

Title: Events and Participation Programme 2026-2029
Report of: Phil Witcherley, Director of Economic Growth and Innovation
Portfolio: Home to a Growing and Vibrant Economy

Report Summary

The Events and Participation Programme 2026-2029 is a three-year regional programme designed to strengthen the North East's events portfolio, increase participation in culture and sport, and deliver social, economic and wellbeing benefits across the region. The programme comprises an £11m Events Investment Programme and a £2m Sport and Cultural Participation Programme, supporting a balanced portfolio of major, signature and grassroots events alongside targeted participation activity.

The total programme value is £27.3m, including £13m investment from the North East MSA and £14.3m of public and private sector leverage, supporting delivery of the Events and Participation Investment Plan endorsed by Cabinet on 17 March 2026. Of the £13m allocation, £3,602,210 has already been approved through previous delegated decisions, and this report seeks approval for the remaining £9,397,790 required to deliver the full programme.

The programme is expected to deliver up to 300 cultural, tourism and sporting events, attract 2 million attendees, reach 1 million people, support 300,000 residents through direct interventions, enable 50,000 residents to report improved health and wellbeing, and support 1,000 residents into volunteering by March 2029.

The proposal aligns with the North East MSA Corporate Plan, Local Growth Plan, the upcoming Mayor's Culture, Creative Industries and Sport Framework and Mayoral priorities by boosting the visitor economy, strengthening the region's cultural and sporting offer, increasing participation, reducing inequalities and enhancing pride in place. The programme has been appraised, and this highlights strategic alignment to Mayoral Strategic Authority objectives and is, deliverable and good value for money.

Recommendations

The Chief Executive is recommended:

- To approve the award of a total of £9,397,790 of North East MSA Investment Fund to deliver the remaining elements of the Events and Participation Programme 2026-2029, noting that £3,602,210 has already been approved through delegated decisions to support early programme commitments.
- To approve the allocation of £1,750,080 of the £9,397,790 North East MSA Investment Fund referred to above to the specific projects set out in Appendix 1 of the report.
- To authorise the Director of Finance and Investment and Monitoring Officer to prepare the necessary documentation and enter into funding agreements with successful applicants and/or delivery organisations, subject to completion of due diligence, subsidy control assessment, and compliance with the North East MSA Assurance Framework.

A. Summary of Investment Proposal (Context)

The programme comprises an £11m events investment programme and a £2m sport and cultural participation programme, with delivery across all seven local authority areas. The total programme value is £27,328,837, including £13,000,000 from the North East MSA Investment Fund and £14,328,837 in public/private sector leverage.

The programme will be delivered through a phased approach. Year 1 will focus on mobilisation, establishing governance, confirming the initial event pipeline and delivering an initial wave of events and participation activity. Years 2 and 3 will focus on scaling delivery through a wider open call, strengthening the long-term regional events pipeline, embedding sustainable event practices, and maximising social, economic and wellbeing impact.

The Year 1 programme has been developed from proposals submitted by local authority partners and external organisations through the initial call for activity. The full Year 1 programme is included at Appendix 1 and should remain as an appendix rather than being reproduced in full in the body of this report.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Events and Participation Programme 2026-2029 has been developed in response to clear evidence of need, including independent analysis identifying fragmentation in the region's events landscape, underinvestment, and persistent inequalities in participation in culture and sport. Public intervention is required to strengthen the events pipeline, widen access to participation opportunities, and secure associated economic, social and wellbeing benefits.
- 1.2 The programme forms a key delivery mechanism for the Mayor's Culture, Creative Industries and Sport Strategic Framework and the Events and Participation Investment Plan, which was endorsed by Cabinet on 17 March 2026. This provides the strategic mandate for programme development and appraisal through the North East MSA Assurance Framework.
- 1.3 The programme supports the North East MSA's strategic priorities by boosting the visitor economy, improving resident wellbeing through increased participation in sport and culture, reducing inequalities by targeting underserved communities, embedding sustainability in event delivery, and strengthening collaboration across local authorities and regional partners.
- 1.4 The programme builds on the Early Priority Events Programme 2025/26 and proposes a three-year portfolio of major, signature and grassroots events, alongside cultural, sporting and volunteering activities. The appraisal has confirmed strategic alignment, value for money and deliverability, with the proposal rated GREEN overall.
- 1.5 The programme comprises two complementary strands: an £11m Events Investment Programme and a £2m Sport and Cultural Participation Programme. Together, these strands are intended to deliver shared outputs and outcomes across economic growth, participation, health and wellbeing, volunteering and community benefit.
- 1.6 The Events Investment Programme will support a balanced portfolio of major, signature and grassroots/growth events. This approach reflects independent recommendations for a tiered investment model that supports nationally significant events, recurring regionally distinctive programmes and locally driven grassroots activity.

