Devolution Amplified

Putting music at the heart of English devolution

Groundwork Research

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About Groundwork Research

Groundwork Research is a non-partisan, mission-driven research consultancy working at the intersection of policy, practice and place. We tackle complex policy challenges, with expertise spanning public service reform, devolution, local government and place-based regeneration.

This report was commissioned by UK Music, the collective voice of the UK's world-leading music industry. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of UK Music. Any errors or omissions remain the responsibility of the author.

About the author

Jack Shaw Director

Jack is the Director of Groundwork Research and was among the Local Government Information Unit's Top 25 Global Thinkers in Local Government in 2025. He is also a Policy Fellow at The Productivity Institute, based at the University of Manchester and an Affiliated Researcher at the University of Cambridge's Bennett School for Public Policy.

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Introduction

The music industry is a major national economic strength. Few industries combine economic value, cultural influence and global reach so effectively. The UK is the world's second-largest exporter of music, while the sector generated £8 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) and supported 220,000 jobs in 2024.[1] From artists and songwriters to venues, studios, festivals, record labels and the businesses that support them, the music industry is central to the economic and cultural fabric of places across the country.

Its importance is expected to grow as the Government has set an ambition for the UK to become a creative superpower, with investment across the creative industries rising from £17 billion to £31 billion by 2035.[2] Music should be at the heart of that ambition. It is an industry in which the UK already enjoys a genuine competitive advantage: creating jobs and businesses, attracting investment and visitors, and projecting British culture around the world. International visitors come to record in iconic studios, work with British songwriters and producers, attend major music conferences, study at renowned music institutions and make pilgrimages to the record stores, venues and places associated with British music.

As devolution reshapes where decisions about England's economy are made, strategic authorities are taking more ownership over the levers that influence the success of the music industry. Their transport decisions determine whether — and how easily — artists and their fanbases can get to and from venues. Skills policies shape routes into the industry. Planning policy influences whether venues, studios and rehearsal spaces survive. International trade and investment missions, increasingly led by mayors, alongside dedicated export strategies, can help local businesses and artists reach new markets. Tourism strategies can turn musical heritage and contemporary music scenes into powerful reasons to visit.

When the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act came into force in April 2026, culture became a formal competency of strategic authorities, representing an important shift in the salience of devolution for the music industry.

Some strategic authorities already recognised the value of culture. Liverpool City Region (LCR) has been building on Liverpool's long-standing association with the Beatles, the previous Mayor of Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) has done similar with Oasis and the wider story of Madchester, and in doing so both are demonstrating how the music industry can shape the identity, reputation and economy of cities and towns across England.

Yet practice remains uneven. The music industry has not historically featured prominently in England's devolution agenda — though it has not been entirely absent either — and the extent to which strategic authorities support the music industry varies considerably. The next phase of devolution therefore presents an opportunity to change that and to treat music not simply as a cultural asset, but as part of the economic, social and physical fabric of local economies and communities.

The Prime Minister has been clear that strategic authorities will play a more significant role in supporting their economies and, by the end of this Parliament, cover the whole of England. A new No. 10 North has been established in Manchester to help deliver that ambition.

The direction of travel is already emerging. Strategic authorities will take on greater responsibility for cultural and sporting investment, including funding currently administered by Arts Council England (ACE). They will also play a more prominent role in the Stadium Regeneration Accelerator to unlock development around major sporting venues — many of which also serve as important live music and concert venues.[3] Meanwhile, the Government is expected to accelerate existing devolution plans, such as placing transport under public ownership, which could give strategic authorities more autonomy to support the night time economy. A new Devolution White Paper, expected alongside the 2026 Budget, will set out a more detailed agenda.

