
Festival & Events Grants Programme 2026/27 – Overview

Culture & Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission

Date of meeting: 3rd September 2026

Lead Officer: Graham Callister

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected:
- Report author: Graham Callister, Head of Festivals, Events & Cultural Policy
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- Report version number: 1

1. Summary

To provide Members with an overview of the 2026/27 Festivals and Events Grants Programme including background, new commissioning process and criteria, successful applications and awards. The report also outlines how the grants programme has evolved and its strategic relevance to the city.

2. Recommendation(s) to scrutiny:

Culture and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission are invited to:

- Note the introduction of the new grants commissioning process and comment on the eligibility and assessment criteria.
- Comment on the approved 2026/27 grant recipients and the breadth and balance of festivals and events supported through the programme.

3. Detailed report

A. Background

LCC 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 e.g. Leicester Caribbean Carnival, Bring The Paint, Chinese / Lunar New Year, Leicester Pride, Leicester Mela, Black History Month, Eid Prayer Festival and others.

The F&E team provide additional logistical support to grant recipients and all other commercial and community festivals and events taking place in the city centre and its parks.

Following a review of the previous grants programme it was agreed that a new commissioning process for LCC F&E grants would be established for 2026/27 with a range of funding options and programme recommendations to be considered.

B. Purpose

Leicester City Council invests in quality, inclusive and environmentally responsible festivals and events as a means of delivering cultural, social and economic outcomes for

the city. The Council is committed to supporting a balanced programme of free and low-cost festivals and events, ensuring that cost is not a barrier to participation and that residents, particularly hard-pressed families and communities facing disadvantage, can access quality cultural experiences. By enabling organisations to co-design and deliver accessible and engaging cultural activity, the Council supports increased participation in culture, greater social inclusion, stronger community connections, and opportunities for people from different backgrounds to come together through shared experiences. This investment also contributes to the vitality of the city centre and neighbourhoods, attracts visitors, supports local businesses, and strengthens Leicester's reputation as a diverse, vibrant and culturally distinctive city.

The LCC F&E programme is reviewed annually to ensure it remains aligned with community needs, best practice in event management, and available funding.

C. 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.

D. Eligibility Criteria, Assessment and Selection Process

Eligibility

Organisations applying for support must:

- Be based within Leicester.
- Be a legally constituted organisation (e.g., charity, community group, business, or nonprofit).
- Demonstrate the capacity to safely plan and deliver the proposed event.
- Hold appropriate insurance, licences, and permissions.
- Provide a clear budget and evidence of financial need.
- Deliver the event within the specified funding period.
- Engage fully with LCC's Festivals and Events team, multi-agency event planning and safety advisory groups where appropriate.

Funding applications will not normally be considered whereby:-

- Activities where the key purpose is to promote a religious or political doctrine
- Activities which are unlawful for the Council to fund
- For events that have already taken place, or any expenditure commitments of the Recipient entered into before the Commencement Date
- For capital expenditure e.g. land, equipment, vehicles or building works
- For core funding e.g. staffing or premises costs except those directly associated with and specified in the Project
- Recoverable VAT

- For any payment to members of its Governing Body
- Individuals
- Research trips or similar

Applicants were required to submit:

- Completed grant application form.
- Project plan outlining concept / description, objectives, timeline, and target audience.
- Outline marketing plan.
- Detailed budget with revenue and expenditure.
- Confirmation how artists will be fairly paid.
- Risk management and safety plan (in outline for further review).
- Summary of environmental practices.
- Evidence of community support or partnerships (if applicable).

Assessment Criteria

Applications were assessed on:

Alignment with LCC Programme Objectives & Outcomes

- Quality Cultural Programming & Creative Expression
- Community Cohesion, Engagement & Co-design
- Place-making, Animation & City Identity / Reputation
- Economic Impact & Tourism Development
- Wellbeing, Pride & Environmental Sustainability
- Participation, Reach & Access
- Cultural, Social & Place-based Impact
- Organisational, Partnership & Sustainability Outcomes

And demonstration of:

- Key Partners & Stakeholders
- Experience & Track Record
- Budget and Funding
- Monitoring & Evaluation
- Inclusion & Accessibility
- Environmental Sustainability
- Marketing & Promotion

Scoring scale (for each criterion):

0 = Not addressed / does not meet requirements

1 = Very weak alignment, limited evidence

2 = Some alignment, but underdeveloped or unclear

3 = Good alignment, clear and relevant evidence

4 = Strong alignment, well evidenced and convincing

5 = Excellent alignment, highly compelling and exemplary

Selection Decision

Following an open grant funding call undertaken in March 2026, LCC F&E received 68 detailed applications for F&E grant funding, 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 criteria, the remaining applications were evaluated and scored by the F&E team against the published eligibility and scoring criteria.

A shortlist of high-quality applications and funding recommendations proposed by officers based on scoring, applicant funding ask, available programme budget and fit with LCC strategic priorities was presented to the Lead Member and Director of TCI for further review.

