



Title of Report:	Limavady Town of Culture 2028 Expression of Interest Application
Committee Report Submitted To:	Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	21 April 2026
For Information	For Information
To be discussed in Committee	NO

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Local Economy. Healthy and Engaged Communities
Outcome	Cohesive and stable communities which work collaboratively with a range of stakeholders to address issues and deliver on opportunities
Lead Officer	Head of Community & Culture

Estimated Timescale for Completion	
Date to be Completed	

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	Nil (SIB funded EOI)
Included in Current Year Estimates	No
Capital/Revenue	Revenue
Code	
Staffing Costs	Staff time for EOI included within current annual budget – next stage to be confirmed

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	No
Legal Opinion Obtained	No

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to inform Members that Council has submitted an Expression of Interest (EOI) to the UK Government’s UK Town of Culture 2028 competition, with Limavady proposed as the host town, and to outline the context, content and strategic significance of the submission.

2.0 Background

2.1 The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has launched the inaugural UK Town of Culture competition to recognise towns that demonstrate the transformative role of culture in regeneration, identity and participation. The programme builds on the legacy of UK City of Culture, extending opportunity to smaller places.

2.2 The EOI stage required a concise submission aligned to the competition criteria by 31 March 2026. In the event of a high volume of applications, the “Your Story” section will inform any initial sift. Shortlisted bidders will receive up to £60,000 to develop a full application.

3.0 Proposed Bid Area

3.1 The submission proposes Limavady as the UK Town of Culture 2028. With a population of 11,729 (Census 2021), it meets the small-town criteria. While located within a strong tourism region, Limavady has not fully realised associated cultural and economic benefits, presenting an opportunity for culture-led regeneration.

4.0 Strategic Vision

4.1 Vision and Narrative

The Expression of Interest is underpinned by a distinctive vision centred on the concept of a “Convention of Culture”, inspired by the historic Convention of Drumceatt. This concept positions Limavady as a place where culture is not only celebrated but actively applied as a mechanism to address contemporary social challenges and stimulate innovation.

The submission articulates Limavady’s story as one shaped by landscape, heritage, migration, creativity and connection. It draws on a rich cultural narrative that includes ancient history such as the Brighter Hoard, strong literary and musical associations including links to the global song “Danny Boy” and the John Steinbeck Festival, and a vibrant contemporary cultural scene led by assets such as the Stendhal Festival.

Central to the vision is the idea of “cultural gravity”, whereby increased cultural activity and confidence will attract people, investment and opportunity to the town. The programme is intended not only to deliver local impact but also to contribute to national conversations around the role of culture in addressing issues such as wellbeing, inequality, and social cohesion.

4.2 Local Needs and Strategic Alignment

The submission recognises key challenges including town centre sustainability and growth, youth migration, deprivation and educational disadvantage, alongside gaps in cultural participation and the need to strengthen community cohesion.

The programme aligns with existing strategies including the Community Plan, Town Centre Masterplan, Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plan and educational initiatives, ensuring strong strategic fit.

4.3 Community Engagement and Empowerment

The EOI has been informed by engagement with the Limavady Town Centre Forum and cross-council collaboration. Ongoing consultation on arts and community services will further inform the bid, should council be shortlisted.

A strong emphasis is placed on co-design and community ownership, with the “Convention of Culture” acting as a mechanism for continued engagement with residents, stakeholders and young people.

5.0 Culture for Everyone

5.1 Quality, Innovation and Infrastructure

The bid demonstrates that Limavady has a solid foundation of cultural and heritage infrastructure upon which to build a high-quality and innovative programme. This includes Roe Valley Arts and Cultural Centre as a central hub, alongside established festivals such as Stendhal and the John Steinbeck Festival, heritage sites including Limavady Museum and the Workhouse, and strong links to education providers.