This builds on announcements made by the Government in July, ahead of Andy Burnham's premiership, including the new Plan for Music and the appointment of Michael Dugher — former Chief Executive of UK Music — as the Government's Music Champion.[4]

Although strategic authorities do not need to wait for further devolution to act — they already have significant powers to influence the music industry — the direction of travel makes the case for a more deliberate and ambitious approach. They should now take the initiative to support and grow their music economies and we set out five principles to guide that action:

VOICE	**Give music a voice at the mayoral table.** Mayors and strategic authorities should provide clear political and organisational leadership for culture and the creative industries, ensuring that music is represented within their institutions and has a voice in the decisions that affect it.
EVIDENCE	**Understand the local music industry and build the capacity to act on that understanding.** Effective policy begins with a clear understanding of the local music economy: its scale and economic contribution, workforce, businesses, infrastructure and comparative advantages, as well as the pressures it faces. That understanding should be embedded across the strategic authority.
POWER	**Give places the tools to act.** Strategic authorities can only realise the economic potential of their music industries if they have the powers, resources and influence to do so. That means making full use of existing investment and business support levers to help the sector grow and attract more private investment, while ensuring that further devolution gives places greater influence over the funding and programmes that shape their music economies.
PEOPLE	**Build the music workforce.** New responsibilities must be matched by investment in human capital. Mayors should use their autonomy over skills and employment to develop pathways into and within the music industry, which is characterised by freelancers, small businesses, portfolio careers and non-traditional routes into work, and to make sure those paths are inclusive.
PLACE	**Create the conditions for music to thrive.** People and businesses need places in which to make, perform and experience music. Planning and licensing policies should recognise that a successful music sector depends on venues, studios and affordable workspaces, alongside transport infrastructure that reflects how and when the music industry operates.

01 Voice

The music industry deserves a stronger voice in the institutions that shape local economic policy. Strategic authorities have long convened advisory bodies, but their membership has often reflected their traditional responsibilities, with a strong emphasis on infrastructure and transport. As those responsibilities mature their advisory structures will need to mature with them.

Dedicated music fora have demonstrated the value of giving the industry a stronger voice in local decision-making. UK Music, working alongside other industry bodies and organisations, has championed the creation of local Music Boards, helping to establish dedicated structures in places including LCR and GMCA. In Greater Manchester, the Music Board established after the 2019 UK Music-led Music Review has since evolved into a Music Commission, reflecting the growing prominence of music within the city-region's economic and cultural strategies.[5] In parallel, appointments such as Sacha Lord as Night Time Economy Advisor, alongside the creation of a Creative Council and Freelance Taskforce, represented the distinctive structure and needs of the music industry.[6] London has also developed a similar model by creating a London Music Board, alongside the Mayor's Cultural Leadership Board and wider advisory fora on the night time economy, culminating in the creation of a Night Czar, Amy Lamé. Bristol followed London and Greater Manchester's lead and appointed a Night Time Economy Advisor in 2021.[7] West Yorkshire also created the West Yorkshire Music Network to shape policy and strengthen its position as a home of live music, anchored by major industry assets such as Production Park. However, not all of these forums have remained consistently active, nor have dedicated roles always remained occupied, suggesting that despite this progress, the institutional commitment to giving the music industry a voice in local decision-making remains uneven.

Strategic authorities should be encouraged to create a dedicated Music Board, but where there is insufficient capacity to do so a Cultural Leadership Board with meaningful representation from music and the wider creative industries should be established instead. This would give the music industry a codified route into mayoral decision-making — connecting the sector, including musicians, venues, promoters and labels with decisions makers responsible for economic growth, planning, transport, skills and place. Crucially, those voices must reflect the diversity of the industry and the communities it serves, as the UK Music Diversity Taskforce has emphasised.

