



Cultural Strategy 2025-2030

IN TAMESIDE



IN TAMESIDE

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Executive summary

The nine towns of Tameside have long and proud history of driving change. Our towns were at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution, with innovation transforming the landscape and expanding our communities. Hyde's Chartists championed the rights of the growing workforce, making sure their voices were heard, and their work was valued.

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Together Tameside's towns drove democracy and equality nationally ensuring labourers' rights were valued and written into law. Embracing new technologies and working together to make the most of new opportunities is embedded into Tameside's DNA. Our new Cultural Strategy reflects this history, placing people at its heart. We know culture has the power to transform lives and improve outcomes for all. With major redevelopments secured across the borough, we want to ensure that everyone can play a part in our shared vision. Tameside's cultural strategy will support people and places through creating networks, programmes, and events. Together we will share ideas and learn from each other, making Tameside a place where culture and creativity thrive. A thriving cultural Tameside will drive growth, support health, and improve equality across the borough. The Tameside Cultural Strategy will ensure that joyful lives and creative futures are forged in Tameside.



Vision

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Our vision is to make Tameside the best place in Greater Manchester to create, learn and grow creative ideas. We will do this by building creative skills supported by local, regional, and national partnerships. Our aim is to make Tameside the go-to place where new projects and businesses can thrive in our diverse communities where country and city meet. We will achieve this by leveraging the investments coming into the borough to benefit everyone in Tameside. By working collaboratively across services and utilising investments to develop skills and networks, we will enable growth of audiences and opportunities across all nine towns and everywhere in between.



