
Title: Events & Festivals Capacity Development Fund 2025/26
Report of: Phil Witcherley, Director of Economic Growth and Innovation
Portfolio: Home to a Growing and Vibrant Economy

Report Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide details of the Events & Festivals Capacity Development Fund which is part 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. On 16 April 2025, the Early Events Programme 2025/26 received Delegated Decision approval.

The Early Events Programme comprises 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.

Additionally, investment has been 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. A total of £345,000, from the £2m allocation was approved and has subsequently been allocated towards the Events & Festivals Capacity Development Fund.

Recommendations

The Director of Economic Growth and Innovation under delegated authority is recommended to approve the award of grant funding to 11 projects from the £345,000 allocation for capacity development as part of the overall Early Events Programme for FY2025/26.

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. The North East CA are seeking proposals for investment to deliver capacity development activity which will help position regional capability and develop knowledge and skills in advance of a longer-term regional events strategy being implemented from 2026/27.

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.

Culture, creativity, heritage, tourism, and sport help define who we are as a region; it's our showcase to the world and a source of pride for everyone who calls it home. The focus of the portfolio is therefore on delivering a vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive economy by leveraging and realising the region's cultural, creative,

heritage, visitor and sport assets and opportunities in line with the Mayor's Manifesto commitments and the Local Growth Plan.

2. Events and Festivals Capacity Development Funding Aims

The North East CA is in the process of developing a long term strategic approach to regional events. This will build on investment recently made in an early events programme in the current financial year.

The Events and Festivals Capacity Development Fund is focused on ensuring that opportunity is realised for event deliverers / event organisations in the region to develop their capacity to produce and deliver impactful events programmes. This is intended to help deliverers and organisations with increased momentum and capacity, providing the opportunity to support longer-term approaches for events that help to build scale, reach, creative ambition, sustainability and impact in the region.

The aim of the Call recently undertaken over summer 2025 was to support a portfolio of projects that demonstrably build on best practice and helps to move the regional offer forward. This would support projects and approaches 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. Funding will prioritise projects which support capacity development in the festivals and events sector helping to develop, for example, through improved marketing, delivery and logistics, and enhanced coordination across the region.

3. Events and Festivals Capacity Development Fund Open Call Process

The Events & Festivals Capacity Development Fund launched via an Open Call on Wednesday 23 July 2025 to support projects within the financial year 2025/26, with a minimum grant investment of £20,000 and maximum £40,000. The Call was targeted at sector deliverers and practitioners based in the North East CA region only, with all interventions are focused on activity delivered in the North East CA area. Although there are no specific outputs associated with the Call Specification, successful applicants must demonstrate the following outcomes:

- Additional revenue / income generated.
- Volunteers or staff trained, evidence of specialist qualifications.
- Better Business Plan.
- Better fundraising / income generation strategy.
- Increased sales / income at event.
- Better / new marketing plan or audience development strategy.
- Evidence that marketing has led to increased attendance.
- Evaluation strategy, to inform future planning and development.
- Improved audience feedback and data collection.
- New networks established for knowledge and skills exchange.
- New suppliers / supply chains established to reduce costs or provide better value.

The deadline for submissions was Thursday 23 August 2025. Fifty-four applications were received. An assessment panel comprising North East CA officers supported by independent sector representation reviewed the applications ahead of the assessment on Wednesday 27 August 2025.

Following the assessment of 54 applications, the panel recommended moving forward with the support of 11 submissions. Listed below are the submissions that have been recommended for support (please see further details in Appendix 1). A key objective of the Call was to create an impactful programme of events across the entire region. The panel concluded that supporting the following applications would fulfil this goal.