Establishing the appropriate institutional architecture must be matched by strong political leadership. Recent legislation now gives a Mayor the freedom to appoint a Deputy Mayor or Commissioner. Mayors should use this flexibility to appoint a Commissioner for Culture and the Creative Industries, providing the sector with a visible, political champion. This is consistent with, and builds upon, UK Music's Local Music Action Charter, which recommends that local authorities appoint a Music Champion.[8]

There is already precedent for a role similar to a Commissioner in the Greater London Authority (GLA), which demonstrates what dedicated political leadership can achieve. As Deputy Mayor for Culture and the Creative Industries, Justine Simons has played a central role in establishing the world's first Creative Enterprise Zone; a Culture at Risk Office, which supports music venues and cultural organisations threatened with closure; and the London Borough of Culture programme, from which Haringey will benefit in 2027.[9] In its early days, the London Music Board supported the Mayor of London in securing the abolition of the Metropolitan Police's Form 696 — a risk assessment that requested the personal details of performers and promoters and was widely criticised as discriminatory. This built on the solid foundation developed by the political leadership at the GLA via initiatives such as the 2015 Grassroots Music Venue Rescue Plan, which strengthened the relationship between the music industry, developers and licensing authorities, which helped to protect grassroots music venues.[10]

Taken together, embedding the music industry within the machinery of strategic authorities will give the industry both a political champion to advocate for its interests and a voice to inform the decisions affecting the sector.

Photograph: Cottonbro Studio / Pexels

02 Evidence

Effective leadership depends on access to robust evidence to inform decision-making. Strategic authorities cannot support their sector without understanding its scale, geography and distinctive characteristics — from its economic contribution and workforce to its venues, businesses and creative communities.

With the right political leadership in place, strategic authorities should build the institutional capacity needed to understand and engage with their local music industry. One model is a dedicated Music Office, providing a focal point and operational capacity within the authority to support the Commissioner for Culture and the Creative Industries, as well as spotlighting local talent. The Music Office should not supplant but complement a national Music Export Office, which has been a long-standing ambition in the music sector, particularly since Brexit.

There are established precedents internationally — and increasingly across England — for institutions that perform functions similar to a Music Office. Seattle's Office of Film + Music provides a prominent international example. Closer to home, Greater Manchester is positioning music as both an economic and international asset. It employs a dedicated Policy Officer solely responsible for supporting the music industry, is developing a Music Plan and has launched the UK's first city-region Music Export Office, backed by £300,000, with a focus on building strategic partnerships and helping local talent access new markets.[11] This approach builds on UK Music's 2019 Greater Manchester Music Review.

Meanwhile Liverpool City Region established a Music Office in 2022, backed with £1.6 million, with a focus on strengthening the domestic music industry through apprenticeship support.[12] Sunderland has similarly developed its Music City initiative with support from the North East Mayoral Combined Authority and, more recently, four strategic authorities across the North of England have worked with music development agency Generator to establish the Northern Music Export Office.[13] Earlier in the year, the Export Office led a trade mission to Japan, the world's second largest music market. Building on that engagement, Leeds-based band Adult DVD toured the country in April, selling out shows in Tokyo and Osaka.[14]

Other strategic authorities are moving in a similar direction. The West Midlands Combined Authority has committed to convening partners to establish a Regional Music Office function.

These initiatives point towards an emerging model in which strategic authorities are building dedicated capacity to convene their music industry, design policy, attract investment and help local artists and businesses reach new markets. All strategic authorities should consider this approach, but they will also need to go further. With dedicated capacity through a Music Office, strategic authorities should undertake a Culture Audit, mapping the businesses, venues, studios, rehearsal spaces, festivals, education providers and freelancers that make up their local music industry. Through the identification of the sector's economic contribution and employment, geographic clusters and supply chains, and by assessing the pressures facing the infrastructures on which the music industry is reliant, this should underpin the policy interventions strategic authorities pursue.

There are pertinent examples to build on. Creative Cardiff has mapped Cardiff's creative economy with support from Cardiff City Council, demonstrating how detailed local intelligence can reveal the scale and geography of creative activity.[15] Registers of vacant cultural spaces akin to the Culture at Risk Office at the GLA can enable strategic authorities to connect artists and their organisations with underused buildings, while meanwhile-use arrangements can bring empty premises back into productive cultural use ahead of longer-term development.