Mission

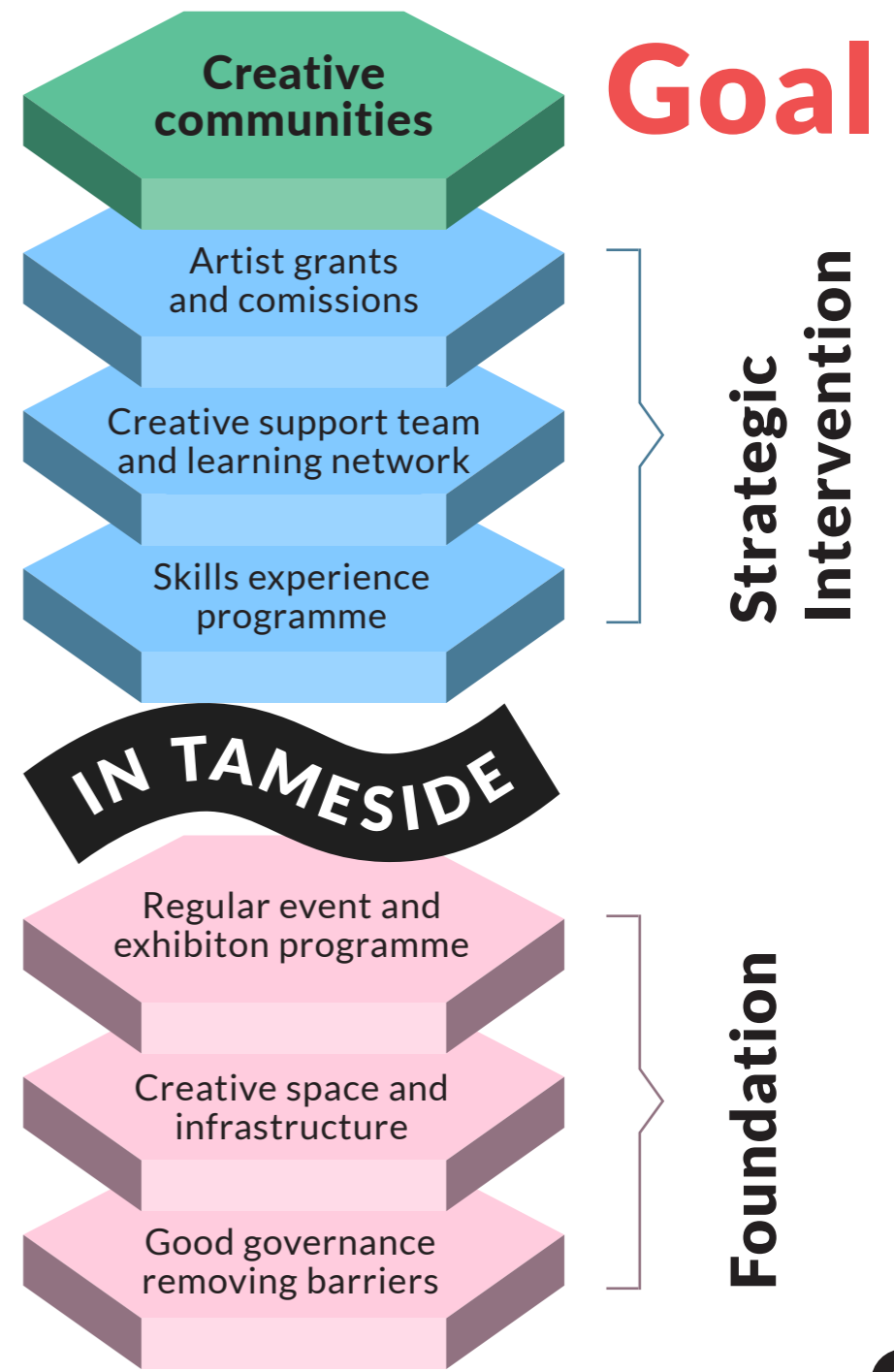
- Establish a new **Creative Strategy Board** to oversee development and delivery of action plans, bringing together the established creative organisations and institutions together with new voices, supported by Tameside MBC, national funders, education, health, and town teams to manage, monitor, support and enable this strategy. Their key role - to remove the barriers to success.
- Equip a new cohort of creatives with the skills and networks to lead a community-driven renaissance of the borough alongside council teams through a structured **Creative Skills Catalyst Programme** aimed at college students. We will signpost developmental and creative opportunities in Tameside.
- Drive ambition and opportunities to gain experience by creating a **Town Centre Artist Residency** model in Ashton which can be rolled out across Tameside in collaboration with the borough's cultural institutions and established cultural sector.
- Support the opportunities for **New Creative Studio/Retail Units** starting with the Ashton Market Hall redevelopment.
- Develop a series of **Artist Development Grants** designed to support community creativity and independent creative practice across the borough by providing seed funding for the ideas created through the Creative Skills Catalyst Programme where funding permits.
- Deliver a regular **Cultural Events Programme** across town centres, cultural institutions, greenspaces and within communities to provide an essential rhythm to audience development for creative organisations in the borough. These will create lifelong routes into culture driving footfall in our towns and giving residents the opportunity to make, join in and enjoy a vibrant cultural and heritage offer.



Goal

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The Tameside Cultural Strategy will deliver a solid foundation for culture in the borough by ensuring that good governance and infrastructure provide the heartbeat of cultural activity from existing local authority institutions and cultural ecology of Tameside. Alongside, it will provide the structure to invest in and support artists, organisations, and communities to upskill local creative and cultural networks in self-led cultural development and delivery, multiplying public investment to ensure everyone in Tameside can benefit from, learn from, and ultimately create great culture.





Our Priority Projects

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1. CREATIVE STRATEGY BOARD

Governance

In order to build faster connectivity between Tameside's cultural makers, communities and the local authority, the Cultural Strategy will bring together a new Cultural Strategy Board.

The board's core objectives are to:

- Create high-speed and direct routes to cultural production and open doors to new voices.
- Offer constructive and pro-active support to artistic practitioners and organisations who reside or work in the borough.
- Support practitioners to align their work and find common goals, promoting cooperation and shared outcomes across the sector.
- Enable Tameside Council maximise funding resources to promote education and training in the arts, commission bespoke artists' residencies, and provide expertise in delivering public programmes.
- Support the selection and commissioning of artists to deliver the artists' residencies.
- Advise the Council on how to support the cultural communities of the borough.
- Monitor creative activity across the borough and evaluate its performance in how it supports the agreed Cultural

Strategy.

