

Agenda Item	5
Report No	CIA/3/21

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: City of Inverness Area Committee (CIAC)

Date: 18 February 2021

Report Title: Events & Festivals

Report By: Executive Chief Officer - Transformation

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 Following the cancellation of the successful City events and festivals programme due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, work has been undertaken to identify options for a new approach. This report updates Members on the progress and outputs of the cross-organisational Events and Festivals working group. On behalf of the Inverness Common Good Fund (ICGF), Highland Council, Eden Court and High Life Highland (HLH) have been working in partnership to better understand how, as a collective, the organisations could help aid City recovery through a refreshed approach to delivering events and festivals.

1.2 It is anticipated that this enhanced partnership approach would help realise significant benefits for the City and its residents and visitors, thereby supporting the objectives of the ICGF, these benefits include but are not limited to:

- A more resilient programme of events that is closely aligned with ambitious wider City developments;
- Enhanced, access to specialist skills, expertise and funding;
- The ability to present a more cohesive events and festivals programme across the City;
- Potential to realise best value through economies of scale and scope.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. agree the vision, values and objectives detailed in [Appendix 1](#);
- ii. agree to preserve the current events & festivals budget in the sum of £0.303m to support the development of a refreshed events and festivals programme;
- iii. note that the governance arrangements with scrutiny through the Events and Festivals Working Group, with annual reports to CIAC will continue;
- iv. note the next steps as detailed in section 7.1 of this report and that a subsequent paper will be presented at the May 2021 CIAC.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource: Further analysis is required to substantiate the level of resourcing and associated costings required to develop an events programme. There is currently a ~£50k allocation for the role of Inverness Events Manager which is vacant. To date there has been no cost implications from this project.
- 3.2 Legal: There are no legal implications arising from this paper.
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island): Failure to deliver a successful events and festivals programme would have a detrimental impact on the mental and physical wellbeing of some of the City's more vulnerable residents. Delivering against the agreed vision, values and objectives will help ensure inclusiveness and continued commitment to supporting community engagement and wellbeing.
- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever: Events will continue to be organised and delivered being mindful of their impact on the environment and in-line with appropriate guiding policies.
- 3.5 Risk: A simplified risk register can be found in [Appendix 2](#), providing an overview of related risks and proposed mitigation.
- 3.6 Gaelic: Events and festivals provide a rich context in which to deliver the Highland Council's Gaelic Language Plan and to secure inward investment for public-facing activities that celebrate Gaelic culture and heritage. The potential of this has been demonstrated by the success of Eden Court's Under Canvas programme, which attracted new sources of funding and impacted positively on tourist spend. By working in greater collaboration with partners, there is an opportunity to support the Council's corporate objective to enhance the profile of Gaelic culture and to secure new investment for events that can be harnessed for the economic benefit of the wider City.

4. Background

- 4.1 In May 2020, noting the impact of COVID-19, previous work on developing events and festivals was revisited as part of the Council's post-covid Recovery Plan. This intervention specifically related to the development of a revised events and festivals programme for the City area, with a particular focus on improved cross-organisational working with key partners (Eden Court and High Life Highland). Due to the ongoing implications of Covid19 this work was disrupted.
- 4.2 In November 2020 [under item 6a](#) a paper was taken to CIAC informing Members that due to the cancellation of the events programme there was a £253k underspend in the Events Management Budget. Members were also made aware that the officer occupying the Inverness Events Manager post had retired. This report asked Members to note that a further report would be brought to the February 2021 committee updating on the progress of the ongoing EFWG work.
- 4.3 On 14 December 2020 a workshop was held consisting of City Members and partners from the Events and Festivals Working Group (EFWG) – the aim of this session was to discuss and agree the vision, values and objectives of the group in relation to ongoing delivery of an events and festivals programme (the final output of this workshop can be found in [Appendix 1](#)).

