

Title: Early Events Programme 2025/26
Report of: Rob Hamilton, Head of Innovation and Strategy
Portfolio: Culture, Creative, Tourism and Sport

Report Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide details of the Early Events Programme for FY2025/26 to enable it to be recommended for approval.

The North East Combined Authority (North East CA) Cabinet in November 2024 approved the development of a 10-year regional events strategy to commence from 2026/27. Alongside this, and to capitalise on early opportunities, and maintain momentum and capacity in advance of the long-term strategy being launched, Cabinet also approved an indicative allocation of £2m of Investment Funds to support an early priority regional events programme for FY2025/26 only. Subsequent to Cabinet, and through the development and commissioning of the extended UKSPF programme for FY2025/26, an additional indicative £621,778 UKSPF has also been allocated to support the early events programme.

Work has commenced to develop the long-term regional events strategy following the commissioning of independent consultants in December 2024, which includes extensive consultation and engagement. To ensure that short term opportunities for impact are taken whilst this long-term strategic approach and a multi-year regional events strategy is developed, investment is required to deliver a cross-regional programme of events during FY2025/26 only.

The Early Events Programme comprises the following specific elements:

- A range of cultural and related events that will be delivered as part of a coherent overarching programme i.e. individual events will complement one another and will enable the attraction of a wide group of audiences and stakeholders including communities across the region and visitors to the region. Following a call specification to the seven NECA Local Authorities, the following events will be delivered across the region:
 - Durham County Council - Lumiere 2025
 - Durham County Council - Women of the World North East (WOW)
 - Gateshead Council - We are Gateshead in the North East
 - Newcastle City Council – Wonders of Winter
 - North Tyneside Council - Mouth of the Tyne Festival – 20th Anniversary
 - North Tyneside Council - North Shields 800
 - Northumberland County Council - Blyth Celebrates Festival of Energy
 - South Tyneside Council - NEXT Big Thing (NE Extraordinary Talent) Programme
 - Sunderland City Council - Riverside Sunderland Futures
- Additionally, investment will be provided alongside and complementary to the above regional events programme to support capacity development in the sector helping to develop improved events marketing, event delivery and logistics, and enhanced coordination across the region.
- Resource has also been made available to support a programme-level evaluation of all activities undertaken through the programme.

Total investment from the above activities comprises £2.621m (being £2m Investment Fund and £621k UKSPF Communities and Place funding) for the period 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026.

Recommendations

The Chief Executive is recommended to approve the award of £2.621m (being £2m Investment Fund and £621k UKSPF Communities and Place funding) to contribute towards the costs of delivering an Early Events Programme for FY2025/26, in accordance with the delegated authority agreed by Cabinet on 26th November 2024.

A. Summary of Investment Proposal (Context)

1. Background

The North East recognises the benefits that events can bring to the region, whether socially, economically and/or reputationally. This programme supports investment in high quality cultural or sporting events capable of achieving wide regional impact and/or national and international profile. A calendar of festivals and events supported in 2025/26, are expected to achieve significant impact, demonstrate a strong sense of place, and showcase the culture, heritage and locations of the North East area – in turn attracting new visitors including overnight stays from elsewhere in the UK and overseas as well as engage residents, through participation, skills development and employment.

There is already a thriving events ecology across the North East and the Mayor and North East CA has committed to support its further growth and development, collaborating with partners and stakeholders. By creating ‘world-class’ and impactful events, we will attract high spending visitors providing them with memorable cultural and sporting experiences, whilst also driving local engagement, enriching, and benefiting residents and communities through improved wellbeing, sense of pride, and understanding of our diverse cultures, aligning with the Mayor’s Manifesto commitments and the Interim Local Growth Plan.