The GLA has similarly mapped London's creative industries through its Cultural Infrastructure Plan and in doing so supports policymakers to understand where creative clusters and workspaces are concentrated and where there are cold spots in provision. Given that it was produced in 2018, the evidence is now likely to be out of date — suggesting that a Culture Audit should be undertaken on a regular cycle.[16]

Given the cultural and economic significance of Black Music, with an estimated 80 per cent of the £30 billion of the UK recorded music market over the past three decades originating from Black Music genres, from Dubstep to Rock — evidence-gathering exercises must proactively engage with communities and networks that have driven that success, including diasporic networks, Black-led community venues and grassroots organisations that may be overlooked by conventional consultations.[17]

Building the evidence base therefore creates space for a different way of thinking about the value the music industry can add to local economies. As a result, the industry should be embedded in the DNA of strategic authorities, including through each Local Growth Plan and their corresponding non-statutory strategies, from a Visitor Economy Strategy or a Sector Plan to an International Strategy. Greater Manchester's International Strategy already draws on the city-region's music scene — from Manchester International Festival and the Hallé to the Warehouse Project, Parklife and contemporary artists — as part of its international proposition.

03 Power

Music: an engine of local growth

Music is one of the most recognisable sources of the UK's soft power. It shapes identity, strengthens people's connection to place and enriches communities. It is also an important economic asset: a source of employment, investment and exports, and central to the culture-led regeneration taking place across the UK.

The UK music industry generated £8 billion in Gross Value Added in 2024, up 5 per cent on the previous year. Its economic footprint extends well beyond the industry. In 2025, music tourism generated £11.2 billion in spending across the UK, including £5.7 billion spent directly by people attending concerts and festivals and a further £5.5 billion through industry supply chains. That spending supports hotels, pubs, restaurants, retailers and transport providers.[18]

In the North East, where music tourism generated £340 million in 2025, its Local Growth Plan sets out an ambition to establish the region as a Centre for Music.[19] When the Mercury Prize was hosted outside London for the first time in Newcastle, it attracted 8,000 visitors and generated £1.4 million for the economy.[20] The North East's Local Growth Plan identifies music as an area of comparative advantage and proposes a Creative Catalyst to unlock private investment while working with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to maximise the impact of public investment. Elsewhere, in Liverpool the new MusicFutures R&D Cluster has been established to support innovation in the music industry and transition to a lower-carbon economy.[21]

CASE STUDY

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Through its Creative Industries Sector Development Plan, GMCA identifies particular strengths in programming and broadcasting, sound recording and music publishing and their value in supporting export-oriented growth and regional branding.[22] It also acknowledges sectoral challenges including precarious employment, global competition, technological disruption, spatial inequality and under-investment. Importantly, its proposed interventions include support for apprenticeships and up-skilling, investment in creative infrastructure, action to improve access to finance and investment, support for freelancers and SMEs and — to take advantage of the UK's status as the world's second-largest music exporter — international promotion. GMCA is also considering its future requirements for rehearsal, studio, production and performance space as part of a longer-term creative infrastructure pipeline.

Devolving government programmes

Strategic authorities should exercise the full range of levers and resources already available to them to support the music sector, but to go further they need greater control too. The Government should therefore examine where further devolution could give strategic authorities the tools they need to support their local music economies.