- Support stakeholders in raising funds and using these to multiply resources.
- The board will initially meet bi-monthly to drive the Strategy launch moving to quarterly meetings once established.
- Appoint a chair on a rotating basis; each chair will lead the board for a period of 12 months. The quoracy of the board will be four individuals.
- It may set up specific subgroups to monitor on-going matters, such as environmental responsibility, or diversity; it may set up task-oriented working groups to undertake specific tasks, such as the selection of commissioned artists/organisations.
- These subgroups and task-oriented groups will have powers delegated to them from the board and will report back to the board regularly.
- The board will report quarterly to the Senior Leadership Team of Tameside Council.

Key Duties

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Professional Practice



Children and Young People



Funders and Investors



Skills, Education and Learning



Health and Wellbeing



Disability and Access



Communities and Neighbourhoods



HR, Legal and Finance



Marketing, Press and Media



Environmental Responsibility



A NEW BOARD FOR CULTURE

Key Objectives

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The board will comprise individuals including expert representatives from creative practices within the borough, specific policy areas, professional services, and direct community voices.

The board's headline objectives will be to:

- Develop, agree, and monitor the strategy, programme, and risk register.
- Support programming policy, checking that the existing programme matches the policy and removing barriers wherever possible.
- Ensure legal and financial obligations are adhered to.
- Seek advice and monitor that outcomes are compliant with Health & Safety, Safeguarding and other policies.
- Attend board meetings and events, including committees when appropriate.
- Advocate for the Strategy.
- Provide contacts and expertise to skills development training tailored to Tameside's needs.
- Assist with fundraising and opportunity development for resident artists, trainees, funded artists, and the local authority institutions.
- Support the Council in the strategy delivery to ensure meaningful and diverse representation, accessibility and inclusion are core to the Cultural Strategy.
- Provide professional expertise in the continual improvement of the programme and personnel.



2. MAKING ROOM FOR CULTURE

Creative Space

All of the key stakeholders consulted in developing the Cultural Strategy highlighted the lack of affordable flexible creative space available to artists and cultural activity across the borough.

Ashton's Historic Market is undergoing significant redevelopment. By introducing creative spaces in the Market Hall, we will be making space for creativity to thrive.

An artist-in-residence programme, skills development and creative programming aligned with the market development will nurture an ongoing cohort of locally connected creative practitioners to drive the cultural programme from the ground up. Government and GMCA investments and initiatives present unique opportunities to trial and develop new spaces, creative businesses, and audiences.

Working collaboratively with Tameside's communities to deliver a cultural programme alongside these major investments in Ashton and Stalybridge means we can roll out best practice across future developments.

By encouraging participation from across the borough we can ensure that Tameside residents have meaningful and relevant opportunities to participate, create and enjoy culture on their doorsteps. This benefits individuals and their communities, creating more opportunities in the cultural sector to gain skills and grow businesses.



3. CULTURAL EVENTS PROGRAMME AND EXHIBITIONS

The Power of Culture

Tameside sits in the middle of town and country. It has incredible green spaces and historic town centres. Our school holiday activities and schools' education programmes encourage all residents to be outside and active, enjoying the absolute best of our green spaces. Together we learn to care for our environment, take responsibility for our surroundings and crucially provide all ages with access to our green parks and spaces – sometimes providing the very first introductions to our natural world.

We want to share our cycling and walking trails with everyone, and we want everyone to know Tameside as a green and active place to live, work and thrive.

We know culture does not exclusively take place in venues; it takes place everywhere and this is why we have theatre in our parks and lantern parades in our town centres. We want an events programme that reflects our unique geographical position and provides everyone with opportunities to try, make and participate in cultural activities. Tameside is a playground for culture; a place where we can nurture, care for, test and develop new opportunities together.



3. CULTURAL EVENTS PROGRAMME AND EXHIBITIONS

Public Celebrations

We have a rich and proud heritage, which we actively celebrate and commemorate through our events programme. The Whit Friday Brass Band Contests are known as the oldest brass band contests in the world. They give over 10,000 people access to free live music, supporting musicians both locally and nationally as well as supporting venues across Tameside.