Our approach to the development and delivery of a regional events programme, now and into the future, aims to address the following overarching objectives:

- To support and proactively contribute to regional inclusive economic growth, capitalising on the values and opportunities that are unique and specific to the region.
- To strengthen a sense of place: leveraging the organisations, activity, sectors, spaces and communities in the region, to shape and strengthen our identity and raise pride, improve belonging, and ignite the aspirations of our communities.
- To increase internationalisation and investment: growing the visitor economy across the region and raising the region’s national and global profile to build new relationships and attract new investment.
- To improve and grow jobs creating sustainable growth: supporting our businesses, organisations and freelancers to grow, thrive and create high-quality jobs in industries across this portfolio, working to attract new and regional young talent to these opportunities.
- To strengthen skills and training for the sector, and to strengthen employment routeways, recognising its importance as part of the wider foundational economy.
- To support health and wellbeing: unlocking a broad range of opportunities in our cultural, sporting and heritage assets that will enable residents to live healthier lives and improve their wellbeing.
- To support the ambitions of the regional visitor economy strategy in doubling the value of the visitor economy and our regenerative framework which ensures that all of our activity has a positive impact on the communities in which it takes place and supports our ambitions as a net zero region.
- To optimally position the investment and convening power of North East CA as part of a broader programme of events delivered within the region.

Independent expertise has recently been commissioned to support the development of a longer-term regional strategy, in consultation with a wide range of regional stakeholders including through the North East CA Culture, Creative, Tourism & Sport Portfolio Advisory Board. The strategy will be built on a comprehensive assessment and benchmarking of the region and its potential in the context of national and international trends and opportunities in the events and festivals market; it will also set out prerequisites of that success including development of the scale, leadership and resourcing required for the region to compete internationally, including skills and wider supply chains. The Strategy will be developed in consultation with strategic stakeholders and subsequently considered by Cabinet in Spring 2025.

The Early Events Programme is focused on ensuring that an impactful events programme can be delivered in the shorter term to maintain important momentum for events as part of a coordinated programme across the region, whilst also providing the opportunity for events to transition into a long-term strategic approach and a multi-year regional events strategy for delivery from 2026/27 onwards. The programme should therefore be viewed as supporting an ‘interim’ year for in-year (FY2025/26) delivery and associated expenditure that helps to bridge between previous events delivery in the region and a longer-term approach to events that helps to build scale, capacity and impact in the sector.

2. The Investment Proposal

Project Outline	
Proposal Name	Early Events Programme 2025/26
Lead Organisations	All seven Local Authorities
Delivery Areas	All seven Local Authority areas
Start Date	1 st April 2025
Financial End Date	31 st March 2026
Practical completion date	30 th June 2026
Total Project Value	£2.621m
Grant Amounts Requested	£2.621m
Budget Implications	The above grant amounts comprises £2m North East CA Investment Fund and £621K of UKSPF Communities and Place Funding from the UKSPF Transition Year 25/26 allocation.

The Early Events Programme comprises the following elements:

- investment to support nine events across the region through FY2025/26 commissioned and delivered by or through all seven Local Authorities;
- investment for events capacity development that will be delivered through an open call process; and
- investment to undertake a programme-level evaluation.

The Programme will prioritise events which meet one or more of the following gateway criteria:

- events that can be delivered in 2025/26, and demonstrably increase their local economic impact;
- enables the delivery of high impact events, which may not otherwise go ahead, to proceed;
- events that create legacy and growth opportunities for the future and have a basis for commercial sustainability in the future.

The North East CA aims to support a portfolio of events that demonstrably builds on best practice and helps to move the regional offer forward, by supporting events that are distinctive and of high-quality, and rooted in the culture of the area, attracting significant numbers of local residents and visitors and with the potential to grow; that are unique to the area, and can make a substantial contribution to national profile and attract staying visitors from across the UK; through to larger-scale events with international status, attracting significant audiences and extensive media coverage. We also see this call supporting events that are in line with our Regenerative Visitor Economy Framework, which ensures that all our activity has a positive impact on the communities in which it takes place and supports our ambitions as a net zero region. We want to see 'impactful' events that make a very positive or powerful effect or impression for our residents and visitors to our ambitious region.