Project Name	Project Location	Applicant	North East CA Funding Requested
Yule Gaderung	Wooler, Northumberland	Ad Gefrin LLP	£40,000
Live Music Capacity Increase Project	North Shields, North Tyneside	Are You Affiliated (AYA)	£39,215

'Culture in Common': a capacity building model to develop equity and growth through local/regional partnership development and visitor framework alignment	Newcastle	Cobalt Studios	£31,628
Make It Happen Playful Pavements	North Shields, North Tyneside	Helix Arts	£29,300
The Community Marketplace	Stanley, County Durham	Karbon Homes	£34,088
Triple Threat: Building Capacity, Breaking Boundaries	Newcastle	Moving Art Management	£30,662
Winds of Connection: Newcastle Puppetry Festival	Newcastle	Moving Parts Arts CIO	£40,000
Female Football Big Weekend 2026	Wallsend, Northumberland & North Tyneside	Northumberland Football Association	£23,085
Culture Champions: Regenerative Volunteering for Sunderland's Festivals & Events	Sunderland	Sunderland Culture	£38,088
Building Capacity to Support the Growth and Impact of Summer Streets Festival, Sunderland	Sunderland	Sunderland Music, Arts & Culture Trust	£22,800
Tyneside Promoter Network	Gateshead	The Glasshouse International Centre for Music (North Music Trust)	£33,746
Total			£362,612

The total available funding through the Events & Festivals Capacity Development Fund is £345,000. The above total equates to £362,612 which is £17,612 over the allocation. Early indications suggest there will be a number of underspends through the overall Early Events Programme which will cover the £17,612.

3.1 Internal Appraisal

Fifty-four project proposals were received and assessed by a selection panel and eleven were chosen as successful. The panel assessed each project against requirements set out in a call specification. Consideration was given to the strategic fit of the activities including contributions to regional inclusive economic growth. Each applicant described their project's ability to build on best practice, its potential for growth, its expected outcomes and its alignment to the Regional Visitor Economy Framework. A scoring process was undertaken.

Following the selection panel process, and in line with assurance principles requirements, an independent appraisal was conducted on those selected as successful by the panel. It was determined that projects align to North East CA objectives and support the long-term regional events strategy.

The projects will enable event providers to develop their capacity to deliver impactful events in the region. The applicants describe established structures and teams, Governance arrangements, while demonstrating knowledge and experience that gives confidence in their ability deploy the funding successfully and deliver outcomes.

Finances have been assessed, and budgets appear realistic with relevant costs within eligible expenditure dates. It has been determined that funding will be allocated through Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA). Financial systems will be discussed and confirmed at the Project Initiation Meeting.

All projects are rated Green.

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

3.2 Conclusion

As part of the Early Events Programme, the Capacity Development Fund 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. The Mayor's Office and Communications Team will work on a communications plan to promote and celebrate the projects which receive funding.

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 Capacity Development Fund, part of the Early 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'.

C. Key risks

- Delay in funding approval and commissioning of projects impacting on deliverability and impact.
- Low levels of engagement and participation across projects.
- Inability in 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 Capacity Development Fund is included below:

Funding source	2025/26	Total
North East CA Investment Fund	£345,000	£345,000
Total (£)	£345,000	£345,000

E. Legal implications

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted on this report and has no comments to add.

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.

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.

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' - pages 87-94

[Delegated Decision Report Early Events Programme v1 \(1\).pdf](#) – Delegated Decision Report – Early Priority Events Programme FY 2025/26

[Events & Festivals Capacity Development Fund - Call Specification.pdf](#) – Events & Festivals Capacity Development Fund Open Call Specification

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K. Glossary

CCT&S – Culture, Creative, Tourism and Sport
North East CA – North East Combined Authority
CDF – Capacity Development Fund

L. Consultee

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

Appendix 1 – Summary of Projects to be delivered

The following is a summary of the projects to be delivered through the Capacity Development Fund for FY2025/26:

Ad Gefrin LLP – Yule Gaderung

'Gaderung' - Anglo-Saxon word for Gathering. August this year, Ad Gefrin and Local Heroes 'gathered' together artisans, makers, bakers, chefs, creatives, musicians, storytellers in a modern-day harvest festival to celebrate the beginning of Lammas – a time of thanksgiving marking the harvest of the first grains, ensuring sustenance and prosperity for the winter months ahead. The Capacity Development Fund will allow Ad Gefrin to capitalise on the success and accelerate ambitions to create a 2nd Gaderung in mid-winter, celebrating Yule, from 11th November 2025 activities will build towards the major celebration on weekend 28th-30th November 2025.

Are You Affiliated (AYA) – Live Music Capacity Increase Project

Diversify operations within music venue by undertaking the consultancy, training and marketing required to add the new area of live music promotion to take place alongside our existing activity within electronic music promotion. Activate a Working Men's Club in North Shields as a contemporary electronic music venue space.

