

KEEPING MUSIC VENUES THRIVING



Securing the Future of Live Music

Event:

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@Camp and Furnace, Liverpool



Liverpool City Region
// Music Board



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Executive Summary

The Liverpool City Region Music Board ‘(LCRMB) hosted a public consultation event, ‘Keeping Music Venues Thriving’ on April 21st, 2026. The consultation’s aim was to collectively air and address pressing challenges facing the local live music ecosystem. Attended by 55 venue operators and promoters, the event used ‘world café’ focus groups to gather anonymous feedback under the Chatham House Rule.

This report captures the insights from venue operators and promoters across the Liverpool City Region (LCR) on the key issues and challenges they face. The discussions revealed a sector under pressure from changing audience behaviours, rising costs, and structural barriers, but also rich with ideas for practical opportunities, and some actionable solutions for recovery and innovation. This Executive Summary provides a list of the challenges discussed, with key findings, ideas, opportunities and some recommended ‘Steps to Actions’ that could be taken. Detailed analysis of the discussions are included in the Thematic Analysis – Questions and Ideas section

This consultation, also followed just shortly after the publication of the Culture, Media and Sports Committee report: [Fan-led review of live and electronic music](#). That report’s recommendations were condensed into a ‘[Live and electronic music fans’ charter](#)’. Many of their recommendations are reflected in the suggestions put forward during discussions at the ‘Keeping Music Venues Thriving’ consultation. Likewise, last year’s UK Music report, ‘[Hometown Glory](#)’, presented similar ‘Local Music Action Charter’ whose ideas found resonance in the contributions of consultation attendees. These crossovers reflect a resonance between local sentiment and national-level dialogue. Where there is alignment with this report’s ‘Steps to Actions’, the corresponding ‘Live and electronic music fans’ charter’ recommendations and/or ‘Local Music Action Charter’ recommendations, these are included in coloured panels for reference.

This report invites in particular, the Music Board, its Music Venues and Live sub-group, [MusicFutures](#), the LOR Combined Authority and LOR district councils to consider the ideas suggested as potential foundations for future policy, funding, and innovations. It also invites the sector to recognise its own agency to proactively develop initiatives based on the collective experiences revealed within the consultation’s findings.

1. Changing Audience Behaviour

Key Findings

- Last-minute ticket buying has become the norm, making revenue unpredictable and increasing financial risk.
- High “no-show” rates (10–15%) are reducing actual attendance even when events sell out.
- Reduced in-venue spending, especially on drinks, is undermining the traditional business model.
- Casual gig-going has declined, with audiences now split between highly engaged niche fans and disengaged occasional attendees.
- Transport limitations (especially late-night) discourage attendance or lead to early departures.

Implications

- Venues struggle to plan staffing, stock, and finances.
- Smaller shows are particularly vulnerable.
- The traditional reliance on bar income is no longer sustainable.

Ideas and Opportunities

- Build stronger niche audience communities instead of relying on casual attendance.
- Improve event timing transparency (e.g. earlier finish times).

Venues, promoters, and ticketing platforms should develop and adopt an industry-wide standard for publishing clear stage start and finish times so fans can plan their journeys home in advance.

Local live and electronic music networks, including promoters and venues, should explore the demand for earlier live music performance times and daytime events. - [Live and electronic music fans’ charter](#)

- Advocate for better late-night transport infrastructure aligned to event schedules.

Local authorities and transport providers should work together with venues to display up-to-date and reliable transport information inside music venues and at festival information points and exits. - [Live and electronic music fans’ charter](#)

- Develop campaigns to encourage commitment (to educate to reduce no-shows and last minute ticket buying).

Steps to Actions

1. The Music Board continue to lobby LCR Combined Authority directly ahead of the franchising of public transport.

Local authorities and transport operators should coordinate to align late-night transport schedules with live and electronic music event and venue closing times. - [Live and electronic music fans' charter](#)

Work with transport operators to align late-night public transport with event schedules and audience needs. - [Local Music Action Charter](#)

2. The Music Board's Music Venues and Live sub-group dedicate a session on audience communication and education, with consideration given to a regional campaign.

2. Financial Sustainability and Business Model Challenges

Key Findings

- The traditional venue model (tickets and bar sales) is breaking down.
- Rising costs and risk are discouraging promoters from programming new or emerging artists.
- Grant funding is often seen as complex, inconsistent, and difficult to access.

Ideas and Opportunities

- Using of the Live Trust ticket levy to fund grassroots venues.
- Develop membership or subscription models for predictable income.
- Diversify revenue through multi-use venue models (daytime use, community services, hosting other creative industries e.g. gallery space, adaptations for touring artist accommodation).
- Explore fan experience innovations, including digital or tech-enabled monetisation.