We are proud of our military history. The Manchester Regiment was based in Ashton-under-Lyne and recruited from our towns. Annually the borough marks Armed Forces Day, celebrating all our serving residents and veterans. We commemorate Armistice Day at all our war memorials.

The annual Northern Lights Lantern Parade is the highlight of the calendar and gives Tameside artists and organisations the chance to collaborate and showcase their talents. Every year new artists join in, while established artists are able to develop their talents. It is our biggest event, benefitting Tameside communities by bringing culture to a broad audience. Northern Lights also benefits town centres businesses through increased footfall and income. It is the party that starts the winter season.



3. CULTURAL EVENTS PROGRAMME AND EXHIBITIONS

Museums and Libraries

Portland Basin Museum and Astley Cheetham Art Gallery are central to the borough's tourism offer, bringing in visitors from far and wide to enjoy a changing programme of exhibitions and events. They support schools and provide adult learners with high quality life-long learning opportunities, while celebrating heritage and creativity of the borough. Our libraries are at the heart of their communities, supporting residents throughout their lives and providing the resources for people to learn and develop. They help creatives and entrepreneurs find the tools to expand their ideas, enabling startups and businesses to grow. Our museums and libraries provide fantastic free venues for culture to thrive and for residents to flourish.



3. CULTURAL EVENTS PROGRAMME AND EXHIBITIONS

Launchpad Events

Funding is providing grant opportunities for a host of creative activities across the borough, driven by local communities, artists, and creatives, it enables them to develop projects, skills, and networks. A new training programme is supporting Tameside College students into programming and developing creative activities in Ashton town centre. Ensuring we have a pipeline of creative talent and opportunities means our young people can find employment and gain confidence and experience within the creative sector. Working with GMCA we will signpost our young people to opportunities to develop their careers.

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3. CULTURAL EVENTS PROGRAMME AND EXHIBITIONS

Partnerships

Building on the successes of partnerships with the National Theatre and Royal Exchange Theatre, cultural communities across Tameside will continue to have access to world-leading cultural programme with an increased focus on ensuring mentoring and learning, schools' participation, community participation and opportunities to grow and develop new partnerships. We will work closely with our partners to ensure funded organisations can play an active role in our communities too.





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Creative Skills

Catalyst

We will promote training and opportunities to unleash the potential of Tameside's creative communities, offering routes into the sector for early career artist. We will promote training programmes for young people and support professional development for those working in the sector, including Local Authority staff.

We want to support the development of indepth sector training that builds sustainable careers rooted in the borough. The training will directly link to high quality projects and funded opportunities that form part of the strategy and that sit within the GMCA and other national funders' strategies for the cultural sector.

In the longer term, these opportunities will develop Tameside-wide skill sets in devising and managing high quality cultural programmes. They will furnish participants with the tools to successfully manage arts projects from within the borough's creative community.

This will support the development of a new generation of cultural leaders who are able to resource and deliver their own cultural productions.

A significant part of this programme will prepare young people to develop a proposal for work that can be supported through the residencies, events, and grants programmes, whilst responding to community need and voices.

We will work with our Greater Manchester colleagues in GMArts and GMCA to sustain and support creativity in our communities through shared knowledge and expertise, highlighting opportunities across Greater Manchester for creatives and audiences alike.



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Artists Commissions Programme

Test and Learn

We will use funding where possible to develop a new process and workflow for hosting siteresponsive artistic interventions across Tameside.

We will recruit for Ashton initially as part of the Ashton Town centre regeneration in order to develop a best practice model for all of Tameside. Artists and cultural organisations will be invited to apply for commissions focussed on projects that animate the public realm and engage the public and local communities. The outputs will deliver learnings for continual improvements around creative opportunities in Tameside, offer new opportunities for artists and organisations in borough, and develop audiences within Tameside. This will nurture a refreshed visitor economy. The current funded Creative Communities grants through the Local Area Flexible Grant Scheme requires a proposal of a programme of activity, identified outputs and outcomes, and a budget.

Successful applicants would also benefit from:

- Support with marketing
- Support in writing applications for future resources
- Opportunities to collaborate with local artists and young people The artist commissions programme is intended to provide a model for skills development for emerging and established creatives in Tameside. It should ensure:
- Successful applicants are delivering activity in Tameside. Their activity and/or outputs are required to animate public spaces, and/or visibly improve the public realm, through the installation of new artworks or an event, for example.



Artist Development Grants

Launchpad

Where funding permits, we will make modest launchpad grants available to artists, groups or organisations who can demonstrate how their project or practice will align with the strategic goal of testing and learning through their work. To qualify they should:

- Be resident in the borough or regularly work with communities in the borough.
- Demonstrate how their project will deliver opportunities for residents of Tameside to experience culture, develop creative skills, or overcome barriers to community participation through creative practice.
- Clearly show how funding their work will contribute to the continual improvement of high -quality cultural programmes in Tameside. Aimed at community groups, graduates from the Creative Skills Catalyst programme and practising artists who are resident in Tameside, the purpose behind these smaller grants is to involve emerging artists in the delivery of the Council's regular events programme. This will help them to develop their practice whilst also preparing a new generation to get involved in the artists' commissions as they develop across the borough where external funding permits.

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A Call to Arms for the Climate

Our Green Responsibility

The climate crisis is one of the most serious and urgent issues facing the planet today, and the development of our strategic approach to culture, heritage and creativity in Tameside must be interwoven with consideration for its environmental impact, not only locally but globally.

We will continue to advocate for a sustainable approach to creating culture, in line with GMCA'S CreateGM strategy and commitment to net zero emissions by 2038. We too understand the vital role culture can play in helping people come together to mitigate the challenges these next few decades will present.

The delivery of this strategy will also adhere closely to the Tameside Council Corporate Plan pledge for 'Safe, green, supportive communities', and makes space for collaborating across Council and external institutions. This strategy will support our Corporate Plan through ensuring the creation and maintenance of sustainable town centre and public spaces that meet the needs of the residents.

Measuring Impact

IN TAMESIDE



The Tameside Cultural Strategy is a live document that will be in constant review. We are open to revising our approach as we evaluate the strategy's impact and consider its effectiveness. This will enable us to react quickly as new opportunities to develop the borough's cultural sector arise.

By adopting a data led approach, we will be able to evidence where we are meeting the goals and outcomes, and the reasoning behind any change we make as our strategy and approach evolves over the next five years.

We will carefully evaluate the effects the strategy is having on the cultural sector in Tameside and beyond, through a varied and methodical approach to gathering feedback and data. We will ensure it aligns with National Heritage Lottery Fund, Arts Council England and GMCA and is of maximum benefit to all in supporting the growth of the creative sector and people participating in culture across the country.

A report on the ongoing progress and outcomes of the strategy will be released annually by the creative strategy board culminating in a final report into its impact and effectiveness in order to inform future plans.



Cultural Ecology and Professional Development

IN TAMESIDE

The current cultural ecology is rich, with work required to connect the cultural infrastructure & council and other enabling services:

- There are a significant number of creative professionals living across the borough or based across the borough
- Affordable, quality spaces for devising, planning, rehearsing, and making work are limited.
- Professional workspace is also at a premium with a perceived contradiction in the prevalence of empty units but a lack of affordable quality making and office space.
- Nevertheless, the Libraries team are consistently referenced as quality supporters of emergent performance and community engagement creators.
- However, there is a perception of a limited cultural infrastructure, limited sector development, and few opportunities for personal professional development compared to neighbouring towns and boroughs.
- Many creative professionals find they can gain support more easily in other GM localities.
- Easier access to support and finance in other boroughs is draining potential investment and talent from Tameside and undermining the potential of place-based economic development.
- Transport out of the borough to close-by major conurbations is more frequent, affordable, and available than it is within/across Tameside's own towns.
- This reinforces a culture of Tameside councillors pulling in different directions to prioritise the interests of their own town over more holistic Tamesidewide needs and opportunities.
- How nine towns simultaneously vie for opportunities needs to be addressed in order to meet the investment principles outlined by ACE in their 'Let's Create' strategy, particularly delivering a 'place-based approach'.



