

Commission Call Out for Artists: Tameside Northern Lights Lantern Parade

- **Application Deadline: Sunday 31st May 2026 at 5pm**
- **Decisions By: The week beginning 15th June 2026**
- **Commission Budget: £25,000 (excl VAT).**

Introduction to Northern Lights – Tameside’s Winter Celebration

This call out is for the opportunity to provide artistic direction, content and community engagement for the 2026 Northern Lights Lantern Parade – Tameside’s annual winter and festive parade.

The 2026 event will take place on 14th November 2026 in Ashton Town Centre.

The Northern Lights event will include a spectacular community lantern parade, which weaves through the streets accompanied by music and dance. The event will culminate with the parade entering Ashton’s Market Square, which will be programmed with a variety of dance and musical acts during the day, for a traditional Christmas lights switch on event.

The 2025 event attracted roughly 5,000 spectators as well as 1,500 people participating in the parade and accompanying activities.

The aims of the Northern Lights Lantern Parade are:

- To create a spectacular event for residents of Tameside and encourage visitors from other local areas.
- To provide opportunities for residents of Tameside to participate in artistic opportunities with a particular focus on local residents living in economically deprived areas.
- To create opportunities for Greater Manchester artists with a particular focus on Tameside based artists.

Who We Are:

Tameside Council Culture Team form part of the Council's wider Cultural Services' offer and are responsible for Arts and Events provision in Tameside which includes creative community engagement in addition to lifelong learning in the arts. The team also offers heritage, theatre, outdoor arts, creative network and a comprehensive Arts Award Programme, for which it has been recognised nationally. It offers a range of support to many community-based arts groups and to community groups undertaking events. Through partnership working, a wide range of quality arts provision is shared both regionally and nationally.

Funding

This commission has confirmed funding from the Flexible Local Authority Grants.



Above photos from previous Northern Lights celebrations.

The Brief

The parade's theme is **Northern Lights** and the applying organisation should interpret this theme, which will link the parade and main event square, however they see fit. The interpretation of the theme should be happy and uplifting. Previous interpretations have focused on the mythology surrounding the Northern Lights and providing light to the Northern Towns.

The artist will shape the final parade content in partnership with Tameside Culture. The parade must feel full of content including: large puppets, dancers and musicians. Interactive elements would be preferred, and use of existing structures, dance and music acts are welcomed.

The parade must have a community focus with large numbers of people from the local community engaged in creating elements for the parade such as large puppets, music and performing dance pieces. Tameside Culture will help identify which community groups will be engaged in creating elements in the parade to the successful organisation.

Please note the making of individual community lanterns is not included in the scope of this tender—the delivery of these sessions will be awarded separately.

Key Project Dates

- June 2026: Commission is awarded
- July 2026: Research and Development Phase
- August 2026: meet with Tameside Culture and share progress and full production budget.
- September-November 2026: Development and creation of final work, in collaboration with local people and artists
- 14th November 2026: Presentation of final work at the Tameside Northern Lights Lantern Parade.

We are seeking an artist, company or collective who...

- Is based in Greater Manchester (or with connections to artists in Greater Manchester).
- Is working in any art form.
- Is experienced in, and excited to deliver, a public presentation outdoors.
- Is interested in co-developing ideas with residents in Tameside.
- Is able to work alongside residents in a way that is safe, accessible & welcoming.

Connecting with residents in Tameside:

- The commissioned artists will work with residents in a series of workshops in 2026.
- TMBC will support a call-out for a new group of residents to come together in a series of workshops in community spaces, to support the creative development of the commission.
- Artists will be welcome to host a series of weekly workshops, and/or arrange intensive periods- we are open to different methods of engagement that work with your practice.

In this role you will need to...

- Provide striking and memorable artistic content for the Northern Lights Lantern Parade. Content must include but is not limited to:
 - Large structural lanterns/ puppets
 - Dance
 - Music
- Prepare and deliver workshops with identified community groups to co-create the new artistic elements. The artists delivering this element must have experience of leading enjoyable and engaging workshops, which are suitable for people of different ages, backgrounds and abilities.
- Provide all materials needed for the workshops.
- Provide staffing for all elements of the creative content they create and supply.

- The lead artist must accompany and represent their creative content in the parade as artistic lead; as well as take a lead role in assembling the parade and ensuring that everyone is present and in the correct place.
- Consider the weather when developing creative content as the parade takes place outdoors in November.
- Have regular catch ups with the producing partner: Tameside Culture
- Provide Tameside Culture with all necessary documentation including proof of public liability insurance (£10million minimum) and provide detailed risk assessments for all community engagement activity.
- Budget for all expenses incurred to deliver the project including storage and transport of all elements included in the parade.
- Provide high quality photos from community sessions for promotional use.
- Provide blog content in order to promote the Northern Lights events.
- Collaborate with other artists delivering small-scale commissions as part of the overall event, to ensure a cohesive range of content across the event.