Steps to Actions

1. Music Board to report how the Live Trust model works, and how local grassroots venues could benefit.
2. The Music Venues and Live sub-group to host a specific session on alternative revenue models such as membership and premises multi-use.
3. MusicFutures continue to invite innovation in live music performance venues.

3. Competition, Touring and Infrastructure Gaps

Key Findings

- LCR is perceived as less attractive than cities like Manchester due to:
 - Fewer mid-sized venues
 - Higher perceived costs
 - Inconsistent venue quality
- Touring artists and promoters are sensitive to both cost and reputation.
- There is a perception this leads to risk averse programming.

Promoters, touring artists and managers should prioritise up-and-coming talent by providing platforms for emerging artists, including opportunities for local artists to perform live. - [Live and electronic music fans' charter](#)

Ideas and Opportunities

- Use sustainability as a competitive advantage.
- Set up a directory of venues and resources for touring artists.
- Introduce independent venue quality audits (sound, accessibility, facilities).

Steps to Actions

1. The Music Board to explore with University of Liverpool/Institute of Popular Music researchers the scope to develop a regional touring resource directory.
2. The Music Venues and Live sub-group to invite organisations who could develop a 'Venue Quality Audit Framework' to offer services and gather ideas on how this could operate.

The music industry and local councils should work together to support mentorship schemes for emerging local promoters and venue operators. - [Live and electronic music fans' charter](#)

Include music and creative sector roles in local skills and employment strategies. - [Local Music Action Charter](#)

4. Transport and Regulation Barriers

Key Findings

- Limited late-night transport is one of the biggest constraints on audience growth.
- Parking costs and restrictions create financial and logistical challenges for artists and staff, and are contributing to a negative impression for touring acts who do book to play in the city.

"A bad parking situation for the bus here in Liverpool, means my alarm's set for 6am to help navigate. We spend the day in negotiations with Traffic Enforcement Officers"
- [Los Campesinos, June 2026](#)

- Noise complaints and licensing frameworks are perceived as biased against venues.

Ideas and Opportunities

- Lobby to expand late-night trains and bus services.
- Introduce parking permits or exemptions for venue staff and touring artists.
- Develop shared parking agreements between venues and nearby institutions.
- Reform noise complaint processes to balance economic and community interests.

Steps to Actions

1. Music Board and Music Office to present this consultation's findings and sentiments to Liverpool City Council Transport Department.

The Department for Transport, in partnership with devolved governments, local authorities and transport operators, should commission research into late-night economy mobility gaps between cities, towns and rural communities. - [Live and electronic music fans' charter](#)

2. The Music Venues and Live sub-group invite Liverpool City Council Licensing Department to inform them of latest developments around transparency.
3. MusicFutures to invite innovation ideas around noise abatement, suppression and measurement.

The Use zoning powers to designate Late-Night Zones or Night-Time Economy corridors. - [Local Music Action Charter](#)

5. Skills, Staffing and Sector Capacity

Key Findings

- A skills gap in technical production (e.g., sound engineering) affects event quality.
- Staff burnout and talent drain (especially to London) are ongoing challenges.
- Many operators struggle to keep up with regulations and funding opportunities.

Ideas and Opportunities

- Offer free/subsidised technical training (e.g. live sound).
- Create flexible staffing models, combining creative and operational roles.
- Develop a 'Live Events Safety Passport' to simplify compliance.
- Use centralised communication tools (e.g. mailing lists) for funding and policy updates.
- Introduce a regional 'Music Charter' to secure public-sector support.

Steps to Actions

1. The Music Venues and Live sub-group to invite organisations who could develop ideas around a 'Live Events Safety Passport' and 'Music Charter' along the lines of the aforementioned 'Venue Quality Audit Framework'.

Venues and festivals should ensure consistent welfare and safeguarding training for all staff and volunteers.

Venues, festivals and promoters should ensure clear, visible signposting and safe reporting mechanisms for fans who experience or witness harassment, assault or other safety concerns, including digital options such as QR codes.

Fans organisations should work together with industry and local authorities to produce a fan-to-fan Code of Conduct that all fans should adhere to. This Code of Conduct should then be made clearly visible at every music venue and festival. - [Live and electronic music fans' charter](#)

2. The Music Board to work with the LOR Combined Authority and LOR district councils to consider a 'Music Charter' or 'Music Strategy'.

Councils and cities that want to celebrate their local live music ecosystem should publish a music strategy, including outlining their involvement in cultural champion schemes such as the Music Cities Network, UK City/Town of Culture and UNESCO Creative Cities. - [Live and electronic music fans' charter](#)

3. MusicFutures to explore fresh approaches and innovation opportunities around live sound production training.

The UK Government should work with regional mayors and local councils on mechanisms to support career paths into music across all genres. It should develop this strategy for music careers in collaboration with the industry and seek the support of the governments of the devolved nations for this work. - [Live and electronic music fans' charter](#)

6. Innovation and New Operating Models

Key Findings

- There is strong consensus that innovation is essential for survival.
- The sector is open to experimentation but lacks resources to implement change.

Ideas and Opportunities

- Transition venues into multi-functional spaces (music and community and creative uses).
- Provide peer-to-peer funding support and 'funding surgeries' led by experienced and successful bid writers.
- Develop cross-venue membership schemes to encourage audience loyalty.
- Venues introduce inclusive design features (quiet spaces, non-alcoholic options, accessibility improvements).

Where possible venues and festivals should encourage everyone on-site during a live event to adopt the principles of Stay Up Late's 'relaxed manifesto' to promote a respectful and inclusive experience for all.

Where possible, venues should work towards allocating a minimum of 2% of their total capacity to wheelchair accessible spaces. Local authorities should ensure this target is part of planning requirements for new or refurbished venues. - [Live and electronic music fans' charter](#) - [Live and electronic music fans' charter](#)

- Improve central gig listings and discovery platforms (moving beyond social media reliance).

Steps to Actions

1. The Music Venues and Live sub-group to dedicate a session to identify select venue multi-use opportunities.
2. MusicFutures/ Institute of Popular Music researchers scope the possibility to initiate a regional listings platform(s).

Local authorities, venues, artists and fans should work together to maintain up-to-date local listings so audiences can easily find out what is happening in their area. - [Live and electronic music fans' charter](#)

3. Music Board to invite the sector to set up its own ‘funding surgery’.

7. Data, Evidence and Advocacy

Key Findings

- Many venue challenges are invisible to policymakers due to lack of aggregated data.
- Existing economic impact figures do not reflect grassroots realities.

Ideas and Opportunities

- Establish standardised data collection across venues (attendance, revenue, behaviour trends), with the goal of building a shared ‘sector dashboard’ to support advocacy and funding bids.
- Launch public awareness campaigns using real data (e.g., impact of no-shows).
- Develop accessibility benchmarking tools to improve inclusivity and transparency.

Steps to Actions

1. Institute of Popular Music researchers to continue efforts to present regional analysis findings within the LCR Venues Map interface and use these findings to inform technical priorities.
2. Institute of Popular Music researchers to discuss with select venues and ticketing platforms mechanisms to track no-show rates and booking trends.

The Information Commissioner’s Office should provide clarity around the sharing of fan data and issue relevant guidance for the live music industry as to the safe and transparent use of that data. It is important for artists and promoters to access the information they need to plan and promote shows and tap into local demand, all while protecting fans’ data rights. - [Live and electronic music fans’ charter](#)

Strategic Direction: From Survival to Sustainability

The sector is transitioning from a fragile, reactive model to one that must be:

- Diversified
- Data-driven
- Collaborative

Challenges are systemic, spanning transport, audience economics, and infrastructure. This report recommends the LCR Music Board’s Music Venues and Live sub-group digest the ideas present here and contained within the detailed, ‘Thematic Analysis – Questions and Ideas’ section of the report and decide of what can be pragmatically achieved, with priority given to:

- Stabilising finances at grassroots level through access to the LIVE Trust levy, exploring membership models and multi-use diversification initiatives.
- Source investment in skills, quality, and venue standards.
- Lobby for improved and expanded late night transport options and licencing alignment, especially on noise complaints.
- Continue to foster collaboration across venues and stakeholders.

The consultation revealed a sector under strain but not in decline. This is borne out by annual research documented on the LCRMB website¹. However, the sentiment, ‘surviving, not thriving’ remains a core perception amongst many who attended. While audience behaviours, economic pressures, and infrastructure gaps threaten viability, the consultation gave voice to a clear set of potentially actionable ideas to reshape its future.

¹ <https://lcrmusicboard.co.uk/campaign/music-venues/>

Thematic Analysis – Questions and Ideas

Audience Behaviours

This roundtable addressed the broad question of what specific shifts in audience habits are identified as the most significant threats to venue stability?

1. Last-Minute Booking Culture and ‘no shows’ - financial instability for both promoters and venues.

Specific shifts in audience habits (e.g., late ticket buying, no shows, reduced bar spend, or demographic changes) were identified as the most significant threats to venue stability.

- Across all three sessions, participants repeatedly highlighted that the window for ticket sales has shifted dramatically toward the event date, from weeks to mere days. Some respondents described this as a “Liverpool thing”, though this trend was observed across the arts, internationally, and pre-pandemic.
- Regardless, this highlights an unpredictability that now defines the sector. It explains why promoters feel increased financial risk, and why venues struggle with staffing and stock planning.

“You can’t predict what level of income there actually is until the very last second.”

- The problem of ‘no-shows’ was discussed at length with participants describing that there is currently a 10-15% no-show rate at events. Whilst bemoaning this, both venue operators and promoters recognised how this impacts smaller shows disproportionately and is a further fallout of audiences’ ‘cost of living’ calculations.

“The ticket is the cost, but then, as you’re approaching that day, you’ve bought a ticket in advance, the weather is terrible, you were getting the bus or the train, but now you’ve got to take the car. Then you got car parking, you’ve got drinks, and all of a sudden that ticket, if I go, it’s going to be 30, 40 quid. It’s actually cheaper to not go.”

“A show that sold out. 250 tickets, a month in advance. On the day, 80 people didn’t turn up. The ticket price was £12.50... When we started off, 5% do not attend, and then an average 10%, but it’s definitely gone up recently.”

“If you’ve spent £100 on a ticket, if you don’t go, you’ve lost £100. You don’t want to lose that even if you spend another £100”

“From an audience perspective, if I’m booking something at a higher ticket price, I’ve already factored that in, I’ve got time to build towards that. I’ve got time to put money aside, planning longer term.”

2. Bar Spend (Secondary Revenue) - Highlights the collapse of the traditional venue business model.

This theme reflected the genuine financial experience of venue owners who rely on bar income to offset low ticket margins and staffing costs. The live music sector, especially for smaller ticketed shows, is predicated on alcohol sales. Several participants suggested younger demographics are drinking less.

“That audience behaviour you’re talking about, that drinking culture, that seems to have gone. The student age – there’s a health kick amongst them. They’ve seen the state of their parents as they’ve grown up.”

Others suggested a shift in audience behaviour, drinking less at the venue by ‘pre-loading’, because of high in-venue alcohol prices (compared to supermarkets). This directly impacts the economic viability of smaller venues.

“Perhaps they pre-drink, but they don’t drink in the way that they used to.”

Preloading, colloquially referred to as ‘prees’ by students, would further evidence cost-of-living impacts as systemic threats to the underlying financial health of the sector, rather than an inferred widespread change in young people’s drinking habits.

3. Broken Habits vs Curated Audiences - psychological shifts in audience engagement?

How can promoters and venues successfully re-engage with or “educate” audiences to foster more sustainable attendance patterns?

- A participant poignantly noted that for many, “the habit is gone” regarding mid-week or regular attendance. Other attendees observed this as a long-term consequence of COVID-19 on the social practice of attending live music events.
- Countering this were reports of successful curation of dedicated, often genre specific fanbases (e.g. hardcore punk, hip-hop, blues), that whilst smaller in scale, and limited in growth rate, are more sustainable than hoping on peripheral, casual audiences.

“I think what’s interesting thing over the last three years is that the casual person will go to one or two shows a year has sort of disappeared almost. And then, the sort of hardcore has remained, and we’ve found success in finding those people who are really hyper engaged in small scale shows.”

4. Transport/Safety Barriers - Connects venue issues to broader city-region planning.

As with the 2022 consultation, the issue of public transport traversed multiple roundtable discussion, not just the dedicated table. Public transport was described as intrinsically linked to audience attendance, with poor provision of late-night services dictating audiences leaving early or not attending.

These observations frame transportation and parking costs (which were also raised) not simply as minor inconveniences, but as structural exclusion factors that prevent audiences from fully engaging with the city region's live music economy.

"I think it's a really strange one still that a lot of grassroots venues choose to finish at 11. We finish our shows at 10 o'clock so people can get the bus and train home. You should tell people when it's going to finish as well. People might skip the support or will come last minute but I think for the sake of access, for people who want to plan their travel effectively...as a promoter, facilitating choice for people is the most important thing you can do really. If they know they can get the train home, they most likely will."

"This is driven by the artist as well. At the start of getting things set up, some say they want to start earlier to make sure everyone gets home on time. I had a band who did a tour last year, before the tour went on sale, they said all tickets for every show would be £10, all shows end at 10 o'clock. Everyone can afford it, and everyone can get home."

"Is that an action for the [Music] Board, to do the piece of research, finding out are people not going into the gigs or, are they using more public transport?"

"What's the cost and loss of moving parking times from 11-8 to 8-8?"

5. Discovery vs. Safe Bets – Is there a barrier to original/new music innovation, that threatens the long-term sustainability of the live music ecosystem?

- Several participants described a 'sameness' to the live music offer in the Liverpool City Region, as promoters either choose to, or can no longer afford to take chances on unknown talent.

"What I feel is missing is a diverse demographic. It's always the same artists or the same style of artist that will appeal to a certain audience."

- Some participants attributed this to a lost trust in venues as arbiters of future tastes and as an audience draw.
- Others disagreed, and described their efforts to develop audience mailing lists, alongside promotion of newer artists.

Venue availability, costs and touring

This roundtable considered whether the Liverpool City Region remains part of the national touring circuit and whether there are innovative touring models or shared resource ideas which could make the region more attractive to touring artists and promoters?

1. Ticket Levy Integration

- The Ticket Levy, pioneered by LIVE, as described during the introduction to the consultation was highlighted as a potentially vital grassroots stabilisation initiative. Several respondents were enthusiastically described this as having reached a positive "tipping point" and that it "will absolutely succeed".
- Participants expressed hope that this would offer a concrete path toward ring-fencing funds for venue safety and structural upkeep. Previous grant funding experiences were described by some as "a curse in disguise" due to constraints on spending windows, a "nightmare" of administrative, and a seeming "lottery" as to whether deserving venues are funded.

2. Independent Expert Quality Audits

How can the Liverpool City Region (LCR) practically restore positive city perception among touring agents?

- Several promoters, and some venue staff, described issues with certain venue's facilities, poor sound quality and equipment, and limited accessibility. They described this as a region-wide issue, which they contrasted with other cities.

"A lot of these venues, it's like they don't know any better. I almost want to say, "can you come in our venue for a day" to see best practice."

- Stemming from this direct observation, is an idea that under-resourced smaller venues require a targeted, expert-led approach to implement best-practice standards for sound and accessibility. This could act as a starting point for policy-driven technical support.
- These negative assertions present an opportunity to use levy funding to deploy some form of independent performance audits, with expert assistance to repair broken or ineffective equipment paired with longer-term adaptations.
- This would go some way to ensure promoters and visiting artists experience consistent, high-tier professional practices across all venue scales in the LCR.

3. Sustainability Differentiation

In what ways can Liverpool leverage sustainability, green routing, and unified asset directories to out-innovate larger competitor markets like Manchester (consistently described as a benchmark)?

What innovative touring models or shared resource ideas are being proposed to make the region more attractive to touring artists in a high-cost environment?

- Manchester was referenced frequently as a benchmark, with various participants describing that it is cheaper to put on events there, there is more spending power available at the promoter level, and a perception of higher quality venues. Furthermore, it was noted that Manchester has a far greater population catchment area and a larger range of medium capacity venues that function as a career trajectory ladder and attract more touring artists. There was no recognition that most of the cost-of-living issues discussed are likely to also be impacting Manchester venues.
- Beyond Geographical and infrastructural constraints, one strategic proposition was for the region’s venues and promoters to utilise decarbonisation and green routing as a core competitive differentiator for the city region.

“...With reduction in touring because of cost, people will just go to Manchester... How do we make it more economically viable to tour locations? Also, when you think there’s no plan B... you can do interventions around waste, food, energy. The biggest carbon contributor is audience travel. So, in some ways people should do larger tours and have a local audience. There’s an environmental case. Part of this is about interventions. How can Liverpool position itself, so it is getting tours, we’re using sustainability to be ahead of the game as a way of differentiating. We’re hoping it’ll have an impact on routing.”

4. Collective Directory Visibility

- One practical suggestion to enhance the LCR offer was a pooling of region-wide resource availability into a centralised matrix or directory to clearly communicate capacity to external tour bookers, as a low-cost, digital asset for regional coordination.

5. Fan Experience Monetisation

What actionable ideas exist for leveraging emerging technologies to enhance fan experience and create alternative revenue streams?

- One venue described how they were seeking to use technological innovation and AI to enhance the real-world gig journey, that might enable venues to diversify monetisation beyond typical ticketing and beverage sales.

- However, this idea is still predicated on increasing consumer in-venue spend whilst simultaneously reflecting on audience behaviour indicating they are strategically reducing their spending.

Transport and parking, planning, licensing and noise

Looking toward local and regional governance, this roundtable discussed what ways current local regulations or infrastructure (e.g., parking restrictions or noise complaints) hinder the daily operations and economic viability of venues and considered suggestions which the Music Board could lobby for.

1. Eurovision and Night Bus Extension Precedents

How can local night transport networks be scaled in frequency, route options, and service hours to align directly with venue curfews and eliminate early audience departures?

- Repeatedly cited as real, empirical proof that the city-region is capable of operationally executing late-night train extensions and night-bus routes when treated as critical economic infrastructure.

“Transport has got to run later, trains across the region till 2am would be a game changer.”

- The N1 Night Bus service was a direct outcome of the previous consultation, however concerns and aspirations for this remain paramount.

“More night buses on more routes, across the city region”

“Not enough promotion of the night bus, people need to know it’s running. Also, some kind of promotion solving the perceptions of safety. E.g. people think it’s a dangerous way to get home, but it’s not necessarily more dangerous than other ways home.”

“The timing of the night buses could improve this, if they were more often, people wouldn’t feel like they have to wait. Also, if there’s more than two people often a taxi (splitting the cost) is the same price as the bus, so convenience is a problem.”

2. Staff / Artist Parking Permits

How could micro-level adjustments to parking tariffs, loading durations, and/or targeted permit exemptions eliminate the financial strain on night-time venue staff, touring crews, and loading artists?

- The explicit request was for targeted permit systems in specific zones (noting it already functions in Ten Streets) to stop late-night venue staff, technical crews, and artists losing their earnings to new council parking extensions.

“Bands can’t park and unload their gear outside of venues because they have to pay so much for parking, sometimes they pay more for parking than they make from the gig”

“As a safety issue, people are taking the fines instead of moving and paying again, since the fine costs the same as moving the cars, and people don’t feel safe to park and walk further away”

3. Brokered Venue Parking Pools

What specific policy changes or collaborative agreements do venue owners and promoters suggest could balance venue needs with other demands on city spaces?

- Grounded in the practical idea that larger cultural institutions or neighbouring spaces with private lots could formalise shared access agreements through an intermediary to secure artist vans and avoid backstreet break-ins. An idea would be to construct a formalised, board-mediated sharing network for existing venue-owned or aligned parking assets to deter thefts.

“In Manchester venues have reported problems with vans getting broken into and gear getting stolen, because they have to park so far away and there no one watching the van. So if there could be security or somewhere to park where there’s eyes on the van.”

- The implementation of later parking charges remains an incendiary and contested issue, though it was recognised by several participants that certain points are anecdotal or speculative.

“How much data is there to show people can’t/ won’t gig in venues because of transport/ parking?” ... “Is that an action for the board, to do the piece of research, finding out if people are not going into the gigs or, are they using more public transport?”

“Talking to and sharing parking with other venues does happen, but it’s reliant on that being a good relationship. Could there be a way the Music Board helps to create parking sharing, so there’s a middle man and it’s not relying on relationships between venues?”

4. Balanced Regulatory Frameworks

What structural framework or communication mechanism could the city council implement to protect established venues from asymmetrical noise-complaint processes and property developer actions?

- Several participants expressed a perception that the current noise complaints process is weighted in favour of the complainant, with councillors aiming to please constituents

“There is too much power on the side of the residents. Residents sending threatening emails, arguably harassment, which venues just have to absorb.”

“There’s no line of communication, or clear protections or actions for the venues to take when a noise complaint does come in.”

- One suggestion was to become more aware of potential council evaluation processes which might, more objectively, take into account the direct economic loss to the local night-time economy before enforcing early venue curfews or noise restrictions.

“Apparently the council is trying to bring in a framework, where councils have to consider the economic value of their licensing policy. Because normally legislation on licensing focuses on protection and impact on the residents. The change would mean the council has to consider the economic loss of forcing venues to shut early because of noise complaints.”

- Music Venue Alliance membership was cited as a mechanism for venues to access noise experts to help defend any complaints.

Staffing and training and production challenges

This roundtable examined a perceived “skills gap” described by those on the ground, particularly regarding technical production and venue management; how this is impacting the live music sector in the region, and proposed solutions.

1. Musicians as Venue Staff

Could venues practically leverage flexible staffing models (e.g., employing active musicians across performance and operations) to counter the talent drain to London and prevent staff burnout?

- One suggestion put forward, which reflects the select real-life workflows, would be for venues to employ young people in bands who could move fluidly between performance and operations, providing them a baseline income without triggering hospitality burnout.
- Combining artistic performance with operational venue shifts could stabilise income through a sustainable, cyclical employment model that keeps creative talent within the Liverpool City Region.

2. Funded Open Training Days

Could objective frameworks or certifications, such as open training days or standardised safety passports, be implemented to bridge the local technical live sound skills gap and resolve regional production quality issues? What funded training pathways, industry-led initiatives could be leveraged to 'skill up' or retain talent within the Liverpool City Region?

- Driven by the clear, repeated finding that “poor live sound can ruin gigs”, with bands reluctant to return; and that young people are struggling to find accessible learning support, this proposal would aim to professionalise grassroots production, but require subsidised, entry-level pathways rather than leaving under-resourced venues to handle complex audio training alone.
- Implementing free, baseline live sound training days to protect show quality and support new learners, could kick start initiatives to engage young people in technical roles, and address recent technical developments that have outpaced training/degree curriculum adaptations.

3. Charter for Music

Is there an administrative mechanism that could secure city-level backing for things such as tour bus parking and production accessibility, which were cited as problems?

- Participants discussed a proposal for a top-tier, structural solution to establish a region-wide criteria list or charter to secure LCROA/LCC support. It was argued that live music events deserve the same level of dedicated city support for artist facilities and parking cooperation currently granted to visiting film companies.

4. Live Events Safety Passport

- In conjunction with the above proposal was a suggestion for an objective operational tool, working alongside ISO credentials and Purple Flag certificates, that would directly benefit venue businesses legal preparation.
- Complex statutory duties examples such as the Venues Terrorism Act and Martyn's Law, which could be streamlined through a standardised industry safety passports alongside ISO standards frameworks to professionalise security and manage legislative implementation.

5. Direct-to-Inbox Notifications

How can the sector use standardised business tools (e.g., safety passports, ISO standards, or direct-to-inbox notifications) to assist busy operators with incoming legislative compliance (e.g., Martyn's Law) and grant-funding alerts?

- Participants expressed explicitly that venues have a strong desire to stay legally compliant but are frequently unaware of specific implementation requirements, or any available funding opportunities.
- The Music Board mailing list was identified as the specific proactive outreach direct-to-inbox mechanism required to direct busy venue operators of immediate funding and legislative alerts.

Innovation

Considering possibilities beyond “survival”, participants involved in this roundtable looked at specific barriers (financial or logistical) to implementing economic and/or environmental sustainability measures and considered examples of innovation or creative adaptation that could serve as blueprints for the wider sector.

1. Multifunctionality

How can grassroots operators transition away from the broken, traditional live music model into multi-use, civic spaces to diversify revenue and attract higher-calibre acts?

- Emphasised across the sessions that moving to hybrid, multi-use spaces is “at the core of survival” and a necessary shift away from the “outdated” traditional music venue model.
- There was widespread agreement that CIC status is a successful model to adopt and that multifunctionality is at the core of survival. This would involve venue spaces being monetised during quiet (daytime) hours through non-traditional programming or hybrid functions (e.g., combining a venue with recording split-copyright deals, gallery space, cinema or community food offerings).
- Redesigning standard layouts into multi-use, destination models encompassing hospitality, community spaces, and other art forms.
- There was a suggestion of venues offering recording / filming services as an add on for artists (different income stream, but also on a split copyright deal for example).
- Another initiative discussed involved a Music Venues Trust generated idea to adapt venues to offer dedicated accommodation for touring artists.

2. Music Funding Surgery

What mechanisms can the Music Board or other organisations fund to mobilise successful localised bid-writing expertise and establish centralised, drop-in business drop-off knowledge services?

- An openness to, and real interest was expressed for peer-to-peer learning, and the support for others in writing bids. It was stated that local knowledge exists. Local operators who have written successful funding bids could be paid to provide peer-to-peer bid-writing support with funding applications.
- This would go some way to addressing the reality that exhausted venue staff (a) require operational funding subsidies, even at larger venues, and (b) need immediate, localised drop-in advisory expertise.
- Such an innovation would bypass expensive external consulting, establish a reciprocal framework where successful operators could be directly funded by Music Board administered fund (Live Trust?) to upskill struggling neighbouring venues in bid writing, governance transformations, and legal readiness. Several venues offered their services and spaces for delivery of such an offer for advice on funding applications and CIC governance structuring.

3. Community Subscription Models and Listings

- A proposal suggested venues, or communities of venues could establish membership structures to stabilise erratic audience revenues and bypass paid social media (widely considered monopolised by Meta/Instagram, and failing).
- This suggestion was grounded in the direct operational successes of certain venue memberships that turn unpredictable audience counts into reliable, recurring monthly subscription cash flows, while offering fans accessible, perks such as monthly free entry shows.
- A question raised was, 'how can we make all venues a community not in competition with each other?', the response to which was that such a cross-venue membership mechanism would aim to build a culture around seeing more and better gigs as a community, across multiple venues.
- The issue of Meta platforms as advertising was discussed through a frame of high costs for not being able to reach the right people, with the consequence that music fans are missing gigs. Social media was described as posing as a central connector but actually failing in this. Renewed calls centralised, comprehensive venues listing page with an associated accessibility guide (that could offer insight into quiet spaces, offer of non-alcoholic drinks, accessible toilets etc.).

4. Audience-Driven Inclusive Activities

What specific physical and behavioural adjustments could venues implement to satisfy younger consumer demands?

- It was suggested that venues could rebuild trust with younger generations by incorporating physical venue modifications and experiential design tailored specifically to this demographic. Examples suggested included earlier finish times, non-alcoholic drinks options, nice toilets, interactive/gamified programming, and dedicated quiet decompression areas directly into show layouts.

5. Local Circular Procurement

How can the city-region enforce commercial circular economy rules to foster systemic market equity?

- This suggestion was driven by the explicit suggestion that incoming commercial festivals, large tours, and dominant outside promoters should be institutionally required to hire and utilise regional grassroots infrastructure.
- The proposal was that council-level planning interventions could capture monetary or exposure value from massive headline events and systematically pump these back into the regional venue network. Examples of opportunities included cross-advertising smaller events at large ones, pooling technical equipment assets, or mandating that incoming major festival promoters utilise local venues for delivery.

Data, mapping, and dashboards

What types of data/dashboard features would be most useful for live sector personnel, collective advocacy and future planning.

1. Standardised Indicators

How can grassroots venues implement standardised value indicators to construct a powerful, unified macro-view for policy advocacy?

- Repeatedly emphasised across sessions as a core method to transition from fragmented, individual venue reporting to an aggregated "macro-view of the industry" that directly influences policymakers and funding bodies.
- This suggestion was in responsive to venue owner frustrations regarding misleading top-down figures that appear to leave grassroots spaces behind (in reference to the imminent LCR Music Economy Report reference during the introduction which describes economic impact figures of £780m).

2. A Public Barometer Campaign?

What data-sharing partnerships could be established with ticketing platforms (e.g., Skiddle) to track audience acquisition, advanced ticket purchasing trends, and expose the 10-15% "no-show" rate?

- Stemming from the direct suggestion of specific public-facing taglines (such as a “Count Me In” campaign” or “Liverpool Takes Its Music Live!”) to display metrics like no-show percentages directly to the public. This would shift data collection (literally count the audience in) and analysis (cross reference with all sales), out of silos into a public communication arena. The aim being to be transparent to educate audiences on the logistical damage of last-minute buying habits in the hope of encouraging predictable advanced ticket sales and attendance.

3. Accessibility Tiering Toolkits

What structured, non-punitive assessment mechanisms, such as localised accessibility tiering toolkits or surveys, could be embedded into dashboards to safely incentivise venue auditing?

- The lack of venues’ accessibility status on tools such as the LCR Venues Map was considered problematic. Discussions described the per individual/per premises complexity and considered mechanisms that might offer practical solutions to handle complicated self-assessment frameworks, perhaps by adopting structured “accessibility tiering” toolkits such as some supposedly offered within the local theatre sector (though an example was not available).

The Roundtables’ Method

The Liverpool City Region Music Board (LCRMB) Live Music Sector Consultation Event are hosted a public consultation event ‘Keeping Music Venues Thriving’ which aimed to facilitate discussion and debate amongst venue owners and promoters as to the issues facing the Liverpool City Region’s live music sector. 55 venue operators and promoters attended.

The consultation involved 25-minute ‘world café²’ style focus group discussions, where attendees had the opportunity to discuss and present ideas surrounding a set of key issues the LCRMB Venues Subgroup determined as the most pressing for the live music sector. Discussions were be scribed anonymously, and attendees agreed to adopt the ‘Chatham House Rule³’ and gave ethical consent to their participation.

Each attendee was invited to choose to join a roundtable designated to discuss a distinct theme they felt most interested in contributing towards. There were six core theme roundtables, plus a table where PRS representatives were on hand to assist with any PRS licencing queries.

After approximately 20 to 30 minutes of facilitated open discussion between attendees, they could then choose to be involved with another discussion roundtable and contribute to further discussions around another theme nominated in the registration process. This process repeated three times, with a total of eighteen distinct roundtable sessions.

MusicFutures researchers applied thematic analysis⁴ to the roundtable transcripts to draw out issues and ideas to be summarised and presented to both the LCRMB Venues Subgroup and MusicFutures which can form the basis of future policy/funding recommendations, further research and/or innovation.

About this Report

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² The World Café <https://theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/>

³ The Chatham House Rule states, “When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.” - <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chatham-house-rule>

⁴ See Braun V and Clarke V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: a practical guide*. London: Sage.