What is it? Where will it be undertaken and when?

The project will provide investment of £2.621m to enable the delivery of a regional early priority events programme for FY2025/26 only. It will deliver a range of cultural events targeted at residents across the region and incoming visitors to the region. Applications for support from the North East CA for individual events are in the range of £100k-£500k. Following a short call process to the seven NE Local Authorities 9 events will be supported, providing a mixed programme covering the North East CA geography and ensuring delivery over the majority of the 2025/26 period to optimise a regional events 'calendar'. The programme ensures that momentum and capacity for regional events is maintained whilst a longer-term strategy is developed and made ready for implementation from April 2026. This early programme of activity will provide funding for events which:

- increase internationalisation and investment by growing the visitor economy across the region and raising the region's national and global profile - supporting the region's ambition to double the value of the visitor economy;
- are in line with our regenerative tourism framework, which ensures that all our activity has a positive impact on the communities in which it takes place and supports our ambitions as a net zero region;
- demonstrably build on best practice and move the regional offer forward.

Who will be delivering activity?

A Call for Projects was launched in early February for Local Authority partners to act as accountable bodies for their respective areas. This would enable events to be delivered by the Local Authority themselves or in collaboration with an external delivery partner.

In addition, sector deliverers and events practitioners in the region will respond to a separate open call anticipated for early Q1 FY2025/26 to deliver capacity development activity to help position regional capability and develop knowledge and skills in advance of a longer-term regional events strategy being implemented from 2026/27. Criteria for this call is in the process of being developed and the scoring and decision-making process will follow a similar approach to that undertaken for the selection of events.

Target Beneficiaries

Beneficiaries will include local residents of all ages, incoming visitors to the region, cultural businesses, organisations and practitioners, tourism and hospitality businesses, and wider industry.

Impact and Success

Impact and successes from the programme will include:

- supporting and proactively contributing to regional inclusive economic growth;
- strengthening a sense of place;
- increasing internationalisation and investment;
- improving and growing jobs creating sustainable growth;
- strengthening skills and training for residents and the cultural sector;
- supporting health and wellbeing;
- supporting the ambitions of the regional visitor economy strategy; and, positioning the strategic investment and convening power of North East CA.

The Call Specification for events issued to Local Authorities, included the following target impact areas: 1) events that are distinctive and authentic; 2) contribute to how our region is seen, and engaged with, nationally and internationally; 3) create the opportunity for local skills growth and improvement; 4) directly increase the number of visitors coming to the region and staying longer; 5) align with our new Regenerative Visitor Economy Framework; 6) have the potential to grow and scale; 7) can build new collaborations, and explore the development of business models; 8) can leverage funding/investment/income supporting value for money; and, 9) increase local capacity, knowledge and capability.

2.1 Projects Submitted via Call to Local Authorities

Below is a list of submissions received by the Local Authorities, with further detail available in Appendix 1. Following assessment of the applications, the panel recommended moving forward with the support of all submissions. A key objective of the Call was to create an impactful programme of events across the entire region. The panel concluded that supporting all applications would fulfil this goal. To make this work within the available funding, the panel agreed on the following approach.

- Funding would not be provided for contingency costs.
- Costs identified for evaluation will not be funded within individual projects. Instead, an enhanced programme level evaluation will:
 - Ensure evaluation across all events;
 - Drive efficiency and consistency;
 - Help develop a long-term regional strategy through a single evaluation methodology.
- After considering the above factors, the panel proposed applying a uniform 11% reduction to all funding requests.

The following table highlights the adjustments made following the assessment via the panel. The amount awarded to the Local Authorities totals £2,239,168. There is currently £2,621,778 available (£2m IF Funding and £621,778 UKSPF). As a result, an additional £20,000 has been to supplement a more detailed approach to programme level evaluation, boosting it up to £40,000, and the Capacity Development Fund will have an additional £42,810 providing an overall total of £342,810.

