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ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND TOI AOTEAROA

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Wellington City Council Te Kaunihera o Pōneke
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By email: feedback@wcc.govt.nz

E te Koromatua, ngā Kaikaunihera mā, tēnā koutou katoa

Submission to:	**Wellington City Council Te Kaunihera o Pōneke**
Subject:	**Draft Annual Plan 2025/26**
From:	**Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa (Creative New Zealand)**

1. Creative New Zealand welcomes the opportunity to submit feedback on Wellington City Council's draft Annual Plan 2025/26.

2. It is fantastic to see the Long-Term Plan (LTP) Amendment and Annual Plan celebrate arts, culture, creativity and ngā toi as important building blocks for a dynamic, sustainable and vibrant city, and we thank Council for your ongoing support of the creative sector in Pōneke.

3. We commend your vision of *Pōneke: the creative capital where people and nature thrive,* and wholeheartedly support Council's focus on celebrating and uplifting te ao Māori, championing the arts, and embracing heritage, creativity, curiosity and expression of our multi-cultural communities and identities.

4. Secure and stable investment in cultural infrastructure, services and activities by Council, through the LTP and Annual Plan, is crucial for a strong, vibrant and resilient arts and culture ecosystem in Pōneke.

5. We share your aspirations for Pōneke and look forward to working with you to support your communities to thrive with arts, culture, creativity and ngā toi. Our collective approach will ensure arts, culture and creativity can deliver value to all New Zealanders and to communities throughout Aotearoa.

Arts, culture, creativity and ngā toi Māori are vital parts of local communities

6. From our most recent *New Zealanders and the Arts—Ko Aotearoa me ōna Toi* research in 2023, we know that New Zealanders' personal connection with the arts continues to grow.[1] Many feel the arts contribute strongly to their mental health and wellbeing. New Zealanders are also increasingly recognising the economic benefits of the arts, and support for public funding of the arts, including funding from councils, is higher than ever.

[1] *New Zealanders and the Arts—Ko Aotearoa me ōna Toi* (2023). Creative New Zealand.

7. Wellington residents are the strongest advocates of the arts in the country, with:[2]

   - 67 percent agreeing that the arts improve New Zealand society, with 73 percent agreeing that the arts can play a role in raising awareness of issues facing our society
   - 66 percent agreeing that the arts are good for their mental health and wellbeing
   - 79 percent seeing the value of the arts in generating employment in creative industries.

8. **Young people, Deaf and disabled, Māori, and Pacific peoples** participate in the arts most frequently, and are more likely to agree that the arts are important to their personal wellbeing. **LGBTQIA+ communities** also participate highly in the arts and need more accessible and inclusive environments to support their engagement.

Investment in arts, culture, creativity and ngā toi is investment in prosperous, healthy and vibrant rohe and communities

9. It's fantastic to see Council's investment in cultural infrastructure, and arts and cultural activities in Pōneke, throughout the LTP and Annual Plan. This support enables the creative sector to continue making vital contributions to strengthening and revitalising the city.

10. Supported arts organisations and regular arts and culture experiences feed other parts of the creative ecosystem and local economy, including education, health, trade and enterprise, hospitality, retail and tourism. The creative industries in Pōneke create jobs, drive economic growth and attract new businesses, while enhancing the city's reputation as a destination to visit, live and invest in. In 2024, the creative sector contributed $17.4 billion to New Zealand's GDP.[3]

11. Iconic arts and cultural events in Pōneke are more successful than ever, bringing visitors, revenue and vibrancy to the city. In 2024, the World of WearableArt alone contributed $31 million in economic benefits, attracting an audience of over 63,000. Working with WellingtonNZ, the festival supports the city's entire creative ecosystem. Last year, it employed 350 people for the show season and engaged more than 115 local suppliers, including creative services.

12. Strong physical and operational cultural infrastructure makes these events possible. It's very encouraging to see Council's commitments to **upgrading and developing significant cultural infrastructure** in the city including the Fale Malae proposal. These facilities provide vital spaces for communities to make, share and present arts and cultural practices, fostering enriching exchanges of knowledge, language and cultural traditions. Council's support also provides opportunities for building further investment, growing audiences, and making arts experiences more accessible.

13. To build on Council's investment, and ensure the needs of communities in Pōneke are met, **we strongly encourage Council to continue ensuring its support for arts, culture,**

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[2] Wellington residents survey findings in *New Zealanders and the arts – Ko Aotearoa me ōna toi* (2023): https://creativenz.govt.nz/-/media/project/creative-nz/creativenz/publicationsfiles/2024-nzers-and-the-arts/20240730nzartswellingtonfinal.pdf

[3] *Infometrics sector profiles 2024*. Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture & Heritage.

creativity and ngā toi is reaching across the wider creative ecosystem (artists, creatives, arts communities and arts organisations).

14. We note Council's proposals to rescope and reduce funding for a number of capital programmes in the LTP Amendment. Several of these advance the vision of a 'creative capital', including the city streets project, Frank Kitts Park, venues upgrades (the Opera House and TSB Arena), and the Te Ngākau redevelopment.