The programme will connect and enhance these assets through a coordinated approach, combining large-scale events with community-based activity. It will also introduce temporary and experimental infrastructure, such as outdoor stages and digital installations, to extend cultural activity into public spaces and rural areas. A key feature will be the integration of skills development and training opportunities, particularly for young people, linking cultural participation with future employment pathways.

5.2 Opportunity and Impact

The proposed programme is designed to create meaningful opportunities for local people, particularly young people, by embedding learning, skills development and career awareness within cultural activity. It will support collaboration between schools, further education providers and the creative sector, enabling participants to engage as creators, performers and organisers.

In addition to economic and educational benefits, the programme aims to strengthen community cohesion by creating shared cultural experiences that bring together people from different backgrounds and traditions. Through widespread participation and co design, it is anticipated that the programme will build confidence, increase volunteerism and strengthen local networks, leaving a lasting legacy beyond 2028.

5.3 Accessibility and Inclusion

Accessibility is central to the programme, addressing physical, financial, cultural and digital barriers. It will ensure inclusive participation across all communities, supported by accessible venues, targeted outreach and digital engagement.

This approach aligns with relevant policy frameworks and will be informed by ongoing feedback.

5.4 Communication and Profile

The communications approach will build a strong narrative for Limavady, using digital platforms, media and community networks, with young people involved in content creation.

It will also target visitors already in the wider Causeway Coast region and engage the diaspora, ensuring both local visibility and wider reach.

6.0 Delivery and Governance

6.1 Partnerships and Collaboration

Delivery will be based on a strong partnership model combining local knowledge with regional and national expertise. Existing relationships with cultural organisations, education providers and community groups will underpin delivery, with additional partners secured as required.

Partnerships will be inclusive and representative of the local population.

6.2 Financial Overview

The total programme cost is estimated at £3.75 million, with £3 million anticipated from the UK Town of Culture award and £750,000 from additional sources including Council investment, public funding, sponsorship and in-kind support.

If shortlisted, the £60,000 development grant will support further engagement, programme development and preparation of the full application.

6.3 Monitoring, Evaluation and Legacy

A monitoring and evaluation framework will measure outcomes across participation, skills, cohesion, cultural profile and sustainability. Existing Council processes will be enhanced to include both quantitative and qualitative measures.

The programme will align with the Northern Ireland Programme for Government Framework and aims to deliver a lasting legacy through strengthened infrastructure, partnerships and a replicable model for culture-led regeneration.

7.0 Timeframes and Decision Points

7.1 Shortlisted towns are expected to be announced in Spring 2026. At this stage, councils confirm whether to proceed to the full application, allocate necessary resources, and access £60,000 in development funding to support bid preparation. The full application stage runs from Spring through to Autumn 2026 (exact dates to be confirmed by DCMS, during which councils finalise delivery models, programme themes, budgets, and secure formal internal approval for submission.

7.2 Assessment, including panel visits and presentations, is expected in Autumn 2026. The panel will visit the shortlisted places, who will be invited to present to the panel and engage in detailed discussions about their plans. The overall winner and finalists are anticipated to be announced in early 2027. Successful towns move immediately into the delivery phase, with the programme taking place in 2028, while runner-up towns may receive £250,000 to support legacy projects.

7.3 Overall, the process spans approximately one year from EOI submission to final announcement, with critical internal decision points at EOI submission, shortlist confirmation, and full bid approval.

8.0 Conclusion

8.1 The submission of this Expression of Interest represents a significant strategic opportunity for Limavady and the wider Borough. It positions the town as a place of cultural ambition and innovation, capable of delivering meaningful social and economic impact through culture.

8.2 Regardless of the outcome, the process, should the bid be shortlisted, of developing the bid is expected to deliver benefits in terms of partnership working, community engagement and strategic alignment. If successful, the opportunity to progress to full application stage would provide further momentum and resources to realise this vision.

9.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that Members note the submission of the Expression of Interest for UK Town of Culture 2028 and support continued development of the bid should the Council be shortlisted.