- 1.7 The Sport and Cultural Participation Programme will support targeted activity to widen access to sport, culture and heritage, particularly for children, young people, under-represented communities and residents in participation “cold spot” geographies. This strand is intended to ensure that the benefits of major sporting and cultural moments translate into longer-term participation and community impact.
- 1.8 A phased delivery model will be adopted. Year 1 will use a targeted pipeline to enable early delivery and maintain momentum, while Years 2 and 3 will transition to a wider open call and competitive process to support a transparent, strategic and outcomes-focused pipeline.
- 1.9 Programme delivery will be managed by the North East MSA Culture, Creative Industries and Sport (CCIS) Team, supported by corporate functions including Finance, Procurement, Legal and Evaluation. Governance and oversight arrangements will ensure alignment with the Single Assurance Framework, performance management requirements and benefits realisation.
- 1.10 The programme will be subject to external evaluation across the three-year period, with an indicative budget of £90,000. The evaluation will assess delivery, outputs, outcomes and value for money, and will be informed by learning from the Early Priority Events Programme 2025/26.

2. The Investment Proposal

- 2.1 The Events and Participation Programme proposes a three-year regional investment programme of major, signature and grassroots events, alongside targeted cultural, sporting and volunteering activity. The programme is designed to increase participation, strengthen the visitor economy, improve wellbeing, support local supply chains and enhance the region’s profile.
- 2.2 The total programme value is £27,328,837. This comprises £13,000,000 from the North East MSA Investment Fund and £14,328,837 in public/private sector leverage. The North East MSA funding profile is £2,918,199 in 2026/27, £4,700,000 in 2027/28 and £5,381,801 in 2028/29.
- 2.3 Of the £13m North East MSA allocation, £3,602,210 has already been approved through delegated decisions to support early programme commitments, including UEFA EURO 2028, BBC Radio 1’s Big Weekend, Mouth of the Tyne Festival, Durham Miners’ Gala and Newcastle Pride. This report therefore seeks approval for the remaining £9,397,790 required to deliver the full programme.
- 2.4 The Year 1 programme has been developed from proposals submitted by local authority partners and external organisations through the initial call for activity. It provides a transparent starting portfolio of cultural, sporting and participation activity across the North East for 2026/27, while recognising that the initial pipeline reflects the timing and nature of partner submissions rather than a full optimised strategic portfolio. The full programme, including funded events, participation projects and indicative allocations, is set out in Appendix 1.
- 2.5 To support fairness across geographies and themes, a cap of £100,000 has been applied to individual events in Year 1. This supports a broader distribution of investment while enabling the North East MSA to undertake further strategic development work to shape a more balanced, competitive and outcomes-focused programme for Years 2 and 3.
- 2.6 For Years 2 and 3, the programme will move towards a wider open call. Proposals will be assessed against criteria including distinctive regional identity, home-grown development, alignment with what the North East seeks to be known for, scalability and longevity, inclusive economic and social impact, geographic reach, additionality, value for money, match funding and portfolio balance.

- 2.7 The programme will not routinely fund the same event on multiple occasions unless the event is home-grown, has strong legacy potential, or can clearly evidence ongoing regional benefit and diminishing reliance on public subsidy. This approach is intended to support a sustainable and diverse events pipeline and spread benefits across the region.
- 2.8 The full Year 1 Events and Participation Programme is included at Appendix 1. This appendix should be retained as the detailed schedule, with the body of the report providing only a concise summary of the approach, rationale and approval requirements.

3. Outputs and Outcomes

These outputs are indicative, particularly the profile across the years – which may change depending on events put forward for consideration.

