

UNBOXED 2022 Festival

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

This report sets out information about the UNBOXED 2022 Festival, which is taking place between March and September this year.

Is this report confidential? Yes ☐ No ☒

Recommendation/s

That the Board note the direction of travel for the festival and LGA officers' work with the DCMS team so far.

Action/s

Officers to develop a webinar event with the UNBOXED team to share information about the festival with a wider council audience.

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Background

1. UNBOXED 2022 is a large-scale creativity and innovation festival scheduled to take place around the United Kingdom between March and October 2022. The programme was first proposed in 2018 by then prime minister Theresa May following the UK's exit from the European Union and was subsequently given the green light by Boris Johnson.
2. It is headed by Sir Martin Green CBE, who previously organised the opening and closing ceremonies of the London 2012 Olympics and Hull UK City of Culture 2017.
3. An open call for ideas was launched in 2020. Around 3,000 organisations, freelancers and other creatives applied to take part in the research and development programme, and the festival team eventually received and assessed 299 submissions.
4. In November 2020, 30 creative teams were shortlisted by representatives of the festival team and the delivery bodies for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, with input from a group of creative advisors, to take part in a funded R&D project.
5. In March 2021, six UK-wide teams, plus one each for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales were commissioned to take forward their ideas for UNBOXED.

The Commissions

6. The final project features ten creative projects designed for the festival, which include hundreds of events, experiences and activities both live and online. All events in the programme will be free.
7. Each of the ten successful project teams are multi-disciplinary, bringing together collaborations between science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics. The ten commissioned teams include scientists, musicians, designers, technologists, engineers, writers and architects.
8. The titles of the ten projects are:
 - 8.1 **About Us:** open-air event that combines live shows and multimedia installations exploring our connections to our planet and everything around us. The show will be projected at night onto landmarks in Caernarfon, Derry-Londonderry, Hull, Luton and Paisley.
 - 8.2 **Dandelion:** a national gardening project based in Scotland and featuring special events, installations and activities during spring and summer building towards harvest.

8.3 **Dream Machine:** Presented in Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh and London, the 21st-century Dreamachine will lead audiences through an immersive environment of light and sound in ‘the first artwork to be experienced with your eyes closed’.

8.4 **GALWAD: a story from our future:** A multiplatform, multilingual story set in a possible future world of 2052 – which will appear on TV, on digital screens and across Wales in September 2022. It takes place over seven days, building to live events in Blaenau Ffestiniog, Merthyr Tydfil and Swansea.

8.5 **Green Space Dark Skies:** a series of mass gatherings celebrating our countryside with special high-tech lights in 20 wild and beautiful places across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

8.6 **Our Place in Space:** Created by artist Oliver Jeffers with scientist Professor Stephen Smartt and creative partners, this sculpture trail will be installed for people to explore in Northern Ireland and Cambridge and will be supplemented with a programme of digital events and learning activities.

8.7 **PoliNations:** Starting with a single large tree structure in Edinburgh, PoliNations will grow into an immersive forest in the heart of Birmingham filled with real and architectural trees, creating an oasis of thousands of plants, grasses and flowers co-planted with the city’s residents.

8.8 **See Monster:** A project working with North Somerset Council to regenerate a decommissioned offshore platform from the North Sea as a garden and showcase for renewable technology.

8.9 **Story Trails:** Each Story Trail project begins in the local library and takes viewers on an augmented and virtual reality experience that remixes the BFI and BBC archives. StoryTrails will take place in Blackpool, Bradford, Bristol, Dumfries, Dundee, Lincoln, London (Lambeth and Lewisham), Newport, Omagh, Sheffield, Slough, Swansea, Swindon and Wolverhampton. It will culminate with a brand new film for the BBC and the BFI by David Olusoga.

8.10 **Tour de Moon:** a two-month festival of performances, installations, interactive experiments and immersive experiences - created by nightlife artists, musicians, writers, scientists, technologists and creative pioneers aged 18-25.

LGA support

9. LGA officers have been engaging with the DCMS team leading on UNBOXED since March, when the ten projects had been selected, but were in an early stage of development. Following a meeting with DCMS officials, we produced a briefing on the role local government could play in facilitating and supporting the programme (Appendix A).