The artist will retain all rights over the commissioned content.

Tameside Culture's role

- Tameside Culture will collaborate with you on all logistical elements of the event and parade and hold overall responsibility for the parade.
- To oversee and be responsible for the production of the Event Management Plan for the event.
- To coordinate relevant legal requirements i.e. road closures.
- To coordinate with relevant authorities to ensure public safety of the event and provide comprehensive stewarding.
- To be responsible for the promotion and marketing of the event.
- To coordinate lantern making sessions with the general public, community groups and school across the borough.
- To help identify and confirm community groups and schools to be involved in the community workshops.
- To co-ordinate and arrange other unrelated elements.

Submitting an application

We are using a one-stage application process to streamline the opportunity and ensure it remains accessible.

To apply, please submit your application in your chosen format by **Sunday 31st May, 5pm**. You can submit your application in one of the following formats:

- Written Application (Word or PDF)- max 3 A4 pages (excluding links to examples of work).

- Easy Read Application- format as needed to meet accessibility requirements

(guidance available upon request).

- Audio Submission (MP3 or WAV)– max 6 minutes.
- Video Submission (MP4 or AVI)– max 6 minutes.

Your Application Should Include:

1. **Relevant Experience:** A brief artist bio or company overview, showcasing your past experience, particularly with co-created, community-based projects or work delivered outdoors.
2. **Examples of Work:** Links to 2-3 examples of your work, especially highlighting projects involving community engagement.
3. **Your Idea:** Outline your concept for the commission, describing your creative vision, and how you plan to engage Tameside residents in a co-creative process.
4. **Co-Creation Approach:** A short explanation of how you envision working collaboratively with local participants during different stages of the process, including research, development, or the final presentation.
5. **Timeline:** A schedule for the project, identifying key phases and milestones.
6. **Access Requirements:** Let us know if you have specific access needs during the application or commissioning process.

How to Submit Your Application:

Send your application by email to the events@tameside.gov.uk with the subject line 'Tameside Northern Lights Commission Application'.

If submitted in writing, direct your application to Tameside Cultural Services, Tameside Local Studies and Archives Centre, Cotton Street East, Ashton-under-Lyne OL6 7BY.

All applications must be received by Sunday May 31st 2026, 5pm.

Notifying Candidates:

Applicants will be notified by the week beginning Monday June 15th.

How we'll make a decision:

We will evaluate the applications based on:

- **Artistic Quality:** Creativity, innovation, and alignment with the project aims.
- **Community Engagement:** How well you plan to involve Tameside residents in the creative process.
- **Feasibility:** A clear and realistic budget and timeline.
- **Experience:** Relevant experience in delivering co-created, community-based, or outdoor work.
- **Location:** are you based in Greater Manchester, regularly work here, or have other significant connections to the region.
- **Inclusivity and Accessibility:** Ensuring the process and final performance are accessible.

Confidentiality: No personal data will be shared outside of TMBC

Access and Inclusion:

We are committed to making this commissioning process as accessible as possible. As part of this commitment, we are offering multiple formats for applications and support throughout the process.

Application Formats:

- Standard written application
- Audio submission
- Video submission

Pre-Application Support:

Questions in advance can be submitted in written, audio, or video formats to Hannah Alwan-Weston, Arts and Engagement Officer, TMBC at Hannah.Alwan-Weston@tameside.gov.uk.

Please Note

This opportunity is subject to the following requirements:

- **Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check:** A valid enhanced DBS certificate is

required for working with vulnerable groups or minors, currently available from link.

- **Public Liability Insurance:** You must hold a minimum of £10m Public & Products Liability insurance and £5m Professional Indemnity insurance cover for the duration of the project.
- **Risk Assessments:** A detailed risk assessment must be provided for all activities, particularly for public outdoor performances or engagement with community groups. Support is available from the TMBC Arts and Engagement team.
- **Tax and Legal Obligations:** You will be responsible for managing your own tax and National Insurance contributions as required by HMRC.

Payment Terms:

- Payments will be made in instalments based on agreed project milestones. This will result in maximum payments of up to £4.999 per instalment. Timeframe to be agreed prior to full production award.
- Payment will be made on standard payment terms from the receipt of a valid invoice