Outputs	26/27	27/28	28/29	Total
Number of cultural, tourism and sporting events	100	100	100	300
Number of attendees	667,000	667,000	666,000	2,000,000
Number of people reached	332,000	332,000	336,000	1,000,000
Number of residents receiving direct intervention	100,000	100,000	100,000	300,000

	Time for achievement	Total
Number of residents reporting improved perceived health and wellbeing	31/03/2029	50,000
Number of residents supported into volunteering	31/03/2029	1,000
First-time participants continuing activity after event engagement	31/03/2029	90,000
Participation growth in 'cold spot' geographies	31/03/2029	12,000
Reduction in participation inequalities	31/03/2029	*5-8% reduction (=1 percentage point)

**Represents a relative reduction in the participation gap between under-represented areas and the regional average, equivalent to c. 1 percentage point over the programme period.*

4. Timetable for Implementation

Milestone	Forecast Date
Indicative 'Year 1' Events and Sports Participation pipeline received from LA partners and external organisations	22/04/2026
Assessment of 'Year 1' Events and Sports Participation proposals	19/05/2026
Present 'Year 1' Events and Sports Participation paper to SLT for approval	03/06/2026
Events and Sports Participation paper approved at SLT to develop business cases	June 2026
LA's and external organisations to develop business cases	June 2026
Appraisal of 'Year 1' Events and Sports Participation projects	July 2026
Develop programme-level Evaluation specification and launch 'Open Call / Tender Opportunity'	August – September 2026
Issue GFA's to Recipients/Deliverers for 'Year 1'	August – September 2026
Project Initiation Meetings (PIM) for 'Year 1'	September 2026

Deadline for Evaluation submissions / Assessment / Contract	September 2026
Develop Specification for Wider Programme 'Years 2 & 3' and Launch Open Call	September 2026
Deadline for Wider Programme 'Years 2 & 3' / Assessment of EOI's	October – November 2026
Successful EOI's to develop Business Cases 'Years 2 & 3'	November – December 2026
Appraisal of Business Cases 'Years 2 & 3'	December 2026 – January 2027
Issue GFA's to Recipients/Deliverers for 'Years 2 & 3'	Spring 2027
Project Initiation Meetings (PIM) 'Years 2 & 3'	Spring 2027
Ongoing Events, Sport and Cultural Participation activities	Ongoing

5. Evaluation

- 5.1 The North East MSA will commission an external evaluation of the Events & Participation Programme, with an indicative budget of £90,000 allocated for this activity. A specification will be developed by the CCIS Team, with input from the North East MSA Evaluation and Procurement Teams, ensuring alignment with the programme's outcomes framework, delivery plan and monitoring requirements.

The evaluation approach will build on the learning from the Early Priority Events Programme (2025/26). The final evaluation report from MEL Research, received on 12 June 2026, will directly inform the scope, methodology and indicators included in the new evaluation tender. This ensures continuity, comparability and a clear evidence base for assessing programme-level impact.

Monitoring and evaluation will be integrated into all funded projects through clear KPIs, quarterly reporting, and standardised data collection templates. The external evaluator will assess delivery, outcomes and value for money across all three years, working alongside the North East MSA's Evaluation Team to ensure consistency with wider organisational evaluation standards. The CCIS Team will manage the contract and oversee delivery of the final evaluation report.

6. Appraisal

- 6.1 The appraisal of the business case provided by the applicant has been assessed and is rated GREEN on all aspects.

Overall RAG assessment		
Risk Rating	The Strategic Case	GREEN
	The Economic Case	GREEN
	The Commercial Case	GREEN
	The Financial Case	GREEN
	The Management Case	GREEN
	Overall Rating	GREEN
Overall RAG assessment		

Appraisal Summary – Events and Participation Programme 2026-2029

The Events and Participation Programme 2026-2029 is aligned with the North East MSA's strategic priorities, including the Corporate Plan, Local Growth Plan and Mayoral objectives. The programme will support a balanced portfolio of Major, Signature and Grassroots events, alongside cultural and sporting participation activity, to delivery economic, social and wellbeing benefits across the region.

The appraisal concluded that the proposal demonstrates a clear strategic fit, defined outputs and outcomes, and an approach that is informed by stakeholder engagement, evidence of demand, benchmarking and previous programme delivery.

Appropriate governance, monitoring, evaluation and risk management arrangements are proposed to support delivery and oversight of the programme. Having considered the Strategic, Economic, Commercial, Financial and Management Cases, the appraisal concluded that the proposal is deliverable, represents acceptable value for money and achieved an overall GREEN rating. A condition is included that no external contracts may be awarded until the necessary funding approvals have been secured.

6.2 Recommended Conditions of Funding

No external contracts to be awarded until funding is approved. Projects to be assessed for compliance with subsidy control requirements on a case by case basis and suitable compliance confirmed.

