural diversity, music is vital in supporting health and happiness, not least on Wearside.

Numerous studies highlight the positive effects of music on physical health. Musical activities like playing an instrument or singing can reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and improve cardiovascular health.

Additionally, music therapy is effective in managing pain, reducing anxiety, and improving sleep quality. For individuals with chronic health conditions or who are recovering from illness, music is a valuable tool for coping with challenges and promoting overall wellness.

In addition to its physical health benefits, music has a profound impact on mental health. Listening to music can evoke emotions, reduce stress, and improve mood. Music therapy has been used to treat depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders.

For individuals struggling with mental health issues, music can offer a safe and effective way to express their emotions, build resilience, and find solace.

Furthermore, music fosters social connections and engages individuals and communities in something new and exciting, vital to their enjoyment of life. Events like music festivals, concerts, and community choirs allow individuals to unite, share experiences, and strengthen relationships.

In Sunderland's dynamic music environment and the city's strong community spirit, music is a significant catalyst for growth, social cohesion, and well-being.

"At the age of 11, I heard a track by Paul Van Dyk called 'For An Angel' - a trance track with no vocals/limited vocals, focusing very much on the electronic instrumentation. I hadn't heard anything like it. The love for this track led me to explore the trance genre further - I got my first mixed compilation CD 'Kiss Ibiza 1998', and my first pair of DJ Decks at 14. During my secondary school years, music became one of the most important things in my life."

Liam Huitson
Sunderland Music Hub

**"WITHOUT MUSIC,
THERE IS NOTHING."**

Sector Survey Respondent

In Sunderland's dynamic music environment and the city's strong community spirit, music is a significant catalyst for growth, social cohesion, and well-being.

Music is an invaluable resource for enhancing health and well-being. Its potential to alleviate stress, boost mood, and foster social connections makes it a powerful tool for people of all backgrounds, abilities, and ages. Integrating music into our daily lives can unlock many benefits for our physical, mental, and social health. The social benefits of engaging with music - whether attending live performances, participating in a choir, or learning an instrument - are profound. Music creates opportunities for communities to connect, helps individuals face mental health challenges, and reduces feelings of isolation.

"For many people, music is the only constant in their lives. Music is always there for them regardless of their emotional, physical, or mental state. It's there when they're happy, when they're sad, and when they're anything in between. Music is always there helping us."

Vaughan Fleischfresser
Music Educator, Clinician, Conductor

The adverse effects of the music industry on musicians' mental health are well-recognised and were highlighted by our research participants. Financial instability, particularly for those lacking external support, emerged as a prevalent issue. Challenges in financing music projects, venues, and everyday operations; delayed payments for recorded music and limited commissioned opportunities; and increasing costs associated with venue rentals, artist bookings, and event organisation all compress profit margins.

"It becomes very depressing having to face these issues daily."

Sector Survey Respondent

This situation, along with long and irregular working hours and fluctuating gig opportunities, can lead to emotional distress, depression, and feelings of isolation.

"It has delayed a lot of my progress and made me feel like my experience was isolating, at times."

Sector Survey Respondent

“

**MUSIC IS PART OF MY BEING,
MY LIFE, AND IT'S PART OF
MY SOUL. SUNDERLAND HAS
PRODUCED SOME FANTASTIC
MUSIC AND MUSICIANS.
MUSIC HAS HELPED ME
GROW AND HAS BEEN A
PART OF MY LIFE SINCE I
WAS A KID. IT WILL BE UNTIL
THE DAY I DROP DEAD.**

Professor Peter Smith
University of Sunderland

”

11.7 Diversity and Inclusivity

Music can unite us and celebrate the richness of diverse cultures, genres, and communities. In Sunderland, this power feels especially vital now, particularly following the unsettling events of the summer of 2024, when racist demonstrations caused harm to our city and fear among our residents. We need to embrace music as a force for positivity and connection in these challenging times.

Music brings us together and plays a powerful role in fostering community and inspiring change—something we discovered during our research. This section embraces a vibrant definition of diversity and inclusivity that celebrates the range of music genres represented and performed in Sunderland and the rich diversity of individuals who contribute as musicians, leaders, and audiences.

Diverse programming

The research shows that musicians and audiences feel there is a need for more diversity in the music genres available in Sunderland. This lack of variety is also reflected in the audiences that attend. Thirty per cent of the respondents in our public survey expressed a strong desire for more diversity in the lineups and genres of music being performed in Sunderland.