The Government is investing in the sector through its Music Growth Package, which has now grown to £45 million over three years, including additional ACE funding. It is expected to support more than 2,000 projects and 40,000 artists and professionals. The package includes support for touring, mentoring and exports, as well as music businesses, labels, managers and publishers.[23] The Government has also established an £85 million Creative Foundations Fund to support cultural infrastructure.[24] But neither have been provided to strategic authorities through the Integrated Settlement, despite initiatives like the Creative Places Growth Fund being devolved. Consistent with the direction of travel set out by the Prime Minister, the Government should explore the mechanisms by which each strategic authority — with a stronger understanding of and connection to its local music industry — can have greater autonomy over investment decisions.[25]

With additional investment from DCMS, strategic authorities could play a central role in supporting existing music businesses, strengthening music in the curriculum as the Independent Review of Arts Council England identified or using those resources to deliver their Local Growth Plans.[26] They should be supported by national institutions such as ACE, where there is alignment, to work towards shared economic and cultural objectives. ACE is not required to align its decisions with strategies prepared by strategic authorities, such as the Local Growth Plan.

That relationship is likely to become increasingly important as the Government considers the future of arm's-length bodies as part of its wider devolution agenda. There are different views about where this should lead. Some strategic authorities may seek direct control over functions and funding currently held nationally; others may prefer stronger strategic partnerships that draw on the expertise and institutional capacity of organisations such as Arts Council England while giving places greater influence over how resources are deployed. Lessons from the devolved administrations' agencies, Creative Wales, Creative Scotland and the Arts Council NI may be instructive.

Whatever model emerges, at a minimum, Arts Council England should have regard to Local Growth Plans when making significant investments in places, with mechanisms for strategic authorities and national agencies to co-ordinate their investment pipelines.

There is also an opportunity to rethink the purpose of that investment. Cultural policy has traditionally relied heavily on short-term grant funding, but strategic authorities are increasingly being asked to mobilise private capital and support businesses to grow. They can operate with an eye to the longer-term in a way that the Government cannot, given their relative insulation from the annual Spending Review cycle and the greater continuity of leadership that mayors provide. Strategic authorities should, therefore, place greater emphasis on supporting the entrepreneurial and commercial capacity of organisations and music businesses — helping them diversify revenues, attract private investment and become more financially resilient rather than dependent on grant funding.

The West of England Combined Authority is already moving in this direction. Its Local Growth Plan commits to establishing a West of England Creative Campus across the Central Bristol and Bath Growth Zone, bringing together investment opportunities across the region's creative industries. Building on its Creative Growth pilot, it also proposes a Creative Industries Scale Up programme to connect regional businesses with investors and attract new investment into the sector.[27] Scaling this across England's strategic authorities will require a change in perspective for some of them.

Mobilising industry investment

Alongside this activity, the industry-led contribution on arena and stadium gigs is expected to generate up to £20 million a year for grassroots music and is administered by the LIVE Trust.[28] Bristol has created an equivalent voluntary scheme, A Ticket To The Future, which is estimated to raise between £400,000 to £1 million annually.[29] Administered through a Community Benefit Society and thereby giving the music industry an opportunity to direct how the income is governed and distributed, the scheme applies a one per cent surcharge on music events.

Strategic authorities should work with the music industry to support and scale these sources of revenue and encourage participation, such as through mechanisms including match-funding. Though it would need to be compliant with UK competition law, participation may also encourage local authorities to look favourably on licensing conditions, such as opening hours, when licences are up for renewal.

04 People

The Prime Minister's renewed commitment to employment and skills devolution has the potential to give strategic authorities greater autonomy to shape the workforce of the future. This is a critical juncture as the Milburn Review has highlighted that the number of young people not in education, employment or training has risen sharply over recent years.[30]

Yet creating accessible and sustainable routes into the music industry requires a different approach from conventional skills policy. The industry relies heavily on freelancers, self-employment, small businesses and portfolio careers. Traditional employer-led training and apprenticeship models do not always reflect how people enter, work and progress within the sector.