E. Budget, Strategic Relevance and Grants

Budget

A provisional budget of £165,000 was allocated for 2025/26. Due to the demand for funding and number of high-quality bids received additional funding of £65,000 was sought and approved by the City Mayor, bringing the total F&E Grants Programme budget to £230,000. The additional funding sits within an approved 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 permanently added to the budget ceiling for Arts & Museums within future budget strategies.

Strategic Relevance

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 delivers social, cultural and economic benefits for the city. The additional investment enables support for a broader range of established, large-scale, culturally significant and community-led festivals and events, while also strengthening the Council's ability to provide accessible, free and low-cost cultural experiences for residents.

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 therefore supports a diverse programme of affordable and accessible festivals and events that enable hard-pressed families, young people and communities across Leicester to engage with quality cultural experiences, celebrate shared identities and traditions, and participate in civic life.

The enhanced programme supports community cohesion, wellbeing and civic pride by creating opportunities for people from different backgrounds, generations and neighbourhoods to come together through shared cultural experiences. It also enables the festivals portfolio to 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.

In addition, the programme contributes to the city's economic vitality by increasing visitor numbers, supporting city centre and neighbourhood footfall, and generating wider benefits

for local businesses and the visitor economy. The increased budget therefore provides the flexibility to consider broader strategic priorities—including inclusion, affordability, accessibility, wellbeing, cultural visibility, community impact and long-term sustainability—alongside assessment scores, ensuring a stronger, more representative and more equitable festivals programme that reflects the diversity, ambitions and needs of Leicester's communities.

Grants

LCC offered grants between a minimum of £2,500 and provisional maximum of £25,000 to support up to 50% of the costs of the festivals and event that are accessible to the general public.

It was expected that the majority of funded activity would take place within or in close proximity to the city centre.

LCC reserved the right not to allocate the full F&E grants programme budget should insufficient bids of quality be received. Equally LCC reserved the right to make the final decision as to grant allocation to successful applicants.

F. F&E Grants Programme 2026/27

Of the remaining eligible applications 20 organisations / events have been identified to deliver high-quality activity in 2026/27, subject to grant terms and conditions, that delivers against the council's key strategic objectives and demonstrates the depth and breadth of the city's festivals and events offer.

The successful applicants and grant awards are as follows:

Event Name	Organisation	Event Dates (TBC)	2026/27 Award
Let's Dance International Frontiers	Serendipity Institute for Black Arts & Heritage	29th April – 9th May 2026	£5,000
UK Asian Film Festival Leicester	Phizzical CIO	1st – 10th May 2026	£5,000
The Spark Festival	The Spark Arts for Children	16th – 24th May 2026	£10,000
Windrush Tea Party	Opal22 Arts & Edutainment	20th June 2026	£5,000
An Indian Summer	Inspirate	1st – 5th July 2026	£10,000
Cosmopolitan Arts Festival	Cosmopolitan Arts	11th July 2026	£5,000
Leicester Mela Festival	Circle 101	15th & 16th August 2026	£20,000
Leicester Caribbean Carnival	Leicester Caribbean Community Caribbean Carnival	1st August 2026	£45,000*
Brew Beat	BID Leicester	4th – 6th September 2026	£5,000
Leicester Pride	Leicester Pride	5th September 2026	£10,000

Leicester International Music Festival	Leicester International Music Festival	16th – 19th September 2026	£5,000
Black History Month	Serendipity Institute for Black Arts & Heritage	1st – 31st October 2026	£15,000
Journeys Festival International	Art Reach	16th – 25th October 2026	£10,000
The Return of Leicester Monsters	BID Leicester	20th – 30th October 2026	£20,000
Nartan Festival	Nupur Arts	14th – 28th November 2026	£7,500
Leicester Comedy Festival	Big Difference Company	3rd – 21st February 2027	£25,000
Lunar/Chinese New Year	Cosmopolitan Arts	13th & 14th February 2027	£5,000
Leicester Poetry Festival	Literati Arts	Dates tbc	£5,000
Debut Festival	Phoenix	25th February – 31st March 2027	£5,000
Bring the Paint	Graffwerk Limited	24th – 30th May 2027	£12,500
TOTAL FUNDING AWARDED			£230,000

* Leicester Caribbean Carnival has historically received a grant of £60,000 from LCC based on the scale of the event and communities represented. A decision was taken to reduce its funding by the council by £15,000 to a grant of £45,000 for future review.

The funding provided is for the 2026/27 financial year only.

G. Funding Conditions, Reporting & Evaluation Procedures

Full LCC funding will remain subject to confirmation and 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 requirements as required.
- Submission of a 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 retain the ability to review ongoing event viability against agreed milestones and recommend withdrawal or reduction of support should critical conditions not be met.

Final Report (submitted within 8 weeks of event end)

Applicants must provide:

- A completed final evaluation form.

- Attendance and participation data.
- Summary of outcomes achieved vs. planned objectives.
- Description of community impact and participant feedback.
- Financial report including income and expenditure statement.
- Evidence of marketing and acknowledgement of the funder (e.g., posters, website screenshots).
- Lessons learned and recommendations for future events.