Project Name	Event Timeframe	Applicant	North East CA Funding Requested	Adjusted Funding
Blyth Celebrates Festival of Energy	Engagement Programme - September 2025 Festival - Feb 2026	Northumberland County Council	£400,000	£325,384
Lumiere 2025	November 2025	Durham County Council	£300,000	£249,200
Mouth of the Tyne Festival – 20 th Anniversary	July 2025	North Tyneside Council	£100,000	£84,550
NEXT Big Thing (NE Extraordinary Talent) Programme	Summer 2025	South Tyneside Council	£151,319	£125,774
North Shields 800	May-December 2025	North Tyneside Council	£200,000	£173,550
Riverside Sunderland Futures	Sept 2025-Jan 2026	Sunderland City Council	£480,000	£427,200
We are Gateshead in the North East	Various over 2025	Gateshead Council	£400,000	£356,000
Women of the World North East - WOW	October 2025	Durham County Council	£200,000	£160,200
Wonders of Winter	December 2025	Newcastle City Council	£400,000	£337,310
Total			£2,631,319	£2,239,168

2.2 Outputs and Outcomes

Outputs and outcomes listed below relate to the programme of nine events recommended for support only. There is the potential for additional outputs and outcomes to be generated through the open call for capacity development as referred to above.

Outputs	2025/26	Total
Number of cultural / tourism events taking place	125	125
Number of people reached	470,454	470,454
Number of local events or activities supported	118	118
Number of residents who have received a direct intervention in line with the aims of the programme	94,060	94,060
Number of knowledge exchange interactions	30	30
Number of residents supported to engage in life skills	25	25
Number of people supported to participate in education	1,880	1,880
Number of volunteering opportunities supported	75	75
Amount of public realm created or improved	46	46
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	200	200
Number of enterprises receiving grants	50	50

Outcomes	Timeframe for achievement	Totals
Residents supported into volunteering	31/03/2026	465
Number of volunteering opportunities created as a result of support	31/03/2026	90
Number of attendees participating in a cultural tourism event	31/03/2026	740,704
Improved perceived health and wellbeing	31/03/2026	15,000
Direct jobs created	31/03/2026	9
Increase in social value	31/03/2026	46
Improved engagement numbers	31/03/2026	66,500
Number of people in education / training following support	31/03/2026	100
Number of organisations engaged in knowledge transfer activity following support	31/03/2026	200

2.3 Timetable for Implementation

Forecast Date	Milestone
Early April 2025	GFA letters to LAs
April'25 – Mar'26	Delivery of Early Events Programme (individual events working to own delivery timeframe in this period)
May 2025	Commission programme level evaluation
June 2025	Programme level evaluation commences
Mar 2026	Programme level evaluation completes

2.4 Evaluation

An evaluation will be completed at the end of the programme to assess and evaluate all events commissioned and delivered. The approach to and design of the evaluation will be developed with LA7 partners and will be undertaken in light of the developed long-term regional events strategy, focused on key points of learning, insight and outcomes arising from the early events programme. This, in turn, feed into and complement the implementation of the longer-term events strategy that is currently in the process of being developed. A budget of £40,000 has been included to undertake the evaluation.

2.5 Appraisal

The North East CA undertook an evaluation of the programme's business case and supporting evidence, following the HM Treasury Five Case model and this is summarised below.

Strategic Case

This is an internal North East CA application to enable an impactful programme of early priority events across the region throughout 2025/26. Alongside the actual event delivery, a Capacity Development Fund/Programme will be developed to enhance event coordination, collaboration, marketing and delivery across the region going forward. The application encompasses details of nine Local Authority-delivered events. An open call was held, and individual event business cases were submitted. A scoring panel assessed the applications and the nine were deemed successful subject to approval of this business case. The strategic case is robust and demonstrates how the project contributes to regional culture, creative, tourism ambitions. The application sets out the case for growing the events market to strengthen the local visitor economy. The benefits are clear and well referenced throughout.