Cobalt Studios – 'Culture in Common:' a capacity building model to develop equity and growth through local / regional partnership development and visitor framework alignment

To strengthen capacity in marketing, delivery and evaluation to secure long-term resilience for one of the region's most distinctive grassroots venues. Introduce new audience development and membership strategies & deliver specialist staff training. These activities will increase attendance, widen access for sanctuary seekers and local residents, and grow Newcastle's profile in the national visitor economy.

Helix Arts – Make It Happen Playful Pavements

Helix Arts' - deliver the established Make it Happen (MIH) capacity building programme to sustain the potential for Playful Pavements events on the Meadowwell. MIH is a real-world training programme that empower communities, providing skills and training for Playful Pavements events in future. Useful stuff events would be offered as a masterclass strand of artists' support.

Karbon Homes – The Community Marketplace

Stanley - street food & culture markets. Scale-up market events into a local growth incubator that integrates food traders, artists, and VCSE organisations into a mutually reinforcing cultural economy. The result of the work will be a replicable, not-for-profit model of placemaking through culture — a model where Stanley is not a bystander but a driver of its own regeneration, powered by grassroots enterprise and creativity.

Moving Art Management – Triple Threat: Building Capacity, Breaking Boundaries

Building on the success of Triple Threat, originally commissioned for Newcastle City Council's NOVUM Festival 2024 and now supported by ACE, proposing a multi-strand development programme for the leadership team. Rooted in arts, culture, the programme will provide dance-specific mentoring and arts management training to expand the event's reach and national profile. It will also strengthen event management processes and overall offer with targeted training for local freelancers, developing skills in event organisation and production.

Moving Parts Arts CIO – Winds of Connection: Newcastle Puppetry Festival 2026

The proposal seeks to considerably develop the capacity of Moving Parts Arts CIO (MPA) ahead of the 7th edition of the award-winning Newcastle Puppetry Festival. The project will invest in and explore the growth of MPA's strategies within marketing & audience development, evaluation, staff training, fundraising, financial management, income generation, and production value. It will enable the first 'International Puppet Festival Delegates' programme to be hosted in the North East of England through partnership with 5 festivals in Scotland, Slovenia, Germany, Norway and Finland to create new connections, international collaborations and explore new income streams.

Northumberland Football Association – Female Football Big Weekend 2026

A three-day Female Football Big Weekend, incorporating International Women's Day on Sunday 8 March, promoting, celebrating, and increasing participation in the women and girl's game. This would include free referee training; a female coaching event to upskill volunteers; a competition day featuring 5 County Cup final matches and a day of recreational football, giving new participants the opportunity to try the game, alongside a Wildcats festival for girls aged 5-11 years of age.

Sunderland Culture – Culture Champions: Regenerative Volunteering for Sunderland's Festivals and Events

Culture Champions is a strategic volunteering programme led by Sunderland Culture in partnership with Culture House Sunderland, Foundation of Light and Sunderland BID. Launched in the wake of the Women's Rugby World Cup, this inclusive programme is designed to develop recruit, train and resource a new cohort of volunteers to act as city-ambassadors across a year-round calendar of events including sport, music and heritage. The scheme will deliver long-term benefits for Sunderland's communities, cultural sector, and visitor economy and aligns with the North East Regenerative Visitor economy and the North East Mayor's vision for a Greener, Fairer region.

Sunderland Music, Arts & Culture Trust – Building Capacity to Support the Growth and Impact of Summer Streets Festival, Sunderland

Summer Streets Festival is an annual two-day outdoor event held in Sunderland with a strong reputation for high-quality music and arts programming, engaging new audiences and partnership working. There is opportunity to grow and develop the festival to strengthen its reach, engagement, and impact. The project seeks to increase marketing, fundraising and programming capacity to build the scale, reach and creative ambition for Summer Streets in 2026 and beyond.

The Glasshouse International Centre for Music (North Music Trust) – Tyneside Promoter Network

The Tyneside Promoter Network (grassroots music businesses) will be set up independently (outside of The Glasshouse and Generator), access central fundraising support, live music industry expertise and create a North East 'grassroots story' showreel.