10. We have since met with the team delivering the programme to offer our help in engaging local government in the festival. We have agreed to deliver a shared webinar in the early part of 2022 to ensure council culture teams and portfolio holders are briefed on the contents of the festival.

Implications for inclusion, diversity and equality

11. The [Equal Opportunities, Diversity and Inclusion policy](#) for the festival is available on the UNBOXED 2022 website.

Implications for Wales

12. The festival is taking place across the UK. Six of the ten commissions cover the whole of the UK, while four are uniquely taking place in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England.

Financial Implications

13. None.

Next steps

14. Officers to develop a webinar event with the UNBOXED team to share information about the festival with a wider council audience.

Appendix A: LGA briefing

Briefing: Festival UK 2022 and Local Government

Why are local councils relevant to my project?

Festival UK 2022 represents a once in a generation opportunity to engage communities of all ages in a range of inspirational, collaborative projects, crossing the boundaries between the arts, science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

If successful, it will showcase the creative potential of the UK and demonstrate the central importance of creativity in the future of our nation and our recovery from COVID-19.

Councils are in a good position to support this work. They cover every area of the country, employ 1 million people and provide over 800 different services to local communities. Here are just a few of the ways they may be able to help.

Public engagement: In the past, large-scale cultural and sporting programmes have sometimes been critiqued for being ‘parachuted in’ to a local area, without engaging local people in their objectives. Festival UK 2022 has placed public engagement as a priority for the programme and there is significant potential for it to shape the lives of people across the country. Councils know their communities and have the networks to support Festival teams to find the best ways of reaching them.

Practical considerations: Councils are responsible for the public realm in a local area and issuing licenses for events. With enough notice, they can facilitate events through closing roads, supporting event management and communicating the messages of a project through their networks. Where the ten projects include physical events on the ground, they can help this to run smoothly.

Legacy: Councils and combined authorities are working hard on strategies to help their local businesses, organisations and communities to recover from the impact of COVID-19, including supporting the recovery of the high street, closing the educational attainment gap, addressing the mental health crisis and getting communities active. There is an opportunity for the ten teams to secure their legacy by working with councils to support these objectives and build longer-term ambitions into their projects.

Councils and culture: What do councils actually do?

English councils spend **£2.2 billion on culture and related activity annually**, making them the largest public investor in culture and the arts.

They are responsible for:

- 3,000 libraries
- 350 museums
- 116 theatres

- 27,000 parks and green spaces
- 2,727 leisure centres
- Numerous castles, amusement parks, monuments, historic buildings, heritage sites, open spaces and big screens in town centres.

These spaces host a wide range of creative activities on a day-to-day basis which relate well to the plans for Festival UK 2022, from coding clubs and digital garages in libraries to festivals and installations in parks and open spaces. Councils in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland play a similar role.

These facilities are embedded in local communities and provide a readymade network of potential community engagement opportunities at a local level.

How councils can help

Public engagement and support

Councils have a strong track record of engaging with communities through the work of elected councillors, partnerships with the voluntary sector, their delivery of a wide range of community-facing services and one-off events like local festivals. They are responsible for a significant network of local cultural organisations embedded in communities.

If you engage the relevant council culture teams early on, they may be able to provide wider support for your project.

The level of engagement will differ from one area to the next depending on capacity, but some of the ways a council may be able to amplify your work are as follows:

- Offering advice on how to maximise participation at a local level
- Facilitating contact with local voluntary sector
- Supporting engagement with local cultural services such as libraries, museums and art centres
- Providing links to complementary themed programmes of activity or hosting parallel or complementary events in public spaces or council cultural venues
- Promoting your activities via council communication channels
- Providing new ways of sharing your content, via libraries or big screens, for example
- Facilitating contacts with local suppliers
- Identifying complementary grant schemes where available
- Match funding activity where funding is available and the work aligns well with the council's community objectives.

Practicalities

At a very basic level, councils will have an important role to play in supporting any public events to run smoothly, whether that is through licensing, road closures, health and safety support or the public realm infrastructure that sits around your event.

Councils are very stretched at present as a result of COVID-19 and have to be particularly careful about managing the public health risks of large events. It is always best to engage as early as possible with the relevant council to make sure there is time to iron out any potential barriers ahead of the event.