Economic Case

The economic case is rated Green. The nine headline events are supported by a programme of a further 116 fringe events for a North East CA investment of £2,621,778 which is a 44% contribution rate. The events are expected to reach 470,454 people and create opportunities for local people. The proposed events have the ability to generate large numbers of attendees which in return increases footfall into the local areas. Increased footfall normally has a wider social impact especially on local hospitality, leisure and high street economy. This is reflected in supported statistics from some applicant Local Authorities; particularly Durham

County Council reference to high average visitor spend and a strong return on investment at the 2023 Lumiere.

Financial Case

The finance tables reflect the cost of each event proposal and a quarterly breakdown is provided. Further granular costings are held in individual event submissions. The total project cost is £5,930,181, which includes a 44% North East CA contribution of £2,621,778. This is a split between North East CA Investment Fund and UKSPF funding. The Capacity Development costing means that the project has a sustainable element through the development of strategy for better marketing, delivery, collaboration of regional events.

Commercial Case

The business case shows evidence of demand and supply capacity to deliver the proposed activities. The proposal outlines compliant procurement processes, where relevant, that are in line with North East CA thresholds.

Management Case

There are established governance and management structures in place within the North East CA to oversee and monitor delivery. Individual Local Authorities have suitable delivery structures and teams with appropriate experience in place. Individual Local Authority applicants have addressed their subsidy position and determined that there is no subsidy present. However, supporting legal advice to confirm this is outstanding and to follow.

2.6 RAG Assessment

RAG Assessment

Overall RAG assessment		
Risk Rating	Strategic case	GREEN
	Economic case	GREEN
	Financial case	GREEN
	Commercial case	GREEN
	Management case	GREEN
	Overall rating	GREEN

2.7 Conclusion

The Early Events programme is a strategic fit with North East CA objectives, contributing to creative, culture and tourism ambitions. The opportunities for local people and the wider economic benefits that high profile events and a strong visitor economic can bring are clear. There is value for money in the investment.

2.8 Recommended Conditions of Funding

No.	Condition
1.	Subsidy control legal advice to be provided
2.	All individual funding awards to Local Authorities to include a requirement to participate in the programme-level evaluation.

B. Potential Impact on North East Combined Authority Objectives

The Mayoral Manifesto, devolution deals and Interim Local Growth Plan recognise the benefits that events bring to the region – socially, economically and reputationally. The North East CA Corporate plan sets out an objective to establish a regional events programme.

The Early Priority Events Programme directly supports the Mayoral objectives of ‘a home to world-class sporting and cultural venues and events, underpinned by eclectic and fast-changing grassroots creativity and energy’ as part of our new Corporate Plan. The Programme therefore contributes to the following missions: ‘A home of real opportunity’ – ‘by growing our cultural and sporting sectors’; and, ‘A North East we are proud

to call home’ – developing a ‘thriving creative economy’ and working to ‘establish and deliver a regional events and culture programme’.

A regional events strategy and programme is needed to support an ambitious ecosystem of ‘world-class’ and impactful events, capable of attracting high spending visitors, and providing them with memorable cultural and sporting experiences. Of equal importance is ensuring that the economic impact of events reaches communities – and that events designed to showcase the region also enrich and benefit residents and communities, for example through skills development.

C. Key risks

A full risk register has been completed as part of the full business case. High-level risks comprise:

- Delay in funding approval and commissioning of events impacting on deliverability and impact.
- Inability to commission a coordinated and complementary programme of events for FY2025/26.
- Inability to secure match funding from public and private sources.
- Low levels of engagement and participation across events.
- Inability to capitalise on key outcomes including raising the region’s profile, widening access to skills development, development of regional events capacity etc.