“More diverse programming. Often, a lot of male/male-fronted acts, which in turn attract a male audience. Programming a wider range of artists across different genres and female/ non-binary acts.”

Sector Survey Respondent

Music lovers in Sunderland have different opinions about the gaps in music offerings. Many point out that while many festivals and gigs celebrate nostalgic acts like 80s pop and punk, these may not resonate with younger or more diverse audiences. Genres like blues, folk, rock, hip-hop, afro-beat, and metal are often mentioned as areas that could receive more attention.

“We need to get more young people into gigs; if we’re talking specifically about education and how we influence music industry development, we need to get more young people into events. I don’t know what that necessarily looks like, whether it is much cheaper tickets or broker deals with venues for all the schools.”

Tamsin Austin
Venue Director

Additionally, some believe many opportunities target younger artists, particularly those aged 18 to 25, which can leave older musicians feeling excluded.

According to our Sector and Public Survey respondents, there is an intense desire for more diverse representation in both genres and audiences. However, events featuring jazz and Latin music find it challenging to attract a wider audience.

“WE SAW THAT THERE ARE A LOT OF OPPORTUNITIES AIMED AT YOUNG PEOPLE, WHICH IS EXCELLENT. BUT IT FEELS LIKE IT LIMITS YOUR OPPORTUNITIES ONCE YOU GET PAST 25.”

Dr Becky Allen
University of Sunderland

Several respondents recommended expanding the festival format to include music alongside other creative activities such as literature and food. They also suggested a seasonal festival to make the events more inclusive. This approach aims to attract a family audience, the LGBTQIA+ community, and individuals from a Global Majority background. Ben Wall, Company Director, shared insights on successful models he has implemented in his various venues in Sunderland, concluding:

Gender

Sunderland has many all-male bands and some female-led ones, yet there are notably fewer all-female bands. Organisations, like We Make Culture, have noticed that while girls show a solid and noticeable early interest in music, many seem to need help progressing.

“I think it’s shifted, and that’s an amazing thing to see, just the number of young women coming through the projects. I think it does feel like quite a different place [than previously]. On the surface level, it might look like there are more girls than boys at Young Musicians Project, which there are, and which is great. But actually, you get underneath it all and see that girls are much more reluctant to perform. They find it much more difficult, are much less confident with instruments and in the studio, and are much less confident about music tech... So, there’s still a lot of work to be done.”

Laura Brewis
We Make Culture

And once in the industry, women can have a different experience than men, as Ruby Kelly, a musician and NAME student, told us:

“People sometimes say things like things when you’re on stage. But because I’ve been doing it for a bit, I’m just thick-skinned, so get on with it. But I think that is generally a problem, and there’s an issue with stuff like that. It’s different being a woman...”

Ruby Kelly
Musician/NAME Student

Many prominent and successful women work in the Sunderland music community, particularly in leadership roles at venues, cultural organisations, and educational institutions. Tamsin Austin, Venue Director of The Fire Station, offers some insight:

“...I like the language of business, and I like the language of the music industry. Good business sense is important, and I would encourage any young woman coming through to concentrate as much on the business side as the artistic. You can’t have one without the other; you need some business skills.”

Tamsin Austin
Venue Director

“FROM THE MUSIC TECH POINT OF VIEW, THROUGH THE NORTH EAST SOUND WOMEN NETWORK, WE’VE SEEN MORE FEMALE LIVE SOUND ENGINEERS PICK UP ROLES. AND I THINK THERE’S POTENTIAL FOR FURTHER GROWTH, TRAINING, OR OPPORTUNITIES TO SHADOW PEOPLE IN THOSE ROLES ALREADY.”

Dr Becky Allen
University of Sunderland

Although non-performance music tech roles in the music industry still show a notable gender imbalance, initiatives like Crew Gal, founded by Susan French, and the North East Sound Women Network, founded by Dr Becky Allen, are making a real difference by shining a light on and creating opportunities for female and gender minority crew members in the North East. As Carly Davidson, an International Tour Manager from Sunderland, shared with us, the key is visibility:

“...having an opportunity to have a wider variety of roles within the music sector in the city and see people in them. I see a lot of women on tour now who are lighting designers, and they are incredible. It’s nothing you’d expect. Many monitor engineers are female now, and that’s brilliant, but I know they’ve had to jump through five extra hoops to get to the same starting point. You have to work harder; this is the music industry. But the experience of the environment is significant - you won’t know you want to be a lighting designer if you don’t know that role exists.”