B. Potential Impact on North East Mayoral Strategic Authority Objectives

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

The Events and Participation Programme 2026-2029 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 Events and Participation Programme 2026-2029 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

A full risk register is included in the business case. High-level risks comprise:

- **Events not delivering expected outcomes or impact** (e.g., lower attendance, reduced participation, weaker economic or social value). **Mitigation:** robust appraisal of individual business cases; clear KPI's and monitoring requirements; quarterly claims linked to delivery; independent evaluation to verify outcomes.
- **Reputational risk** if funded events are poor quality, poor value for money, or fail to meet public expectations. **Mitigation:** strong Strategic Fit assessment, quality-based scoring; due diligence on delivery partners; clear branding and communication protocols; ongoing performance monitoring.
- **Delivery delays**, including risks that individual business cases are not completed in time or that retrospective funding requests arise. **Mitigation:** clear programme timetable; early engagement with applicants; standardized business case templates; proactive programme management; no retrospective funding permitted except in exceptional, pre-approved circumstances.
- **Financial risk**, including securing the full £13m revenue allocation and managing inflationary pressures. **Mitigation:** realistic cost assumptions; phased budget allocation; regular financial monitoring (quarterly along with PAT team); early escalation of variances.
- **Operational risks**, such as supply chain pressures; staffing shortages; or event-specific logistical issues. **Mitigation:** use of experienced delivery partners; procurement compliance; contingency planning within individual event budgets; cross-authority coordination.

D. Corporate Implications

D1. Financial and other resources implications

The financial profile for the project/programme is included below.

Funding Sources	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Total
North East MSA Investment Fund (£)	£2,918,199	£4,700,000	£5,381,801	£13,000,000
Private Public Sector Leverage (£)	£12,328,837	£1,000,000	£1,000,000	£14,328,837
Total (£)	£15,247,036	£5,700,000	£6,381,801	£27,328,837

Status of match funding:

Match funding of £12,545,361 has been confirmed through the early commitments to UEFA EURO 2028, BBC Radio 1's Big Weekend, Mouth of the Tyne Festival and Durham Miners' Gala. The remaining match funding identified within the programme is currently unconfirmed and will be secured through ongoing engagement with delivery partners, event organisers and local authorities as individual projects are developed. This approach is consistent with the programme-level design, where match funding is expected to be confirmed at project approval stage rather than upfront at programme approval.

Funding availability:

Funding for the Events and Participation Programme is available from the North East MSA Investment Fund, with £13m identified within the approved Investment Plan for delivery over the period 2026-2029. Of this, £3,602,210 has already been allocated through delegated decisions to support early programme commitments, and the remaining £9,397,790 is available for consideration by the Finance and Investment Board as part of this recommendation request.

Programme Flexibility: The North East MSA will retain flexibility to reprofile funding between programme strands and financial years as delivery evolves, ensuring resources can be directed to the highest-value opportunities and programme priorities, subject to appropriate approvals.

Resources:

Delivery of the Events and Participation Programme will be managed within existing North East MSA staffing resources. Programme oversight, commissioning and monitoring will be led by the CCIS Team, supported by corporate functions including Finance, Procurement and Evaluation.

D2. Legal implications

The comments of the representative of the Monitoring Officer have been included in this report.

D3. Equalities implications

The North East MSA complies with 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 will be undertaken for the project and the implications of this will be considered in the project mobilisation and delivery stages.

D4. Consultation and engagement

Consultation and engagement have included the CCIS Advisory Group, LA CCIS Strategy Group, CCIS Portfolio Holder, Mayor's Office, North East MSA Senior Leadership Team, local authority partners and regional sector stakeholders. The programme has also been informed by the development of the long-term regional events strategy and engagement with cultural, sporting and visitor economy partners. Ongoing engagement will continue through programme governance, local authority networks, sector forums and funded project monitoring arrangements.

E. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Events and Participation Programme Year 1

F. Background papers

G. Contact officers

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H. Glossary

EPP	Events and Participation Programme
North East MSA	North East Mayoral Strategic Authority
CCIS	Culture, Creative Industries and Sport
TOG	Technical Officers Group
FIB	Finance and Investment Board
SAF	Safer Assurance Framework
PAT	Programme Assurance Team
LA	Local Authority
SLT	Senior Leadership Team

Appendix 1

EVENTS & PARTICIPATION PROGRAMME 2026-2029 – YEAR 1

***Note:** Appendix 1 provides a full Year 1 Events and Participation Programme portfolio. This includes projects previously approved through delegated decisions (see *), together with the projects proposed for approval through this report. Previously approved projects account for £3,602,210 of the £13m programme allocation and are included for completeness and transparency.