D. Financial and other resources implications

The financial profile for the programme is included below:

Funding source	2025/26	Total
North East CA Investment Fund	£2,000,000	£2,000,000
UKSPF	£ 621,778	£ 621,778
Public Sector Leverage	£3,258,403	£3,258,403
Private Sector Leverage	£ 50,000	£ 50,000
Total (£)	£5,930,181	£5,930,181

Status of match funding:

Public Sector leverage from Local Authorities and Arm’s Length Bodies supporting individual events has been confirmed or is subject to confirmation by individual Local Authorities.

Private sector leverage supporting individual events has been confirmed or is subject to confirmation via individual Local Authorities

Individual grant funding agreement letters to respective Local Authorities will be issued on the basis of confirmation of match funding.

Funding availability:

There is capacity with the regional UKSPF allocation from Government to meet the £621k sought, and this has been factored into the forecast spend for FY2025/26.

E. Legal implications

As part of the programme call, Local Authorities have been asked to consider the approach to subsidy control. This will be assessed through the technical appraisal to ensure an agreed subsidy control position approach is in place prior to contracting.

F. Equalities implications

The North East CA follows the Public Sector Equality duty and this report has due regard to the need to achieve the objectives set out under s149 of the Equality Act 2010.

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken and the implications of this will be considered in the project mobilisation and delivery stages.

The programme level evaluation will include an assessment and review of equalities impact arising from the delivery of the events programme.

G. Consultation and engagement

Consultation has included the Local Authority Officer Group for the CCT&S portfolio, LA7 Economic Directors, and the CCT&S Portfolio Advisory Board. The Mayor's Office has also been consulted on the approach, the call specification, and the applications received.

The development and approach also sits within the context of the independent consultation commenced in December and currently ongoing to develop a long-term regional events strategy. This included a recent 'Regional Events Roundtable' hosted by the Mayor at The Glasshouse with circa 100 regional representatives and stakeholders attending.

H. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Summary of Events to be delivered

I. Background papers

[July 2024 Cabinet](#) – 'Culture, Creative, Tourism and Sport Strategic Portfolio Plan' – pgs 35-36

[November 224 Cabinet](#) - 'Early Delivery Priorities for Culture, Creative, Tourism and Sport in the North East' - pgs 87-94

J. Contact officers

Name: Mark Adamson
Title: Principal Manager, Sectoral Growth & Delivery
Email: mark.adamson@northeast-ca.gov.uk

Name: Lesley Strickland
Title: Senior Economic Development & Regeneration Officer
Email: lesley.strickland@northeast-ca.gov.uk

K. Glossary

CCT&S – Culture, Creative, Tourism and Sport
North East CA – North East Combined Authority
UKSPF – UK Shared Prosperity Fund

L. Consultee

Cabinet Member:	Director/Head of Service:	Director of Finance and Investment:	Monitoring Officer:
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Appendix 1 – Summary of Events to be delivered

The following is a summary of the events to be delivered through the Early Priority Events Programme for FY2025/26:

Durham County Council - Lumiere 2025

Lumiere 2025 will comprise a series of large and/or spectacular artworks and some smaller artworks in the public, private and semi-private spaces of Durham, each created by individual artists or arts organisations. Most of the programme will be new commissions and/or works new to the region. The featured artworks will focus on light in all its forms, works will include light installations, illuminations of existing buildings and windows, performances, and projections.

Funding is sought to support the enhanced/deepened delivery of Lumiere 2025, including bolder creative programming, production and display of light art installations, wider professional development, deeper learning and participation programmes, and new kind of satellite programme, hosted at Shildon, linking to celebrations marking the bicentenary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway, and shining a spotlight on our wider communities. Lumiere 2025, will be delivered over 3 evenings between 13-15 November 2025.