Carly Davidson
International Tour Manager

“I THINK WE ARE IMPROVING EQUALITY REGARDING GENDER DIVERSITY, AND THERE’S A LOT OF WORK GOING ON THERE, WHICH IS EXCELLENT. BUT I THINK THE NEXT STAGE IS AROUND INCLUSIVITY AS WELL.”

Dr Becky Allen
Sunderland University



Ruth-Ann Boyle, lead singer of Olive, performs in her hometown of Sunderland

Safe Spaces

Audiences, musicians, and venue staff must feel secure and free from harassment. The importance of safety was emphasised by musicians in our research and in an October 2024 Arts Professional article by Lauren James from Splitpixel Creative:

Lauren advocates for the importance of a truly welcoming and accessible culture that permeates the entire business, from the CEO to the Box Office staff. This ensures everyone understands and embodies the business's values and remains open to criticism and change.

Several respondents to surveys and case-study interviews mentioned the need for a safe space charter in Sunderland that covers all music venues and spaces.

"I'm conscious of is the fact that when we pass young people out into the world beyond, past the safe spaces such as us, and The Bunker and places like that, safe places which we know exist, there are still some unsafe places out there. Safety doesn't exist in the music industry once you get past the youth project stage. The chances of girls having a bad experience within the music industry within the live music industry are still much higher.

Laura Brewis
We Make Culture

Cultivating an inclusive music community is essential for bringing together musicians and venues.



“WE NEED TO FEEL SAFE IN THEM. BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, WE NEED TO BE SAFE. IT IS SAFE TO SHOW UP AS OURSELVES WITHOUT RISK OF HARASSMENT. SAFE TO USE FACILITIES WITHOUT RISK OF HARASSMENT. WE NEED TO KNOW WE’LL BE RESPECTED BY STAFF AND OTHER EVENT ATTENDEES, THAT THE ENVIRONMENT WON’T TOLERATE HARASSMENT AND WILL BE SUPPORTIVE.”

Lauren James
Splitpixel Creative

Community Building

A significant 21% of respondents from the music sector highlighted the importance of diversity and cultural integration. They suggested initiatives like year-round indoor and outdoor events featuring multicultural activities to celebrate a diverse range of music. These initiatives aim to unite residents and create excellent opportunities to connect with other communities, enriching the musical landscape for everyone in Sunderland and beyond. Cultivating an inclusive music community is essential for bringing together musicians and venues. This initiative aims to tackle competitive tendencies and promote more music-related opportunities to retain artists in the region. The Sunderland Music City Office encourages non-music segments of the community to create valuable connections with the music industry.

21%
OF RESPONDENTS HIGHLIGHTED THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION

11.8. Audience Development and Marketing

Build it and they will come? Well, not really.

If you are reading this, you may already consider Sunderland a Music City. The Sunderland Music City Directory describes our vast ecosystem of venues, cultural and educational organisations, festivals, promoters, media, dance schools, DJs, recording studios, and musicians. Yet over one-third of our sector survey respondents indicated that audience-focused marketing for these impressive assets is a significant weakness in Sunderland's music ecosystem. Only 5.5% believe it to be a strength of our city.

For example, over 40% of respondents felt Sunderland already had the right number of music venues to meet existing demand; however, 65% of those felt more events could be programmed in the city. Ask any promoter or operator, and they will tell you this can only be possible by increasing the profitability of existing events to make future events possible. Marketing these events is critical.

"Sunderland has the potential to thrive and be known as an excellent location for independent music venues. It lacks the marketing/advertising reach of venues such as O2. Sunderland is developing rapidly, and with the right marketing to gain reach, there is no reason why it shouldn't be a sought-after area for more established bands to want to play."

Anonymous respondent.

Our goal is to enhance awareness of the existing venues in Sunderland by establishing central promotional hubs, collaborating as a unified Music City, and ensuring that gigs are accessible to everyone. This way, residents and visitors to Sunderland will know where to find live music. Yet, our music experience is diverse, reaching beyond live performances. In our public consultation, most respondents shared that they engage with music via radio and online platforms such as Spotify, YouTube, TikTok, podcasting,

“IN SUNDERLAND, YOU CAN LIVE AND STUDY MUSIC. IT’S A VERY AUTHENTIC CITY WITH A HERITAGE THAT SHOULD PUT US AT THE TOP OF THE LIST. LIST THE DIFFERENT ARTISTS THAT HAVE EMERGED FROM THIS CITY. IT’S NOT A COINCIDENCE.”

Carly Davidson

and streaming, in addition to traditional avenues like live events and listening to vinyl at home. A contemporary Music City must connect with people online, offline, in schools, at work, and on their couches—essentially, everywhere. Our marketing strategy for Sunderland Music City will deliver this vision.

"For musicians, podcasts are a great way to introduce themselves to an audience and for the community, local podcasts are great; you can have a local podcast for your village."

Richard Berry
Senior Lecturer in Radio & Podcasting, University of Sunderland

"I'd like more of a coordinated point to find out news about what's happening in the city. I get emails, but there are many to keep up with."

Professor Peter Smith

“HAVING A STATION THAT CAN PLAY [SUNDERLAND MUSIC], WHETHER IT BE SPARK OR SOMEONE ELSE, IS IMPORTANT. WILL IT MAKE MILLIONS OF POUNDS? NO. WILL IT ADD TO THE CULTURAL VALUE OF THE CITY? IT WILL. THE COMMUNITY WANTS TO BE CONNECTED TO THE CITY AND THE AREA THROUGH RADIO.”

Richard Berry
Senior Lecturer in Radio & Podcasting, University of Sunderland

12. 47 WAYS WE'LL IMPROVE MUSIC IN SUNDERLAND

Through our research we've identified eight key focus areas. The following list is not exhaustive and will be expanded on, measured and adjusted as we understand the impact of our work.

Spaces and Places

1. **Audit spaces and places** not currently used for music to explore their feasibility for gigs, festivals, rehearsal spaces and other suitable uses.
2. **Create a city-wide prospectus** to be available to bookers and promoters so they understand the Sunderland landscape.
3. **Work with partners to improve connectivity between venues** and highlight current spaces and places through improved marketing and promotion

Music Education

1. **Partner with educational providers and community organisations** to promote and support music programmes and workshops. This will give young people and emerging musicians more opportunities to learn about music, develop their skills, and increase participation in music education.
2. **Explore local and national funding avenues** for music education to help provide financial support for music programmes and initiatives. This will ensure that music education is accessible to everyone, regardless of their background, ability level, or financial situation.
3. **Support, co-promote, and host live music events with partners.** This will guarantee that young individuals and emerging artists can present their work in secure, inclusive, and professional settings. Additionally, it will offer them a platform to express their passion within the community and inspire others.
4. **Develop partnerships with music businesses, venues, studios, and music education organisations** to provide work experience and training opportunities for young people and emerging artists. This will help the next generation gain the skills and experience they need to pursue careers in the music industry, whether on stage or behind the scenes.
5. **Promote the significant benefits of music education** to parents, caregivers, and the broader community. This will help raise awareness of the importance of music education and encourage more people to support and participate in musical activities in Sunderland.

Career Progression

1. **Keep the online Sunderland Music City Directory current** by regularly updating it with information on music education providers, artists, music businesses, and partners, including venues, recording studios, and media contacts in the city and beyond.
2. **Aim to establish the Sunderland Music City Directory as the primary resource** for individuals looking to advance in their musical journey. This will assist both emerging and established musicians find the tools they need to hone their skills and reach their objectives.
3. **Host informal networking and social events** where emerging and established musicians can connect with other musicians, industry professionals, and representatives from local music education

providers. This will enable musicians to form real-life connections and learn about opportunities in the local music industry beyond.

4. **Signpost mentorship and career progression programmes** that connect emerging musicians with experienced music industry professionals, along with both emerging and established musicians. This will provide musicians with trusted guidance and support as they navigate their careers.
5. **Support connections with current musicians** and create platforms for emerging artists to showcase their work alongside local partners. For instance, a live showcase, radio show, podcast, or social media channel like YouTube can assist musicians in sharing their music and connecting with potential fans and collaborators.
6. **Collaborate with music businesses, educational providers, and music organisations to offer internships and work experience opportunities** for musicians and those interested in gaining further insight into the music industry. This will enable emerging and established artists to acquire valuable experience and develop strong skills and connections.