Monitoring & Audit

LCC reserves the right to:

- Request additional financial documentation during and up to a twelve-month period post-event delivery e.g. independent audited account.
- Conduct site visits during event delivery.
- Withhold or recover funds if conditions are breached.

Programme Review

The LCC F&E grants programme will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains aligned with community needs, best practice in event management, and available funding. It is intended that the annual grants programme will re-open in October to receive festival / event applications for delivery in 2027/28.

H. SUMMARY

Following a review of the previous grants scheme, the introduction of a new grant commissioning process and assessment framework enables the LCC F&E Grants Programme to directly support and deliver against Leicester City Council's strategic objectives of delivering inclusive, accessible and environmentally responsible festivals and events that generate cultural, social and economic benefits for the city.

Eligible organisations are now required to demonstrate organisational capacity, financial viability, event management capability, community benefit and alignment with the Council's strategic priorities in detail.

Following approval by the City Mayor, the total available funding allocated to the programme is £230,000 with additional funding permanently added to the budget ceiling for Arts & Museums within future budget strategies. The increased investment supports the Council's commitment to a more balanced, representative and affordable programme of festivals and events, helping to strengthen community cohesion, cultural participation, civic pride and economic activity across the city.

A total of 20 festivals / events has been recommended to receive funding in 2026/27, with grants ranging from £5,000 to £45,000. The funded programme reflects a broad range of cultural, community, arts and heritage events, including Leicester Caribbean Carnival, Leicester Mela, Leicester Pride, Black History Month, Lunar/Chinese New Year, Leicester Comedy Festival, Bring the Paint and Journeys Festival International.

Grant recipients will be subject to formal funding agreements, monitoring and reporting requirements, including financial accountability, event evaluation, attendance data and evidence of outcomes achieved. Leicester City Council retains the right to carry out audits, site visits and recover funding where conditions are not met. The Festivals and Events

Grants Programme will continue to be reviewed annually to ensure it remains aligned with community needs, best practice and available resources, and will re-open to applications in October 2026 for festival / event delivery in 2027/28.

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

4.1 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

Signed: Stuart McAvoy - Head of Finance

Dated: 30th July 2026

4.2 Legal Implications

This report is for information only. In awarding grants, the Council has power under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 (the general power of competence), which enables it to do anything that an individual generally may do, including providing financial assistance where it considers this will promote the economic, social or environmental well-being of the area.

These powers must be exercised reasonably and in accordance with public law principles. The Council must also have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 when administering the programme and future funding rounds.

Any funding awarded should be subject to an appropriate grant funding agreement setting out the conditions of funding and associated monitoring, reporting, audit and recovery provisions. Prior to any award of funding, consideration should also be given to the Council's obligations under the Subsidy Control Act 2022 and an assessment undertaken, where required, to ensure compliance. Legal Services can provide advice and support in this regard.

Signed: Mannah Begum, Principal Solicitor, Commercial Legal Services

Dated: 29 July 2026

4.3 Equalities Implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council must pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (the Public Sector Equality Duty). Protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The Festivals and Events Grant Programme 2026–27 is designed to promote equality, diversity and inclusion. The programme encourages applications from organisations and events that engage underrepresented communities and widen participation in cultural activity across Leicester's diverse population. It prioritises free or low cost events to reduce financial barriers for residents regardless of income, age, disability, race, gender, religion or belief. It supports co designed and community led approaches so that local voices, including those from minoritised or disadvantaged groups, are represented in event planning and delivery, and enhances social cohesion by bringing people together from different backgrounds through shared cultural and creative experiences.

Assessment criteria specifically reward projects that demonstrate inclusive practice, equitable access and community benefit. This approach aligns with the Council's Public Sector Equality Duty by seeking to foster good relations between communities, advance equality of opportunity and eliminate discrimination.

No direct negative equality impacts are identified. Indirect impacts may arise where some communities are not funded in a given year due to budget constraints. This is mitigated through a transparent, open application process and annual review to ensure a balanced and representative programme over time.

Overall, the programme is expected to have a positive impact on equality, diversity and inclusion across the city.

Signed: Equalities Officer, Surinder Singh, Ext 37 4148

Dated: 29 July 2026

4.4 Climate Emergency Implications

While festivals and events have a climate and environmental impact, they also provide an opportunity to promote care for the environment and climate-friendly ways of doing things – both in the way that they are organised, and in their content and the communications with the public.

The council seeks to address climate change in the organisation of its own festivals and events programme and, as this report says, community organisers seeking council funding are asked to show how they will do the same. Typically, travel tends to generate the biggest climate impact from events, so wherever organisers are taking positive steps to encourage active travel and public transport to their events, this is particularly welcome.

In light of recent heatwaves – expected to become more frequent and intense in coming years due to climate change – consideration of extreme heat risks in planning for summer events will become increasingly important.

Signed: Duncan Bell, Change Manager (Climate Emergency). Ext. 37 2249

Dated: 24th July 2026

4.5 Other Implications

N/A

Signed:

Dated:

5. Background information and other papers:

N/A

6. Summary of appendices: