
Executive Decision Festivals & Events Budget

Decision to be taken by: City Mayor

Decision to be taken on: 29 June 2026

Lead director: Peter Chandler,
Director of Tourism Culture and Economy

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: Citywide
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- Report version number: 1

1. Summary

This report seeks approval to increase the Festivals and Events budget to enable delivery of a high-quality programme of festivals and events across the city by the Council and external organisations.

2. Recommended actions/decision

The City Mayor approves:

- A permanent increase of £105,000 to the Arts & Museum budget ceiling, to support festivals across the city. This will be funded from the budget strategy reserve in 2026/27 and will be permanently added to the budget ceiling for Arts & Museums within future budget strategies.
- One-off funding of £10k to fund a rebranding of Leicester Riverside Festival to be funded from the budget strategy reserve.

3. Scrutiny / stakeholder engagement

The 2026/27 F&E grant funding opportunity was announced via press release published on the council website on 5th March 2026 and promoted via associated social media and local press. The grant criteria, application process and online application form was published on the council website with application closing date 29th March 2026 with evaluation of bids completed by the 10th April 2026. Previous grant recipients were notified of the opportunity in addition to local arts, cultural, community and commercial event providers. In total this resulted in 68 detailed applications being received from a wide array of organisations. Separate discussions have taken place with the organisers of the Eid Prayers and Festival (EPF) which takes place on Victoria Park.

4. Background and options with supporting evidence

The City Council's Festivals and Events team (F&E) design, curate, produce and deliver major festivals and events for the city that include Old Town Festival, Light Up Leicester, Diwali Day, Riverside Festival, Abbey Park Bonfire and Fireworks Display and annual Christmas Lights Switch On event.

In addition, the F&E team manage a festival and events grant programme that supports multiple partner organisations to deliver a wide array of additional festivals and events in the city, many of which have been in receipt of grant funding for several years.

F&E Grants Programme 2026/27

Following a review of the current grants programme it was agreed that a new commissioning process for the Council's F&E grants would be established for 2026/27 with a range of funding options and programme recommendations to be considered. The approved funding allocation for the programme for 2026/27 is currently £165,000.

An open grant funding call for the 2026/27 programme has been completed, and 68 detailed applications for F&E grant funding were received and assessed, with a total funding request of £926,950.

Following a long-listing process which saw the de-selection of 33 applications that did not meet the published grant assessment criteria, the remaining 35 applications were evaluated by the F&E team against scored criteria. 20 organisations / events were identified to deliver high quality activity in 2026/27, subject to confirmation of the final budget allocation, that deliver against the council's key strategic objectives and demonstrates the depth and breadth of the city's festivals and events offer.

The current approved funding available is £165,000 for 2025/26, which can support 15 organisations / events. The inclusion of more organisations / events in the programme will therefore require additional funding.

A series of costed options and rationale for further investment was provided for review:

- Option 1 - an uplift of £30,000 on current F&E budget to £195,000, extending the number of awards to 16 recipients.
- Option 2 – an uplift of £60,000 grant on current F&E budget to £225,000, extending the number of grant recipients to 19.
- Option 3 - an uplift of £65,000 on current F&E budget to £230,000, extending the number of grant recipients to 20.
- Option 4 - an uplift of £85,000 on current F&E budget to £250,000, extending grant funding amounts available to the 20 identified events / organisations.

Option 3 is recommended, as the additional £65,000 of funding will support the delivery of 20 high quality festival / event proposals, 5 of which are new grant recipients, with a total F&E grant programme cost of £230,000. Further grant funding calls will be used to allocate funding for delivery of a high-quality programme in future years.

Full grant funding for each organisation will remain subject to confirmation and will be conditional upon:

- Execution of formal funding and service agreements.
- Submission of a balanced and detailed event budget pre- and post-event.
- Evidence of sufficient match funding and/or sponsorship commitments.
- Confirmation of appropriate governance and financial controls.
- Delivery against agreed planning milestones.
- Compliance with all branding, promotional, licensing, safeguarding, and public safety requirements as required.
- Detailed event plan, risk assessment and proof of insurance (or planned purchase date).
- Agreement that the council will not provide additional financial underwriting beyond approved support arrangements.

Officers will retain the ability to review ongoing event viability against agreed milestones and recommend withdrawal or reduction of support should critical conditions not be met.

LCC Flagship Festival Investments

In addition to existing support for Diwali and Christmas celebrations, the Council is looking to provide more equitable support to the Eid Prayers and Festival (EPF). A base grant of £25,000 per annum would support the delivery of this important community led festival.

Further investment is also proposed for two of the council's in-house produced events – Abbey Park Bonfire and Riverside Festival.

Despite a ticket price increase in 2024 and continued efficiency savings, the traditional Abbey Park Bonfire event faces increasing financial challenges to break-even and provide an affordable low-cost ticketed event for city residents due to factors outside of its control that include rising fuel prices, knock-on transport / supply chain costs, local competition and increases to the national and living wage and cost of living crisis. A modest budget increase of £15,000 is proposed to enable investment in event marketing and maintain ticket prices at 2024 levels, consolidating its position as the premier and best value traditional bonfire and fireworks display in the city.