Professional Development

1. **Collaborate with partners**, including the North East Business and Innovation Centre, **to offer a series of workshops and masterclasses** on topics that are directly relevant and beneficial to the music sector, such as financial planning and management, understanding copyright law, engaging and building an audience, contract negotiations, effective networking, marketing, and navigating diverse media platforms. These sessions will be led by business support professionals alongside music practitioners who can provide real-life experience in the music industry.
2. **Organise regular informal gatherings** for the music community to connect, exchange insights about the Sunderland Music City initiative, and collaborate with peers.
3. **Offer weekly surgeries with the Music Office** for individuals or organisations seeking advice, referrals, and guidance on music-related matters, such as commissioning musicians and applying for funding.
4. **Serve as a mediator, advocate, and connector between musicians and the industry.**
5. **Collaborate with the Living Wage Foundation and the Musicians' Union** to ensure that individuals working in the music sector in Sunderland experience fair pay and conditions.

Accessibility

1. **Collaborate with Children North East to conduct Poverty Proofing sessions** across the city's music sector to remove obstacles hindering access to and participation in musical activities. These sessions will cover issues such as Pay it Forward and offering discounted tickets.
2. **Work with all venues in Sunderland to assess their accessibility** for individuals with disabilities and provide support for implementing reasonable improvements. This initiative will also update the accessibility section of the Music City website's music directory entry, facilitating the creation of a map that displays accessible venues throughout the city.
3. **Support educational bodies by highlighting the benefits technology can have on accessibility in the music-making process.** The goal is to ensure that everyone can make and enjoy music if they wish to.

Health and Wellbeing

1. **Collaborate with the music sector in Sunderland and the Musicians' Union to create a mental health charter** that recognises the challenges musicians and artists face and develops mechanisms to help anticipate and overcome them.
2. **Collaborate with Sunderland Culture and other organisations in Sunderland on social prescribing through music.** Social prescribing is a non-clinical intervention that includes activities typically offered by voluntary and community-sector organisations, such as the arts, gardening, and cooking. The aim is to support individuals holistically by focusing on their well-being, alongside their physical health.
3. **Encourage positive mental health in the music industry and local music community.** The Music Office will do this through social media by connecting with and sharing links to resources that promote mental health and well-being within the larger music industry. Furthermore, the Music Office will collaborate with local and national mental health charities to increase awareness about the challenges musicians encounter through focused social media campaigns and masterclasses.
4. **Investigate the development of and provide guidance toward secure environments** for musicians and individuals within the local music community to discuss their mental well-being. This may encompass establishing a dedicated support group or an online forum where participants with relevant experiences or those confronting music and mental health challenges may exchange advice and cultivate a sense of safety and connection with others facing similar situations.
5. **Provide and promote mental health first-aid training** for those in the local music industry by trusted professionals and accredited mental health organisations. This training aims to help individuals in the music community recognise the signs of mental health issues in themselves and others within their organisations, bands, collectives, ensembles, and the broader music community.

Diversity and Inclusivity

1. **Collaborate with Sunderland City Council to convene festival and event organisers throughout Sunderland.** This initiative explores the development of and the commitment to a gender equality policy in programming and support roles.
2. Work with Sunderland Music Hub, We Make Culture, Cultural Spring, Sunderland Culture, and others to **guarantee that a wide variety of individuals are included in learning resources** and serve as role models and mentors in their engagements with children and other learners.
3. **Strive for diverse representation on the Advisory Group and project teams**, ensuring that marginalised and underrepresented groups are involved in planning and decision-making from the outset and encourage others to do the same.
4. Partner with the Musicians' Union and engage with all pertinent venue and studio owners to **establish a best practice framework for safe spaces** that can be adopted by every organisation involved in music across the city.
5. **Conduct and review current research to explore the career journeys of women, gender minorities, and global majority music makers** in the music industry, focusing on their motivations, experiences, and challenges.

Audience Development and Marketing

1. **Develop a central hub for all Sunderland music listings** on the MusicCity.uk website and investigate selling tickets for Sunderland venues if they wish to take advantage of this option.
2. **Introduce a free membership for Sunderland music fans**, giving them access to exclusive ticket deals at local venues. This initiative will enable concertgoers to enjoy more affordable pricing while allowing venues to develop their audience and enhance attendance for shows that require it.
3. **Launch Music City Radio**, a groundbreaking global station highlighting Sunderland Music City to an international audience.
4. **Repurpose selected radio content and interviews for the Music City Podcast and Vodcast**, streaming on Spotify, Apple Music, and YouTube.
5. **Partner with transport and government bodies to communicate our city's most significant music assets** effectively, advertising on vehicles and digital screens, signposting venues along routes, rebranding stop names, enhancing public transport routes through venues, providing gig-goers with better transport options.
6. **Establish designated visitor points for Sunderland Music City throughout the city**, where audiences, musicians, venues, and those interested in music can learn more about the opportunities, partnerships, resources available, and upcoming events.
7. **Create and distribute a Sunderland Music City roadmap for musicians.** This jargon-free how-to guide, written in collaboration with NARC Magazine, will assist aspiring musicians in our city in taking their first steps in their music careers, including how to successfully promote themselves, their music, and their gigs.
8. **Design and provide walking routes that connect all venues in Sunderland**, featuring paid options for attendees to experience the hospitality of each establishment.
9. **Increase awareness of our city's musical history** by showcasing our proud heritage through physical locations, online platforms, and educational venues.
10. **Develop a strategy to market Sunderland as a music destination.** Collaborate with music organisations locally and beyond to promote Sunderland as a music tourism hub. We will engage key stakeholders through working groups that we hope will include Sunderland City Council, NGL, Sunderland BID, hotels, guest houses, venues, hospitality, travel operators, and anyone else with a passion for music in Sunderland.
11. **Establish partnerships between venues and organisations to co-market our city**, including facilitating contra agreements among venues to promote our city's more comprehensive offerings. Examples include:
 - Commission an illustrative map of our Music City to be displayed in venues, public spaces, and places where music is played, performed, and listened to.
 - Convene and establish co-marketing agreements across all participating venues to maximise our collective digital marketing audience.
12. **Continue to offer Sunderland Music City merchandise**, allowing fans to proudly support this initiative and showcase Sunderland as a Music City.

A young man with dark hair, wearing a teal long-sleeved shirt and light-colored trousers, is playing an acoustic guitar on a stage. He is looking down at the guitar with a focused expression. The guitar has a decorative floral pattern on its body. A microphone on a stand is positioned in front of him. The background is dark with some stage lights visible.

**SUNDERLAND'S
MUSIC IS INTEGRAL
TO ITS OVERALL
IDENTITY, WHICH
SHOULD BE
PRESERVED AND
PROMOTED.**

13. ENCORE

Sunderland is entering an exciting chapter in its cultural journey, with music ready to lead in shaping its unique identity and future growth. The Sunderland Music Strategy (2025-2030) lays out an inspiring and clear plan to tap into the incredible power of music to transform the city in wonderful ways - economically, socially, and culturally. Through our new partnership with the Music Cities Network, thoughtful investments, teamwork, and strong community involvement, Sunderland is on its way to becoming a vibrant 'Music City,' where music enriches everyday life and contributes to the city's regeneration.

The music industry and its audience in Sunderland take immense pride in the city's musical heritage and the flourishing music scene. Sunderland's music is integral to its overall identity, which should be preserved and promoted. Additionally, the city has significant potential to emerge as a notable local, national, and international music hub.

Music has a unique way of captivating, transporting, connecting, and transforming us. It can soothe our pain and lift our spirits, bringing joy. Music ties us to our past and future, weaving together our experiences through cherished tunes from our childhood and the fresh hits we discover. When music resonates with everyone, it achieves its true magic.

14. THE STRATEGY'S AUTHORS

The Sunderland Music, Arts and Culture Trust

Established in 2012, The Sunderland Music, Arts and Culture Trust has been the catalyst, developer, and promoter of cultural activities within Sunderland and beyond. It brings together individuals with ability, talent, and ambition who share a vision for a future where the arts, music, and culture flourish.

It seeks to encourage people of all ages and backgrounds to participate in cultural activities such as playing an instrument, learning to dance, act, or sing, or creating literature or poetry.

The Trust develops the infrastructure and venues needed for this cultural renaissance and helps to build organisations and capacity within the sector, most notably The Fire Station venue.

Paul Callaghan, Chair of The Sunderland Music, Arts and Culture Trust

Paul is the chair of the Sunderland Music, Arts, and Culture Trust, which was instrumental in developing Sunderland's £20 million Cultural Quarter. This quarter includes the renovated 1908 Fire Station and other Edwardian structures.