Durham County Council - Women of the World North East (WOW)

On 17 and 18 October 2025, the Women of the World (WOW) festival will come to the North East for the first time as part of the Stockton and Darlington Railway 200 festival (S&DR200). Aligning with International Day of the Girl, WOW North East will celebrate women, girls and non-binary people in the region, nationally and internationally, and raise conversations, awareness and action around gender equity, led by creativity and innovation. WOW - Women of the World was founded in 2010, since then, WOW Festivals celebrating women and girls, and taking a frank look at the obstacles they face, have taken place in 71 locations across the globe from Rio to Karachi reaching more than five million people to date.

The Festival will take place across the region with a hub at Gala Durham. Diverse and inclusive in approach and curation, the aim is to engage with the most diverse audiences. We will ensure this by expanding the range, reach and impact with 3 additional elements; the WOW show, Hope Brigade exhibition and Wowzers creative careers events, as well supporting the evaluation and planning which will support the long term development of WOW North East. It will be delivered in venues and locations across the North East Combined Authority area providing an impactful and cost-effective reach across our whole region which is integral to the innovation and invention of the railway story, engaging with a broader audience at key places

Gateshead Council - We are Gateshead in the North East

Gateshead has a proud history of culture-based regeneration and staging of major events and is now embarking on a new Cultural Strategy (Creative Spaces) that will see activity, placemaking and animation across the borough. Year 1, 2025/2026, will see events and activities which will help to drive the co-creation of our culture strategy. There are some significant milestones being celebrated across Gateshead and the event programme will encapsulate these in collaboration with key partners: Gateshead Central Library Centenary; Gateshead College 80th Birthday; Railway 200 in conjunction with Network Rail; and, Glasshouse 20th Birthday.

In addition to these events, we are looking to activate Baltic Square for 3 months with animation and performances including music, dance, comedy, poetry, and art by creating a pop-up venue. Grassroots creative freelancers will also be providing performances and workshops at community-based events across Gateshead. This programme will instil a sense of pride and place and celebrate our heritage and will be of benefit to local communities and businesses through local supply chains together with contributing to the wider events and visitor economy program across the region.

Newcastle City Council – Wonders of Winter

Wonders of Winter will be the first year of an ambitious annual Winter Festival for Newcastle and wider region. The programme will contain 5 elements, commissioned for the festival, ideally from artists and organisations based in the region. It is an important element of the festival to establish a winter parade that will wind its way through the city and arrive at the festival site. Weighting will be given to ideas that involve communities in the design, development and implementation of work.

Elements will be located in a specific site within Newcastle that centres around the Haymarket Area. The festival will become the centre piece of Newcastle's Christmas offer and take place over 4 days, on one of the first 2 weekends of December. It will bookend with the traditional New Year's Eve celebrations. With the Christmas markets, lights, recent addition of Northern Lights, Ice Rink at Centre for life plus the pantomimes and Christmas shows performed in theatres, it will become a centre piece of Newcastle's Christmas celebrations.

North Tyneside Council - Mouth of the Tyne Festival – 20th Anniversary

Mouth of the Tyne Festival is North Tyneside's homegrown flagship annual event that attracts around 100,000 people and generates an estimated £1m for the visitor economy. 2025 sees it celebrate 20 years of world class street theatre, spectacular one-off music concerts and community involvement in and around its nationally renowned Tynemouth home on the coast of North East England.

North Tyneside Council will deliver the 20-year celebration between 10-13 July with a line-up that includes international street performers and music artists UB40, Elbow and Ministry of Sound Classical. Specific activities that NECA funding will support include: a grassroots music programme supporting emerging artists; real-life event industry work experience for students; and the introduction of a dance stage allowing young performers the chance to perform. The programme will be delivered in Tynemouth Priory and Castle, the village itself and surrounding areas, taking the opportunity that a two-decade celebration brings to enhance the programme significantly to grow visitor numbers as we look towards the 21st anniversary in 2026.

North Tyneside Council - North Shields 800

2025 marks the 800th anniversary of North Shields in North Tyneside. It's a once in a lifetime chance to shout about what makes our part of the world tick, highlighting the many reasons to visit. It is 800 years since a small village made up of simple huts (shields) was founded on the north bank of the River Tyne where the Fish Quay stands today. Created originally as a small fishing port to serve Tynemouth Priory, this grew into the thriving harbour town we know today.

