

Lerwick 2028 - Commissioning Brief

We are inviting artists, creatives, companies and organisations from Shetland, across the UK and internationally to propose ambitious new cultural work for Lerwick 28.

This is a light-touch Expression of Interest, not a full application. At this stage we want to understand the strength of your idea, how it helps tell our story, who it involves, what difference it could make and whether there is a credible route to delivering it at the scale proposed.

You do not need to have every partner, production detail or budget line confirmed before you apply.

The opportunity

Lerwick is shortlisted to become the UK's first Town of Culture in 2028. If successful, Lerwick 28 will use commissioning as one of the principal ways to create ambitious new work for the year.

We are currently planning nine principal commissions: one commission at each of three values within each of the three chapters of 2028.

- Up to £200,000
- Up to £100,000
- Up to £50,000

These are maximum, full and final values. The overall model may flex if the open process produces exceptional proposals and a different distribution would create a stronger programme.

Commission values must cover all costs needed to create and deliver the work, including fees, production, travel, accommodation, technical requirements, accessibility, community engagement, insurance, permissions and contingency where applicable.

There will be further commissioning opportunities announced once we receive the Town of Culture 2028 designation that will be up to £20,000.

Our creative structure

Lerwick 28 is being developed through four interconnected strands:

- Major Commissions - new work of national and international ambition, with a strong emphasis on place-responsive creation.
- Shetland Creatives - celebrating and platforming the breadth of creative practice rooted in the islands.
- Community & Participation - enabling communities to create and perform, rather than simply attend.
- Young Shetland - putting young people at the heart of the programme as creators, collaborators and decision-makers.

The three Chapters

Chapter One: Inspiration | January-April

Open the year; build confidence, skills and anticipation; start projects that may culminate later. Inspiration is about ideas, encounters, learning, exploration and new creative relationships. Commissions might include long-form participation, residencies, a “welcome” to Lerwick 28, skills development or work that grows across the year.

Chapter Two: Play | May-August

Make Lerwick visibly different and joyful; invite residents and visitors to use the town differently. Play is the most visibly transformative phase, encouraging experimentation, participation, spectacle and curiosity across streets, waterfronts, venues and public spaces.

Chapter Three: Launch | September-December

Bring the year towards a culmination and look outward. Launch celebrates what has been made, sends Shetland culture outward through touring, broadcast and exchange, and connects 2028 to the longer journey towards 2038.

The chapters form one journey: Inspiration creates possibility, Play makes it visible, and Launch sends it forward.

Tell our story

The principal commissions have a particular responsibility: together they must tell our story.

Lerwick is both edge and meeting point - shaped by sea, migration and exchange, trade, energy, craft, music, storytelling, celebration and a strong culture of people making culture for themselves.

We are looking for work that responds to this place and its people. We are not looking for finished work that could simply be placed in Shetland without being changed by being here.

Different commissions can tell different parts of the story. They might explore sea and landscape, migration and exchange, industry and energy, tradition and making, language, technology, community life, contemporary identity or what it means to create at the edge. Taken together, the selected commissions need to feel like one coherent Lerwick 28 programme.

Rooted in Shetland

Every principal commission must involve Shetland communities meaningfully in its development, creation or delivery.

That involvement could include co-creation, local artists or performers, young people, skills development, community research, workshops, production roles or another meaningful form of creative exchange.

Community involvement should be integral to the proposition, not something added after the work has already been conceived.

Strong relationships with Lerwick and Shetland organisations, festivals, events, venues and creative practitioners are welcome, but they are not mandatory where another credible model of local involvement is proposed. We want the process to remain open to new voices.

Who can apply?

The opportunity is open to artists, creatives, companies and organisations from Shetland, across the UK and internationally, including those with no existing relationship with the Lerwick 28 team.

Quality, originality and ambition will be expected at every scale. The experience and track record expected will be proportionate to the scale, complexity and financial value of the commission.

Applicants for the largest commissions will need to demonstrate experience of delivering work with comparable responsibility. Less established practitioners can apply at an appropriate scale, or as part of a team or collaboration that collectively provides the experience and capacity required.

Before you apply: talk to us

You are welcome to arrange a short, informal conversation with Graeme Howell, Lerwick 28 Bid Director, before submitting an Expression of Interest.

The conversation can be used to clarify the brief, the commissioning process or the fit of your idea. It is not part of the assessment process and will not give an applicant an advantage. We cannot develop or write your proposal for you.

To arrange a conversation, email martine.hall@shetlandamenity.org.

If the online form is not accessible to you, please use the same email address or ring 01595 743843 and ask for a call back to discuss an alternative way to submit.

The questions

1. Tell us your idea

In simple terms, what would you like to create or deliver as part of Lerwick 28?

Maximum 200 words.

2. How will your idea help tell our story?

What aspect of Lerwick and Shetland does your proposal explore, celebrate or challenge? Why does it have particular meaning here? How could it help people in Shetland, across the UK or internationally understand something about who we are, where we have come from or where we are going next?

Maximum 200 words.

3. What will people experience, and who is it for?

Describe what an audience or participant would see, hear, do or take part in. Who do you want to reach, and could the work have a life beyond its immediate location through touring, broadcast, digital activity or other forms of wider reach?

Maximum 150 words.

4. Who will be involved?

Who would you like to create the project with? Tell us particularly how Shetland communities, artists, young people, organisations, venues or other local partners could be involved in shaping, creating or delivering the work. Partners do not need to be confirmed at this stage.

Maximum 150 words.

5. What difference could it make - in 2028 and by 2038?

What do you hope people, communities or artists will gain from the project in 2028? Looking ahead to 2038, what might be different because this project happened? Could it create lasting skills, opportunities, relationships, confidence, creative capacity or activity?

Maximum 200 words.

6. What would it cost?

Approximately how much funding would you expect to seek from Lerwick 28, within the commission level you have selected? You do not need to provide a detailed budget at this stage.

7. What gives us confidence you can deliver at this scale?

Tell us about previous projects, commissions or programmes that demonstrate your ability to deliver work of comparable scale, complexity or responsibility. You can include the experience of your proposed team or partners as well as your own.

Maximum 200 words.

8. What would be involved in making it happen?

Tell us anything important we should understand about delivering the project - for example location, technical requirements, travel, permissions, timetable, key partners or other dependencies. We are not asking for a detailed production plan at this stage.

Maximum 150 words.

9. Previous work

Applicants may provide one optional link to previous work, a website, portfolio, video or other material that helps demonstrate relevant experience.

10. Anything else we should know?

Optional: Is there anything important about your proposal that the questions above have not allowed you to tell us?

Maximum 100 words.

Expression of Interest

The Expression of Interest opens on 16 September 2026 and closes on 16 October 2026.

We have deliberately kept this first stage concise. We are not asking for a detailed production plan, a full budget, confirmed partners or formal references at this stage.

How proposals will be considered

After the deadline, submissions will first undergo a technical assessment to confirm basic eligibility and credibility. This will consider deliverability, budget and value for money, relevant capacity and experience, accessibility and safeguarding where applicable, and compliance with the commissioning brief.

The technical assessment is a gateway, not the final creative decision.

Published assessment criteria will include:

- Contribution to the Lerwick 28 story
- Creative quality, originality and ambition
- Relevance to the proposed Act
- Meaningful Shetland community involvement
- Accessibility and inclusion
- Audience and reach
- Deliverability within the full and final value
- Experience and capacity appropriate to the scale proposed
- Environmental responsibility
- Skills and learning
- Local relationships where relevant
- Touring, export, broadcast or wider dissemination
- Contribution towards 2038

Who makes the decisions?

Final selections will be made by the Lerwick 28 Commissioning Panel. The Panel will comprise the Liaison Forum together with the Bid Director, Production Manager and Shetland Arts Director of Creativity and Impact, alongside two openly recruited Independent Community Members from Lerwick.

Conflicts of interest will be declared and managed, with panel members withdrawing from consideration of proposals where appropriate.

The Panel will consider findings from the wider Lerwick 28 public consultation across all commissioning decisions, alongside the published assessment criteria and the need to create a coherent and balanced programme across the three chapters.

Public voice for the £200,000 commissions

Technically viable proposals for the three £200,000 commissions - one for each Act - will be presented for an advisory public vote.

The public will be asked two questions:

- Which proposal tells our story best?
- Which proposal celebrates our culture best?

The vote will be advisory. It will provide the Commissioning Panel with clear evidence of community response, but responsibility for artistic, technical and financial decisions will remain with the Panel.

Where the final decision differs materially from the strongest public preference, the reasons will be recorded.

What happens next?

Stage One - Expression of Interest | 16 September-16 October 2026

Submit the concise Expression of Interest described above.

Stage Two - Assessment, Public Voice and Development | from 19 October 2026

The strongest proposals will be invited into proportionate further development for possible inclusion in the final Lerwick 28 bid. At this stage we may ask for more detail on the creative proposition, community approach, production, accessibility, environmental approach, partners, audience and reach, broadcast/digital/touring potential, risks, legacy, budget and delivery capacity.

We may also ask for references or other evidence of previous delivery experience at this stage, particularly for higher-value commissions.

Stage Three - Final Development Following Designation

When Lerwick is designated UK Town of Culture 2028, selected proposals will move into full development before contracting. This will include detailed work on the creative proposition, co-creation, delivery team, production and technical requirements, milestones, accessibility, environmental sustainability, permissions, rights, safeguarding, risk, evaluation, touring or export potential, contractual deliverables and payment schedules.

Selection for development or inclusion in the bid is not in itself a contract or guarantee of funding. Final approval will depend on the proposal remaining creatively strong, deliverable and consistent with the proposition selected.

Commission or partnership?

A commission is a defined, funded and contractual opportunity to create and deliver new work against an agreed brief. A partnership is a relationship built around shared objectives and mutual contribution.

A commissioned project can include strong partnerships, but if your proposal is primarily about a wider strategic or delivery partnership rather than the creation of commissioned work, please use the separate Lerwick 28 partnership route.

Ready to propose an idea? Complete the Lerwick 28 [Commissioning Opportunity Form](#) by 16 October 2026.