He is passionate about place-shaping and regeneration. Paul also heads the Leighton Group, a technology company he founded with offices across Tyne and Wear, Europe, and the USA. His leadership experience spans several organisations, including England's Regional Development Agencies, ONE North East, the University of Sunderland, Redhouse Academy, Live Theatre, Business Link NE, the North East Regional Technology Centre, and Sunderland Software City.

[Paul's LinkedIn profile](#)

Michelle Daurat, Chief Executive of The Sunderland Music, Arts and Culture Trust

With over 20 years of experience, Michelle has led cultural projects and organisations throughout the North East. In 2010, she served as Project Director for The Tall Ships Races in Hartlepool and reprised this role in Sunderland in 2018. Previously, she held the positions of Head of Business and Operations at the National Glass Centre and Executive Director at The Fire Station. She is now the Chief Executive of Sunderland Music, Arts and Culture, overseeing Sunderland Music City.

[Michelle's LinkedIn profile](#)

Andrew Dipper, Marketing Director, Sunderland Music City and The Fire Station

Andrew has worked with entertainment and hospitality venues, event organisers, and promoters for over 15 years, and has delivered award-winning marketing strategies on a local and global scale. Through his work with Sunderland Music City and his role on the board at The Fire Station, Andrew combines his passion for live music and marketing, setting the marketing and communications strategy for the Sunderland Music City project.

Andrew is proud to play a role in the city's cultural transformation, and wants to show the world that Sunderland is the place to be for music lovers, musicians, and anyone wanting to make a career for themselves in music.

[Andrew's LinkedIn profile](#)



Frankie Francis

Frankie Francis, Music Officer (Communications and External Engagement)

Frankie, a musician and broadcaster from Sunderland, has released three critically acclaimed albums with his band Frankie & The Heartstrings, achieving mainstream chart success. He has toured North America, Europe, Japan, and Australia while collaborating with major industry players. In Sunderland, he has organised stadium shows alongside promoters and founded the grassroots cultural hub Pop Recs. As a broadcaster, Frankie promotes new and established music through radio and frequently covers sports on television for Sunderland AFC.

Frankie will be responsible for developing Sunderland's relationship with the UK's national music industry and with organisations such as Sunderland City Council, the North East Combined Authority, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, and Arts Council England. He will help develop a series of gigs, concerts, and events that build on the city's growing musical programme.

[Frankie's Spotify link](#)

Marty Longstaff, Music Officer (Education and Communities)

Marty is a singer, songwriter, musician, and qualified teacher from Sunderland. In addition to recording and touring globally with his band The Lake Poets and others like Above & Beyond, Marty has spent the last decade merging his love for music and education by designing and facilitating music and songwriting workshops nationwide.

As a Music Officer for Sunderland Music City, Marty aims to support and strengthen the links between artists, educational providers and the wider music community by collaborating with and signposting to local and national initiatives, helping to nurture established and emerging artists in Sunderland. His commitment lies in assisting emerging and established musicians in the city to realise their goals, serving as a source of inspiration for the next generation.

Marty's Spotify links:

[As The Lake Poets](#)

[As Marty Longstaff](#)



Marty Longstaff

15 PEOPLE WE INTERVIEWED

This strategy brings together various insights from talented professionals in the music industry in Sunderland. Each shared their thoughts on our local music scene's challenges and exciting opportunities. You can find their interesting observations and perspectives featured in the relevant sections of the report.

We are immensely grateful to all our contributors for giving up their time to talk to us.

Barry Hyde

Barry, a prominent musician from the city, and his band, The Futureheads, have extensively toured globally and achieved significant sales and streaming figures. He is a partner at NAME, a music school affiliated with the University of Sunderland in the city centre. Additionally, Barry is the proprietor of The Peacock, a public house and music venue, where he manages a music studio named Birdland.

Dr Becky Allen

Becky is a lecturer at the University of Sunderland, where she teaches computer science. However, her main research interest is in music technology. She is investigating how musicians can use artificial intelligence as a tool, exploring a human-centred approach so that it remains a creative tool and it does not overtake human involvement in the process. Her primary focus is embedding AI within accessible digital musical instruments to enhance their provision and musical depth.

Ben Wall

Ben is the city's longest-serving operator of music venues. For over twenty years, he has built a diverse portfolio of establishments in Sunderland, with music at the core of their operations. Ben's dedication to improving Sunderland is undeniable as he works to promote local performers and draw touring artists to the city.