15. As you make decisions on these proposals, we encourage Council to prioritise arts and cultural infrastructure. For example, the **Te Ngākau Civic Square precinct has significant potential to be a thriving arts hub for the city**. If plans for the programme are rescoped, we urge Council to ensure the precinct offers a supportive environment for arts and culture. This ranges from retaining the presence of public art that encourages a sense of ownership and community pride, to providing accessible spaces and venues for Pōneke's creative organisations and communities to operate.

16. Access to arts spaces for creative production, exhibition and participation remains a significant challenge for the creative sector in Pōneke, heightened by risks of closure of facilities including Te Kāhui Auaha. There is an increasing need for accessible and affordable spaces for artists and practitioners to not only share their work with audiences, but collaborate, create and develop work behind the scenes.

17. Council is a crucial facilitator of access to venues. As an example, it's fantastic to see Council's commitment in the LTP and Annual Plan to funding the **Re-imagining Toi Pōneke Arts Centre** project through the *Aho Tini 2030 Arts, Culture and Creativity Strategy*. With its artist residencies, workshops, talks and exhibitions, Toi Pōneke offers an invaluable creative space for the city's diverse creative communities. We greatly look forward to the ways this project will support artists and creative organisations in the city, and develop pathways for artists, and encourage Council to continue supporting the creative sector to access venues throughout the city, such as empty retail spaces.

18. It's also heartening to see that Council's ongoing production of free public events for the city in the Annual Plan, such as Gardens Magic and Te Rā o Waitangi, 'plus supporting the community and events sectors to create occassions to add to the city's vibrancy'. As we recently saw with Cuba Dupa's enormous success, Council's support for grassroots local festivals brings the city to life, enhances social wellbeing and connection, and showcases Pōneke creative communities on a national stage.

19. These events also activate public engagement within the city. With the support of Wellington City Council and the Creative Communities Scheme, PARK(ing) Day 2025 brought together artists, performers and local businesses to transform Cuba Street into a temporary park and reimagine how public spaces can function. Interactive installations, performances and pop-up experiences encouraged Pōneke residents to creatively participate in their city.

Te reo, mātauranga and ngā toi Māori, brought to life by tangata whenua and ringatoi, strengthen communities' sense of belonging and connection and are central to our unique national and regional identities

20. We commend Council's commitment to strong partnerships with mana whenua through Tākai Here, and to improving cultural wellbeing by celebrating and making visible te ao Māori across the city. We know from our 2023 research that ngā toi Māori is increasingly embraced by Māori and New Zealanders as a whole.

21. Council's support for ngā toi Māori is a crucial part of ensuring ngā toi is being produced, enjoyed and celebrated. Investment in ngā toi Māori also supports the revitalisation of te reo Māori and te ao Māori. It grows knowledge and value of the stories, values and places of importance to tangata whenua.

22. It's heartening to see Council's commitment to revitalise the city through the Tūpiki ora Māori Strategy action plan waypoints, including celebrating te ao Māori and ensuring the local Māori economy is thriving in the city. We encourage Council to recognise the importance of ngā toi Māori in this area and again align this work with *Aho Tini*.

23. For example, as Council makes decisions for the future of the **City-to-Sea Bridge**, we strongly encourage Council to recognise the cultural significance of Paratene Matchitt, Rewi Thompson and John Gray's sculptures. A significant example of public art in Aotearoa, these sculptures of taniwha (Ngake and Whātaitai), whales, birds and fish, reflect the whakapapa of Pōneke and its harbour, and have become a landmark for the city. Visibility and representation of ngā toi Māori in a city's infrastructure inspires pride and engagement for local communities.

24. Success in protecting, revitalising and promoting ngā toi Māori also supports many artists, practitioners, businesses and tourism operators in the region, and positively enhances the reputation of Wellington nationally and internationally.

25. Councils also have an important role in their funding and management of Māori cultural institutions. Dedicated funding and leadership of ngā toi Māori in Council supports capacity building, and partnerships with iwi and hapū are valuable ways to build well-resourced, thriving and visible ngā toi Māori practice and Māori cultural institutions.

Local councils play a crucial role in offering stable support for arts, cultural and creative activity and infrastructure that enable communities to thrive

26. Wellington City Council is a critical investor in arts, culture, creativity and ngā toi in Wellington, and we value our shared investment in the region. Ongoing collaboration and co-investment between central and local government is vital for a vibrant and resilient creative sector.

27. Although participation in arts and cultural events in Pōneke is growing, the current outlook for the creative sector is very difficult and we remain concerned about the sustainability of the arts community. Arts organisations are operating on thin margins, with revenue streams under pressure, making them vulnerable to any changes in relationships with funders.

28. Arts organisations and community centres in Pōneke often receive core funding from Council in partnership with central government (such as through Creative New Zealand) and private and community funders. These arts organisations and community centres, such as Arts Access Aotearoa, Enjoy Contemporary Arts Space, Wellington Pride, Cuba Dupa, NZ Fringe Aotearoa Digital Arts, Orchestra Wellington, Kia Mau Festival, Bats Theatre and Barbarian Productions, include a range of diverse artforms, audience focus, and leadership from members of Wellington's Māori, Pacific and Deaf and disabled communities.

29. Pōneke's creative sector is reliant on local government contributions, as this support is not guaranteed from other sources. Creative New Zealand's own ability to support the

sector remains under strain. Challenging economic conditions are also putting pressure on other funding sources, with private investments down in the current economic climate.

30. We value our shared investment and ongoing collaboration with you to support a resilient arts and cultural sector in Pōneke, and look forward to our ongoing conversations on how we can collectively work together.

Arts, cultural and ngā toi Māori organisations, iwi and hapū can be wonderful collaborators with Council to build strong relationships with communities and create flourishing localities

31. Arts organisations, practitioners and creatives are **valuable partners** for Council to achieve its broader priorities and vision, by strengthening communities through connection, empowerment and placemaking.

32. As connectors, activators and innovators, arts communities are particularly skilled at providing effective and impactful ideas for Council's projects, and hold strong relationships with mana whenua, funders, government, non-profits, businesses and other community groups.

33. Partnerships with Council can also build capacity into the creative ecosystem and make a significant contribution to creative workers' incomes. While the arts funding system tends to deliver well for the public, it does less well for those working in the sector. The median income of creative professionals in Aotearoa New Zealand remains stubbornly low, at $37,000 per annum compared with $61,800 for salary and wage earners.

34. We have been greatly encouraged by the Council's work on delivering *Aho Tini* as an ambitious and enabling arts strategy. The experienced and dedicated cultural staff at Council hold long-standing and meaningful relationships with practitioners and organisations throughout Pōneke. Their work is essential in strengthening Pōneke's connections with the arts and cultural sector and with local communities, as well as delivering Council's cultural wellbeing obligations.

35. We strongly encourage Council to continue working closely with your local artists, creatives and arts organisations, and mana whenua, throughout your LTP and Annual Plan's proposals, to successfully deliver outcomes for Pōneke and enhance the wellbeing of your communities.

Creative New Zealand's interest and investment in the arts in Wellington

36. Creative New Zealand is the national arts development agency of Aotearoa New Zealand, responsible for delivering government support for the arts. We're an autonomous Crown entity under the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa Act 2014.

37. Our legislative purpose is to encourage, promote and support the arts in New Zealand for the benefit of all New Zealanders. We do this by *Investing in the arts*, *Developing the arts*, *Advocating for the arts*, providing *Leadership in the arts*, and *Partnering for the arts*.

38. Creative New Zealand receives funding through Vote: Arts, Culture and Heritage and the New Zealand Lottery Grants Board Te Puna Tahua. In 2023/24, Creative New Zealand invested **nearly $79.4 million** in the arts.

39. We recognise Wellington's importance to arts, culture, creativity and ngā toi in Aotearoa. For arts that are delivered in the Wellington region, **$11.4 million** of direct financial

support was provided by Creative New Zealand in 2022/23. Of this, **$8.6 million** in funding went directly to Wellington City, supporting individual arts projects and arts and cultural organisations. These include Chamber Music New Zealand, Enjoy Contemporary Arts Space, SOUNZ Centre of NZ Music, Taki Rua Productions, Te Waka Taki Korero, Arts Access Aotearoa, Playmarket, Toi Māori, Kahitea Te Rakau Hua o Te Wao Tapu, Tawata Productions, Circa Theatre, Red Leap Theatre, Footnote Dance, Aotearoa New Zealand Festival of the Arts (Tāwhiri), The Conch, Bats Theatre, Kia Mau Festival, Barbarian Productions, Wellington Orchestra, International Institute of Modern Letters, Gecko Press, NZ String Quartet, Circuit Artist Film and Video Aotearoa NZ, Bridget Williams Books, Read NZ, Te Pou Marama and many more independent artists and creatives.

40. Under the Creative Communities Scheme, we also fund territorial authorities directly to support local arts activities. In 2023/24, funding of **$569,876** was provided to the Wellington region, which included **$144,780** to Wellington City Council and your creative communities.

Final thoughts

41. Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the Annual Plan. We understand there's considerable pressure on all local councils' budgets, and we commend your commitment to investing in arts, culture, creativity and ngā toi Māori.

42. Just last month we were thrilled to again co-host, with the Arts Foundation, *All in for Arts—He waka toi e eke noa nei tātou* in Wellington. We were excited to work with the creative community in Pōneke and hear from locals, who talked about how arts and creativity impact their lives every day.

43. To quote Mayor Tory Whanau: *"There would not be Wellington City without creativity. Arts and culture, especially for Wellington, are the basics – it's part of our lifeblood, it's part of our soul… it makes us a happier city, and it teaches us to live by our values"*. We whole-heartedly agree.

44. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or if you wish to discuss it further. The key contact person is:

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Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou katoa, nā

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Pou Whakahaere Matua, Rautaki me te Tūhono