There are already examples of strategic authorities beginning to bridge that gap. South Yorkshire's Music Hub led by the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority brings together local Music Hubs across Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield. It supports educational, creative and community organisations to work together across the city-region, with an explicit ambition to connect music education with opportunities in the industry.[31] GMCA's Manchester Baccalaureate — known as the MBacc — was designed to encourage more young people into vocational routes aligned with the sectors in which Greater Manchester is already generating employment opportunities. Unlike the national English Baccalaureate, or EBacc, the MBacc includes pathways for the creative industries.[32] Meanwhile, across the West of England's Music Hubs, pathways into the industry include music production workshops and DJing courses, helping young people develop practical, industry-relevant skills.[33]

Photograph: Tima Miroshnichenko / Pexels

Equipped with new skills devolution, expected to arise from the Milburn Review, strategic authorities should bring together employers, education providers and the music industry to understand local skills gaps and whether existing provision meets them. They should identify clearer pathways from schools and colleges into employment, while recognising that a route into music may look very different from a route into a larger, more conventional industry.

The Growth and Skills Levy provides an important opportunity to put this into practice and should be devolved. Strategic authorities should have meaningful autonomy over how their share of the Levy is spent, which is estimated to generate £4 billion in 2027-28, allowing them to respond to the structure and needs of their local economies.[34] UK Music has previously made the case that the Growth and Skills Levy is poorly suited to the freelance and project-based nature of the industry. Greater local flexibility could make it easier to fund shorter or less conventional forms of training, provided that businesses — particularly those in the creative industries — have a strong voice in how the system is designed and implemented. There is also a strong case for enabling apprenticeships to be shared across multiple employers, reflecting the prevalence of SMEs across the music industry, alongside greater support for mid-career professional development, building on initiatives such as the Music Managers Forum's Accelerator Programme. Creative Scotland has funded music manager professionals to participate in the programme, which could be replicated by strategic authorities.[35]

A more responsive skills system must also be a more inclusive one. There is still a challenge within the music industry despite representation of Black, Asian and ethnically diverse groups increasing from 15.6 per cent in 2016 to 25.2 per cent in 2024.[36]

As UK Music and its Diversity Taskforce have highlighted, alongside its cultural value, the commercial benefits of Black music are substantial as House, R&B, Neo-Soul and Grime are among the most popular genres in the UK. Breakthrough stars including Olivia Dean, Jorja Smith, Little Simz, PinkPantheress, Dave and Michael Kiwanuka highlight this commercial success.

Meanwhile, people from lower socio-economic backgrounds remain overrepresented in low-paid positions and career progression can still depend too heavily on personal networks and unpaid opportunities. Mayors should, therefore, use their convening power and devolved employment and skills programmes not only to build stronger routes into the industry, but to ensure that talent from diverse backgrounds is nurtured and routes are genuinely open to people from all backgrounds. Each Music Office will have an important role to play in sharing training and employment opportunities in an accessible way.

05 Place

Transport

The music industry has an intimate relationship with place. Artists need venues to perform, studios to record and affordable spaces to rehearse. Audiences and artists need transport to get to events — and, just as importantly, to get home afterwards.

Transport is therefore an important feature for a successful music industry. UK Music found that half of adults would be more likely to attend music events if public transport coincided with event schedules.[37] The Live and Electronic Fan-Led Charter similarly calls for music to become a central consideration in transport planning, including by aligning late night services with venue and event closing times.[38]

Devolution gives strategic authorities an opportunity to make these changes. Prior to the pandemic, the London Night Tube was anticipated to generate £138 million for the capital's economy annually.[39] This is welcome. But patterns of work and leisure have since changed. Hybrid working has altered the rhythm of many city centres, with commuting increasingly concentrated on Thursday.[40] Transport strategies designed around a traditional Friday and Saturday night time economy therefore need to keep pace with how people now work, travel and socialise.

Strategic authorities with transport responsibilities should ensure that evening and late night services reflect the needs of the music industry and wider night time economy. As mayors develop integrated transport networks, they should review service patterns against event schedules, venue closing times and changing patterns of travel. Doing so would not only make it more cost effective and environmentally sustainable for visitors to get to and from gigs, but musicians and performers too.