The 800th anniversary year provides an exciting opportunity to share the town's rich heritage, cultural strengths and bright future through a programme of activities, events, exhibitions and performances bringing community members of all backgrounds, ages and ethnicities together to celebrate North Shields' past, present and future. It presents the best chance in a generation to raise the profile of the town, the wider borough of North Tyneside and North East England as a whole, stimulating the visitor economy.

Developed in partnership with over 50 community, heritage and voluntary organisations who form the NS800 Committee, an open call for ideas and activities saw over 60 project ideas submitted, culminating in a programme that will celebrate the area's heritage, music, culture and communities.

Northumberland County Council - Blyth Celebrates Festival of Energy

"Blyth Celebrates" is a yearlong campaign which will ignite Blyth's culture and tourism reputation amplifying the benefits of wider investment of £95m (UK Government and Northumberland County Council). Distinctive cultural events and placemaking-interventions will raise the town's profile attracting new visitors, businesses and investors.

Blyth Celebrates enhances the new Market Pavilion venue launching in summer 2025 promoting Northumberland's largest town as the new visitor destination in the NorthEast region. North East CA investment will support the expansion of an ENERGY themed event that will celebrate Blyth's culture, history and its leading role in the global renewables energy revolution as the concluding Festival of Blyth Celebrates. The Festival of ENERGY centres around creativity and innovation of the Renewables Sector in Blyth, globally recognised, working in partnership with Blyth based organisations. Northumberland County Council and a commissioned delivery company will work with the Port of Blyth, ORE Catapult, Energy Central and Newcastle University to deliver an expansive engagement programme from September – December 2025.

South Tyneside Council - NEXT Big Thing (NE Extraordinary Talent) Programme

NEXT! Big Thing (North East Extraordinary Talent) Programme is a new programme to engage up and coming talent from a range of backgrounds, supporting local people to perform their musical talent to a live audience. It builds on the family-friendly, free festival programme that spans Summer 2025, bringing new, grassroots acts to the fore from across South Tyneside and the wider region, from younger performers to our varied minority communities whose music is less heard in mainstream live performances. In this way it can

help to open up access to opportunity, boost community cohesion and provide a sustainable platform to showcase the strengths of North East music.

Building on our track record of nurturing local talent including Joe McElderry, Jade Thirlwell, Perrie Edwards (Little Mix), Nadine Shah and Lulu James (and regional developments such as Sunderland Music City), it will extend the Live Music season in South Tyneside. The “NEXT! Big Thing” Programme will invite talent to perform at our open-air Amphitheatre stage, which is family-friendly, free, with well attended audiences. This gives new talent, whatever their background, an opportunity to perform to a live audience – an opportunity that is rare and out of reach to many.

Sunderland City Council - Riverside Sunderland Futures

Riverside Sunderland Futures is an integrated series of events to drive economic growth showcasing the dynamic direction of the city’s regeneration and reflecting Sunderland as a leader in smart city technology and at the forefront of digital and creative industries. It combines two nationally significant events Sonic Futures, and the launch of Culture House Sunderland aka the Culture Housewarming.

Sonic Futures is not just a music event. It’s a bold statement about the future of live entertainment and technology, combining high-profile performances, multi-venue locations, cutting-edge technology, strategic marketing and industry-leading seminars, as well as 5G live streaming. Culture Housewarming will promote the launch of the flagship venue Culture House Sunderland, the national centre for creative smart cities, through a series of exciting cultural and creative events.

The programme will enhance local engagement, showcase the region's talent, and elevate Sunderland's profile as a destination for creative smart cities. This integrated initiative aligns with Sunderland and the region’s commitment to sustainable tourism and community engagement, ensuring a legacy of growth and collaboration for the future.