Additional one-off investment is also proposed to support delivery of the Riverside Festival which will be celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2027. This popular free annual event now regularly attracts over 60,000 attendances and has establishing itself as a major signature, multi-artform festival for the city in partnership with De Montfort University. The Council invests £35,000 in delivering the Riverside Festival, and a further one off investment of £10,000 will help establish a contemporary new brand identity for the festival befitting a flagship festival which in turn will assist in attracting even greater audience attendances and potential sponsors / funders.

SUMMARY

| Proposed Additional Investment in 2026/27 | |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| F&E Grants Programme | £65,000 |
| Eid Prayer & Festival | £25,000 |
| Abbey Park Bonfire & Fireworks | £15,000 |
| Riverside Festival (one-off) | £10,000 |
| TOTAL INVESTMENT | £115,000 |

The proposed increase in the festivals budget reflects Leicester City Council's commitment to delivering a more balanced, inclusive and strategically aligned programme of cultural activity that generates social, cultural and economic benefits for the city. The additional investment will support a wider range of established, large-scale and community-led festivals and events that celebrate Leicester's diversity and heritage, strengthen community cohesion and civic pride, and provide accessible, free and low-cost cultural experiences for residents of all ages and backgrounds.

Recognising the financial pressures facing many households, the Council is committed to ensuring that cost is not a barrier to participation in cultural life. Increased investment will enable more affordable and accessible opportunities for families, young people and

communities across Leicester to engage with high-quality cultural experiences, celebrate shared identities and traditions, and participate in civic life.

The enhanced programme will better reflect Leicester's diverse population by supporting both established cultural celebrations and events that showcase the traditions, identities and contributions of underrepresented and emerging communities, including African and East Asian communities. By bringing people from different backgrounds, generations and neighbourhoods together through shared cultural experiences, it will also contribute to wellbeing, community cohesion and civic pride.

In addition, the programme will support the city's economic vitality by increasing visitor numbers, boosting footfall in the city centre and neighbourhoods, and generating wider benefits for local businesses and the visitor economy. The increased budget will provide greater flexibility to consider strategic priorities such as inclusion, affordability, accessibility, wellbeing, cultural visibility, community impact and long-term sustainability alongside assessment scores, helping to deliver a stronger, more representative and equitable festivals programme that reflects the diversity and ambitions of Leicester's communities.

5. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

5.1 Financial implications

This report proposes to increase the Arts & Museums budget ceiling by £105,000 from 2026/27 to support festivals and events in the City. This will be funded from the budget strategy reserve in 2026/27 and will be included in the budget ceiling for Arts & Museums within future budget strategies.

In addition, it requests one-off funding to support the rebranding of the Riverside Festival to be funded from the budget strategy reserve.

Signed: Amy Oliver, Director of Finance

Dated: 22 June 2026

5.2 Legal implications

The Council has discretion to award grants in furtherance of its cultural, community wellbeing and economic development objectives pursuant to the Localism Act 2011 and the Local Government Act 1972.

The grants must be awarded in accordance with the Council's Constitution and Subsidy Control obligations. Officers should ensure that appropriate grant funding agreements are entered into with successful recipients, setting out the funding conditions, monitoring requirements, clawback provisions and termination rights. Legal Services should be engaged to undertake formal subsidy assessments before any funding is committed.

Signed: Seema Patel, Principal Lawyer

Dated: 22 June 2026

5.3 Equalities implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The report is seeking approval for the proposed funding allocation under Option 3 which would enable support for a broader and more balanced programme of events, including established, culturally significant and community-led activities, as well as new and emerging provision. The assessment process included criteria relating to inclusion and accessibility, community cohesion, participation and reach, and cultural, social and place-based impact.

Any change in funding for individual organisations should be noted and monitored to ensure that any impact on community participation, cultural representation and continuity of delivery is understood and appropriately managed.

Signed: Corporate Equalities Team
Dated: 22 June 2026

5.4 Climate Emergency implications

Events can generate carbon emissions where they lead to additional travel by staff, members of the public or staff of partner organisations using private cars, taxis/private hire vehicles or buses. There are also building emissions (heat and power) associated with the use of venues for events along with secondary impacts such as waste and recycling.

The inclusion of sustainability in the event assessment criteria is a positive action in mitigating the potential climate impacts of festivals and events. There is also an opportunity to gather information on travel and sustainable catering from the festivals and events which can support the monitoring of the impact of the sustainability assessment criteria, and also after the event to support a positive impact on future events.

Signed: Phil Ball, Sustainability Officer
Dated: 22 June 2026

5.5 Other implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

N/A

6. Background information and other papers:

N/A

8. Summary of appendices:

N/A

9. Is this a private report (If so, please indicate the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

No

10. Is this a “key decision”? If so, why?

No