Some considerations you may want to consider when running any local events include the following:

- **Licensing:** You will need a license from the relevant local council if any of your events include the sale of alcohol, the sale of food after 11pm, or the playing of amplified music
- **Road closures:** if you need to close a road as part of your project you will need to seek permission from the Highways department of your local council. Gov.uk has a [helpful tool for street parties](#) which directs you to your relevant council department via a postcode search
- **Other requirements:** councils may need evidence of public liability insurance and a risk assessment (including COVID-19 mitigation measures) before allowing larger events to go ahead

Legacy

Working with councils to embed your project in a local area could help to secure a longer-term legacy. As we move into recovery from COVID-19, councils are increasingly thinking about the bigger challenges for their community:

- Bringing life back to the high street and managing the issue of empty shops
- Bridging the attainment gap for children who have missed out on formal schooling during the pandemic
- Addressing rising levels of mental ill health and loneliness
- Ensuring local people have the skills they need to find high quality, sustainable work

Culture, creativity and innovation have an important role to play in addressing all these issues. By understanding the particular local concerns of the area in which you are working you may find synergies that allow your project to take on a life beyond 2022.

Questions to consider:

- What will happen to any assets produced by your project after its completion?
- Where will you base your team? Could your location help to support an area that might not typically have access to this sort of work?
- Could your project support regional or local suppliers who might ordinarily struggle to access similar contracts?
- Who will participate in your work and what will happen to them afterwards? Are there routes for those who engage to further creative or learning opportunities in their local area?

If you are planning activity within a combined authority (legal bodies comprising two or more local authorities, often led by a directly elected mayor) area, it will also be worth engaging with them at an early stage. [Combined authorities](#) will not be involved in the practicalities of

event delivery described above, but have strategic influence and will play an important role in establishing long-term recovery plans for the wider region.

Top tips for engaging with a local authority

- **Know your council.** If you have activities taking place in physical locations you can find out which council is responsible for the area by using the [Government's postcode checker](#). In areas with a county and a district council, the district is usually responsible for licensing, while the county may be responsible for most road closures. Counties are responsible for [library services](#) and districts for leisure centres. Combined authorities will have their own websites containing information about their approach to culture.
- **Choose who to contact.** Councils are large organisations and you may need to contact different parts of the council for different requests. If you want to hold a public event as part of your project it will be best to contact the events, parks or communities team in the first instance. If you want to have a broader conversation about how your work connects with the local area you may find it is best to contact the Cabinet Member with responsibility for culture or the Head of Service for culture. Their details will be available on the council website. The LGA is also happy to support conversations and provide introductions.
- **Engage early.** Councils are still extremely busy as a result of their pandemic response, reopening and plans for recovery. The sooner you can get in touch to discuss your project, the more likely it is that you will be able to have a productive conversation.

Other national schemes delivered locally

It may be helpful for some teams to consider existing national schemes which councils support, and which have a significant reach into communities. For example:

- [The Summer Reading Challenge](#) is delivered annually by the Reading Agency in partnership with public libraries. It is the UK's biggest summer reading initiative reaching over 700,000 children with fun reading activities. Open to primary age children, it offers incentives to keep children reading over the long summer break, helping to tackle the holiday reading dip and to embed reading for pleasure as a life skill in formative years. Feedback from parents and carers show that 82 percent believe it has increased their child's reading over the summer.
- [Get Creative](#) is an annual campaign and festival, [supported by the BBC](#) and a group of cultural and environmental organisations from across the UK. It runs over the summer months and shines a light on all the great cultural activity that takes place on a regular basis in local communities. It encourages people to try their hand at something new and creative and aims to give everyone the chance to get actively involved in a creative event in their local area.

About the LGA

The LGA is the national membership body for local authorities and we work on behalf of our member councils to support, promote and improve local government. Our core membership

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Culture, Tourism and Sport Board

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comprises 328 of the 333 councils in England and includes district, county, metropolitan and unitary authorities along with London boroughs and the City of London Corporation. The 22 Welsh unitary councils are in membership via the Welsh Local Government Association.

If you are interested in knowing more about councils' work on culture, please get in touch. We are happy to share examples of best practice and to broker conversations with specific local authorities where appropriate. We also have [case studies and publications on our website](#) illustrating the ways in which councils support creativity, culture and STEAM projects.