Planning

Transport is only one part of the infrastructure on which music depends. Venues, studios, rehearsal rooms and other cultural spaces are particularly vulnerable to rising land values, redevelopment and competition from more commercially attractive uses. UK Music has highlighted the loss of venues, festivals, studios and rehearsal spaces as a significant challenge facing the industry. London's cultural infrastructure policies similarly emerged against a backdrop in which the capital had lost a third of its grassroots music venues and creative workspaces over the preceding decade.[41]

Strategic authorities therefore have two roles: protecting the infrastructure that already exists and creating the conditions for new spaces to emerge.

As set out in London's Cultural Infrastructure Plan and by Cardiff University, the first step is understanding what exists. Strategic authorities should map venues, studios, rehearsal spaces and other music infrastructure, identifying where clusters are concentrated and where important assets are at risk. They should then use their planning levers to protect and support them.

Planning policy should enable new development and existing cultural infrastructure to co-exist. The Government's support for the Agent of Change principle, embedded in the National Planning Policy Framework, is welcome, although the music industry would prefer that it is placed on a statutory footing.[42] Strategic and local authorities should reinforce that principle through their own spatial development and licensing strategies, in order to reduce the risk that new residential development threatens long-standing venues and other music infrastructure.[43] The Licensing Taskforce drew a similar conclusion last year.[44]

They should also use planning, regeneration and investment powers to support music clusters. London's Cultural Infrastructure Plan demonstrates how these levers can be brought together.[45] Creative Enterprise Zones can combine affordable workspace, business support, rates relief and investment, while Late Night Zones or Night Time Economy Corridors can bring planning, licensing and economic policy together.

These interventions can generate economic as well as cultural returns. Evidence suggests that employment in Croydon's music, performance and visual arts sector increased by 200 per cent within its Creative Enterprise Zone between 2018 and 2021, supporting the local economy and generating additional business rates for the authority.[46]

Devolution also creates an opportunity to address gaps in cultural infrastructure. Provision remains heavily concentrated in England's largest urban centres, particularly London, leaving many towns and rural communities comparatively underserved. Strategic authorities should therefore consider not only where existing clusters need protecting, but where investment in venues, rehearsal space, transport and the wider public realm could help new clusters develop.

The objective is not to preserve every cultural asset unchanged. Places evolve and music scenes should evolve with them. It is, however, to ensure that economic development proactively supports — rather than inadvertently erodes — the infrastructure that makes places distinctive in the first place, particularly where those assets have strong roots in and connections to their communities.

Music in the public realm

The relationship between the music industry and place also works in the other direction: music depends on place, but it can also help make places distinctive.

International examples show how relatively modest interventions can reinforce a city's musical identity and create opportunities for local artists. Seattle has used its airport as a platform to showcase local musicians through live performances and exhibitions, while Bradford's Buskers Street Festival creates new opportunities for local performers by bringing live music into public spaces across the city.[47]

Strategic authorities should similarly consider how their own assets and public spaces can showcase local music. Stations and other transport assets provide obvious opportunities, building on initiatives such as Transport for London's Busking Scheme.[48] Local authorities should also ensure that the management of streets and public spaces creates the right conditions for busking and live performance. These interventions may be modest, but together they can make music more visible in everyday life, create opportunities for artists and strengthen the identity of a place.

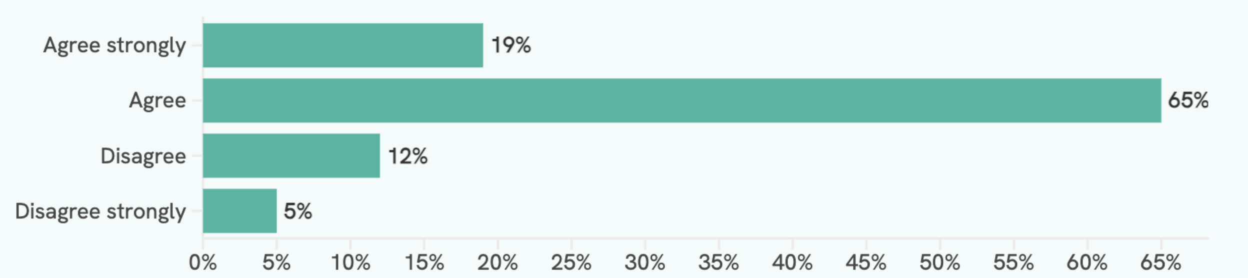
There is also an appetite to go further, as polling by Whitestone Insight demonstrates. Six in ten adults believe local music should receive greater support from their local authority, while 62 per cent believe music and the night time economy, if better supported, has a role to play in reviving high streets.[49]