Process and Workflow

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Current cultural sector professionals find Tameside Council to be enthusiastic to engage with their work but not able to systematically support projects throughout their development:

We will aim to:

- Help the cultural sector to have a clear development and support pipeline and pathway through local sector and Council channels, to prevent and reduce missed opportunities.
- Bring leading cultural professionals together to increase knowledge, practice and audience development with a consistent offer.
- Increase confidence within the council and across the independent sector in applying for major funding for delivery in Tameside.
- Support evidence and independent organisations to be able to articulate and demonstrate how their work is specifically Tameside based through contribution to this borough wide strategy.
- Help maximise future opportunities to secure major funding support with increased workflow and capacity.

National Portfolio Organisations

IN TAMESIDE



The Arts Council’s regularly funded partners – the National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) are significantly underrepresented in the borough with Mossley’s Global Grooves and Modus Arts being the only recipients of NPO funding in 2024.

- Global Grooves are praised by numerous early career practitioners and small organisations as providing creative development opportunities alongside business development support – often sharing resources and knowledge freely.
- Although the organisation is rooted in Mossley, their work has had a positive impact on multiple respondents to this consultation across the borough, driving confidence in smaller one -man -band organisations who are looking towards future NPO status.
- Global Grooves are effective fundraisers, securing NPO status and receiving funding from ACE 2023 -26 [note the current NPO funding round has been extended beyond 2026].
- Arts Council England has also contributed to The Vale project, Global Grooves’ “Northern Carnival Centre of Excellence” through Small Capital Grant funding.
- Modus Arts made Tameside their second home in late 2024. The multi-disciplinary arts organisation’s Director was born in Tameside. Their ‘Tape Letters’ exhibition toured to Ashton’s market hall. The organisation is building its local footprint.



Appendices

Town Centres Vision

It is important that the Cultural Strategy aligns with the Town Centres plans to deliver on funder's increasingly place based agenda that identified:

- There is a lack of overarching town centre strategy that needs addressing through redevelopment. Regeneration and evolution of centres is urgently required and being actioned through master planning.
- Place based investment approach is viable for Tameside.
- There is an opportunity to pull various strands together.
- A strongly aligned culture programme can impact on the majority of the cross-cutting themes.

Pre-pandemic

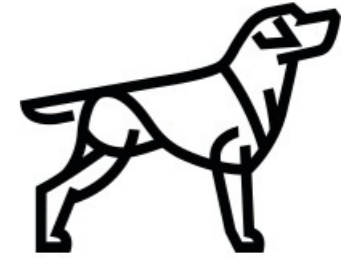
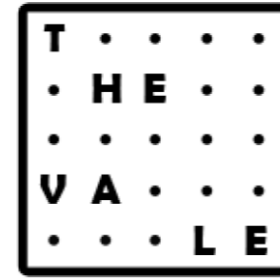
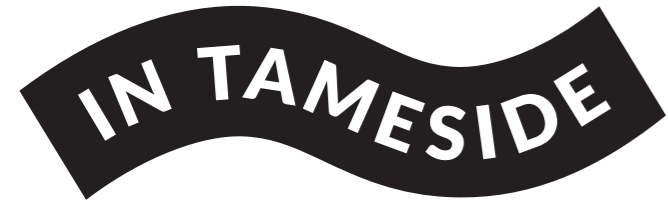
- General decline in town centres – 'traditional' retail closures, declining footfall
- Change in shopping habits
- Growth in online shopping
- Growth in out-of-centre retail

Post pandemic

- Accelerated rate of decline
- Lower footfalls – safety issues, lockdown, closures
- Some areas of growth – discount retailers, cafés, pop-up shops, services, trade/DIY
- Increase in demand for workspaces
- Change in people's attitudes – environmental & sustainable influences
- Accessing town centres increases overall wellbeing



Key Sector Informants



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