EVENT	ORGANISATION	FUNDING	DATE(S)	AREA
* UEFA EURO 2028 (Year 1-3)	Newcastle City Council	£2,937,210	2026-2029	Region Wide
* BBC Radio 1 Big Weekend	Sunderland City Council	£495,000	22/05/2026 – 24/05/2026	Sunderland
* Mouth of the Tyne Festival	North Tyneside Council	£80,000	09/07/2026 – 12/07/2026	North Tyneside
* Durham Miners' Gala	Friends of the Durham Miners' Gala	£50,000	11/07/2026	Durham
* Newcastle Pride	Curious Arts	£40,000	25/07/2026 – 26/07/2026	Newcastle
		£3,602,210		
BBC Proms	The Glasshouse ICM	£70,000	24/07/2026 – 25/07/2026	Gateshead
Ouseburn Festival	Ouseburn Trust	£7,150	04/07/2026	Newcastle
Durham City Runs	Events of the North	£5,000	16/07/2026	Durham
NEXT Big Thing	South Tyneside Council	£35,930	July – August 2026	South Tyneside
High-Profile Film Premieres – Tyneside Cinema	Tyneside Cinema	£20,000	July – November 2026	Newcastle
Novum Summer Festival	Newcastle City Council	£100,000	07/08/2026 – 09/08/2026	Newcastle
Cyclone Festival	Cyclone Festival of Cycling	£12,000	09/08/2026	Newcastle / Northumberland
404 Festival	404 International Festival of Art & Technology	£30,000	27/08/2026 – 02/09/2026	Newcastle / Gateshead / Sunderland
Great North Run	The Great Run Company	£100,000	11/09/2026 – 13/09/2026	Gateshead / Newcastle / South Tyneside
Creative Places: <i>Saltwell Park World Food and Culture</i>	Gateshead Council	£25,000	July 2026 – March 2027	Gateshead
Creative Places: <i>Baltic Square Activation</i>		£30,000		
Creative Places: <i>Sculpture Festival</i>		£25,000		
Creative Places: <i>Christmas in Gateshead</i>		£50,000		
Creative Places: <i>SHAPE Youth Festival</i>		£30,000		
Creative Places: <i>Holi Festival of Colours</i>		£20,000		
Creative Places: <i>Gateshead Community Event Fund</i>		£22,000		
Northumberland News: <i>Lighthouse 200</i>		£30,000		

Northumberland News: <i>Alnwick Outdoor Performance Space</i>	Northumberland County Council	£15,000	July 2026 – March 2027	Northumberland
Northumberland News: <i>2027 Dark Skies Festival</i>		£40,000		
Northumberland News: <i>Made in the Tyne Valley</i>		£45,000		
Northumberland News: <i>Hadrian's Wall 40</i>		£50,000		
Northumberland News: <i>Woodhorn Museum 20</i>		£35,000		
Sunderland Stages: Blends	Sunderland City Council	£80,000	July 2026 – March 2027	Sunderland
North Shields 801	North Tyneside Council	£60,000	July 2026 – March 2027	North Tyneside
Space Week Sunderland	Sunderland City Council	£30,000	September / October 2026	Sunderland
Durham Book Festival	Durham County Council	£100,000	09/10/2026	Durham
Hogmanhoway 5K	Events of the North	£15,000	31/12/2026	Newcastle
Enchanted City	Newcastle City Council	£100,000	Winter 2026/27	Newcastle
Paint & Piano	Sunday for Sammy	£15,000	05/03/2027	Region wide
Durham Day	Durham County Council	£20,000	27/03/2027	Durham
SPORTS PARTICIPATION	ORGANISATION	FUNDING	DATE(S)	AREA
Together Through Sport	NE Sporting Foundations	£150,000	July 2026 – March 2027	Region wide
Great North Run Participation Programme	The Great Run Company	£300,000	July 2026 – March 2027	Region wide
Sport Newcastle – Participation through Sport Newcastle 60 th Anniversary	Sport Newcastle	£83,000	July 2026 – March 2027	Region wide
		£1,750,080		