FIGURE 1

Do you agree or disagree with each of these statements about music in your local area?

Music, nightlife, and music space (e.g. recording studios) should be part of how we bring life back to the high street

Per cent of all Britons, excluding those who don't know



Source: Whitestone Insight. 2,112 GB adults interviewed online between 6 and 8 June 2025. This polling was commissioned by UK Music.

A checklist for change

There is already considerable good practice across England, but the task now is to bring these interventions together and embed them within the changing architecture of English devolution.

What has hitherto been missing is a systematic approach: one that deliberately recognises the value of the music industry and uses the full range of powers available to strategic authorities to support it. Every strategic authority should, therefore, be able to answer five tests:

PRINCIPLE	TEST
Voice	Does the music industry have a seat at the table?
Evidence	Do strategic authorities understand their local music industry and is it reflected in its Local Growth Plan?
Power	Are strategic authorities using the powers and resources available to grow music — and are the right powers being devolved?
People	Does the skills system support routes into and careers across the music industry?
Place	Do transport, planning and licensing policies create the conditions for the industry to thrive?

These tests do not require every strategic authority to adopt the same models to promote the music industry, but they do encourage consistency of ambition. Taking them into account, strategic authorities should consider the following:

Recommendations

VOICE	**Give the music industry a seat at the table.** Strategic authorities should establish a Cultural Leadership Board with meaningful representation from music and the wider creative industries. Where there is capacity, a dedicated Music Board could also be established. To provide visible political leadership, mayors should also appoint a Commissioner for Culture and the Creative Industries.
EVIDENCE	**Understand the local music industry.** Strategic authorities should build dedicated capacity to engage with the sector, including through a Music Office, and undertake a regular Culture Audit mapping the businesses, workforce, venues, studios, rehearsal spaces and related infrastructure that make up their local music industry. The Culture Audit should be repeated on a regular cycle. Armed with this insight, the role of the music industry should be embedded within strategic authorities' economic strategies, including the statutory Local Growth Plan.
POWER	**Use the powers needed to grow the music industry.** Strategic authorities should use the levers at their disposal to support the industry, including their investment and trade functions, as well as strengthen the commercial capacity of the sector's employers. They should also work with industry to grow funding for grassroots music through voluntary contributions from large venues with a capacity of 5,000 or more, while preserving their industry-led governance. The Government, for its part, should also explore how it can give strategic authorities more autonomy over DCMS funding and programmes, such as the Creative Foundations Fund and the Music Growth Package, having already devolved the Creative Places Growth Fund. Arts Council England should also have regard for Local Growth Plans and co-ordinate investment with strategic authorities.
PEOPLE	**Make skills devolution work for the music industry.** Strategic authorities should identify local skills needs and create clearer and more inclusive routes into and through the industry. A devolved — and more flexible — Growth and Skills Levy should provide the autonomy to support freelancers, SMEs and creatives through shorter training, multi-employer apprenticeships and professional development.
PLACE	**Create the right conditions for the music industry.** Strategic authorities should align evening and late night transport with the needs of venues and audiences, embed Agent of Change principles in spatial development and licensing strategies, protect and nurture the creative industries through tools such as Creative Enterprise Zones and use transport assets and public spaces to showcase local music and support live performance.

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