Carly Davidson

Carly is a well-known international tour manager and promoter in the music industry. She collaborates with some of the biggest names globally and locally. She is passionate about increasing female representation in her field and recognises the considerable distance to travel for equality. With international and domestic experience at significant events, Carly hails from a family with a strong presence in the industry. She is proud of her Sunderland roots and enthusiastically shares the city's musical potential with others.

Kenny Sanger

Most people involved in music in Sunderland have probably met Kenny. He has lovingly managed The Bunker in the city, which hosts rehearsal rooms and a studio that has had a tremendous impact on Sunderland's musical scene for many years. Kenny connects directly with different communities, using music to unite people, encourage self-expression, and provide therapeutic benefits. He is a crucial part of the community, always helping others to pursue their ambitions, grow their careers, and develop within the city.

Laura Brewis

Laura leads We Make Culture, a significant organisation in the city that primarily focuses on children, youth, and families. The Young Musicians Project engages individuals aged 13 to 19 in creating and performing original music together. This highly successful initiative has expanded in size and scope over nearly a decade. Additionally, Laura runs community projects that reach individuals who typically would not have access to such opportunities. She understands firsthand the impact of music and the arts on people's lives.

Liam Huitson

Liam is the Musical Inclusion Officer at Sunderland Music Hub and an accomplished musician and DJ. Sunderland Music Hub delivers, supports, and champions music-making activity across the city of Sunderland, advocating the potential of music to change lives. Liam previously held a leadership role at The Bunker and is passionate about supporting vulnerable young people, adults, and those without access to music education.

Professor Peter Smith

Not only is Peter an esteemed academic, but he is also a music lover and has attended events in the city since 1969. Peter still regularly attends music events regionally and across the country, enjoying all genres and styles. He records all the events he attends on his blog, myvintagerock.com, documenting over 2,000 events. In recent years, Peter has had to rely on a wheelchair and assistant care. He has faced accessibility challenges because of this, both in the city and nationally, but it has not stopped his infectious enthusiasm for his city and music.

Philip Morris

Originally from the region, Philip left to pursue music studies in the North West. Since then, he has established a successful career in the music industry, encompassing roles as a musician, editor for a music magazine, public relations specialist, and involved in publishing and synchronisation. He serves as the North of England Regional Officer for

the Musicians' Union. Philip acknowledges Sunderland's potential to be recognised as a Music City and is confident that such recognition would significantly enhance the city's current trajectory.

Dr Richard Berry

Richard is a Senior Lecturer in Radio and Podcasting at the University of Sunderland. He has lived in Sunderland for 26 years and recognises the vital synergy between the University community and the city. He believes music is the ideal medium for fostering this connection. Radio can promote local artists within and beyond the city through modern platforms. Additionally, Richard thinks podcasts provide an excellent opportunity for audiences to learn about and connect with artists.

Ruby Kelly

Ruby is a passionate musician who has made the city her home thanks to the superb music education at the Northern Academy of Music Education. Hailing from Wales, this talented emerging singer-songwriter studies music in Sunderland, crafting songs and promoting music nights in the city. Ruby has had the fantastic opportunity to open for touring artists at local music venues and shine at the Summer Streets Festival. Recently, she took the initiative to start a Music Society at the University, bringing musicians together to share their passion.

Tamsin Austin

Tamsin, the Venue Director at The Fire Station in Sunderland, is highly regarded in the music industry for her expertise and extensive connections. With a lifelong career in music stemming from her studies in the region, Tamsin's folk music roots provide her with a comprehensive understanding of the industry. She has held various roles, including promoter, agent, and tour manager, working in venues across the UK and Europe and engaging with multiple music genres. She has led the venue since it opened in 2021 and is now experiencing its most successful and busiest period ever.

Tony Ratton

Tony is passionate about music and loves his home city of Sunderland. He enjoys attending various live music events and wholeheartedly supports our music scene. Every week, he makes it his mission to share music events on online forums, helping to connect local musicians and spread the word about exciting happenings in the city. Tony genuinely believes there has never been a better time to enjoy music in Sunderland, and he is excited about what the future might bring.

Emeli Sande performs a hometown show in Sunderland

SUNDERLAND IS A MUSIC CITY



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Music, Arts and Culture Trust