5. The Case for Change

- 5.1.1 The ICGF events programme traditionally consisted of the following core events; The Highland Games, Ness Islands Halloween, Fireworks Display, Christmas Lights and The Red Hot Highland Fling.
- 5.1.2 Currently there is no programme of events for 2021/22 due to ongoing restrictions related to COVID-19. A lack of clarity on when events can be reintroduced, coupled with the vacancy of the Inverness Events Manager post, makes this an uncertain period for the future of ICGF funded events – it is therefore essential that this time is used effectively to establish and embed robust working practices to ensure the City is well placed to deliver events once restrictions are eased or lifted.
- 5.1.3 Working collaboratively with our partners, sharing the risk and workload – particularly in these uncertain times – will help minimise the impact of project variations and change that is inevitable due to ongoing challenges of the pandemic. This approach also helps address the ‘single point of failure’ risk associated with having one dedicated individual managing and delivering this programme; progressing this as a partnership should resolve that issue and help ensure continuity and resiliency in the nature and standards of the work being progressed. This also provides additional flexibility and should help ensure we are well placed to be reactive and indeed proactive to opportunities (commercial or otherwise).
- 5.1.4 It should also be noted that when any future events are referenced or proposed, they will be progressed adhering to Government policy on social interaction and wherever possible events will be ‘COVID resilient’; for instance, elements of a suitable events may be digitised to make it more widely accessible. Furthermore, minimal abortive costs will be incurred during planning stages to further protect the allocated budget.

5.2 Budget and Resource

- 5.2.1 The annual budget allocation for the events and festivals programme is £303k, with £50k of that specifically assigned to funding dedicated resource (Inverness Events Manager graded HC08 + uplift).
- 5.2.2 Further analysis is required to help determine the resource level and cost required to establish and manage a robust programme. Adequate resourcing will be crucial in ensuring consistent dialogue between the organisations and governance forums to support transparent and effective decision making, however further work must be undertaken to understand the specific nature of the role.
- 5.2.3 The post holder of the current vacancy reports to the Inverness City Area Manager.

5.3 Process and Governance

- 5.3.1 Whilst there are no events currently scheduled, the rollout of a COVID vaccine offers some hope that it may be possible to develop a partial programme in the latter stages of 2021. Due to the absence of an events programme, it is suggested that as a temporary measure proposed events are assessed on an individual basis - these proposals will be subject to scrutiny through the existing EFWG. Proposals will be assessed, as they currently are, on strict criteria to ensure they align with the vision, values and objectives of the ICGF. Client-side governance would continue to be the executive responsibility of the Inverness City Area Manager.

5.3.2 Until a structured programme is developed and approved (comprised of re-occurring and recognisable core events that are costed and have associated KPIs) it is proposed that the following three stage approval process is followed –

Stage 1: Proposal is scrutinised by the EFWG

Stage 2: A recommendation is made to the ICGF sub-committee by the EFWG with approval being an option if the cost of the event is not more that £10k, otherwise;

Stage 3: Approval at CIAC

5.3.3 Re-introducing events as soon as safely possible, is hugely important in further aiding economic recovery and encouraging footfall. Hosting individual events will also provide an evidence base that will help inform and substantiate a programme.

5.4.4 As we move forward as a collective and embed this process in business as usual, it is anticipated that the EFWG and our partners, will have increased creative autonomy to develop and deliver events. They will be tasked with translating the broad strategic goals (vision, values and objectives) into deliverable work packages (events). It is important that some delegated authority is granted to allow for a much more streamlined and autonomous operating model – this allows greater flexibility to react to changing landscapes and finite opportunities, all whilst delivering against the agreed vision.

6. Benefits

6.1.1 Significant benefits can be realised, directly and indirectly, through the delivery of a considered and inclusive events and festivals programme.

6.1.2 A refreshed approach, utilising the commercial experience of our partners and their contacts, could result in income being leveraged from specific events. Whilst generating a profit through events is challenging, the ability to monetise suitable events (or elements of events including priority seating or merchandising), could help support the ongoing delivery of a wider events programme.

6.1.3 This approach also provides access to a wider customer base and presents opportunities to share branding, social media platforms, mailing lists and even membership privileges, resulting in a more holistic approach in continuing to deliver popular and well attended events in the City area.

6.2 City Footfall and Economic Recovery

6.2.1 The cancellation of events in the City has had a hugely negative impact on City centre vibrancy. Direct and indirect footfall from large scale public events is proven to generate additional spend and, in some cases, provide a reason for people to purposefully travel to the City centre area. Estimated attendance figures for ICG funded events since 2008/09 are as follows -

- The Red Hot Highland Fling: 10,000 - 15,000
- Highland Games: 2,500 - 7,500
- Halloween event: 10,000 - 15,000
- Bonfire Night: 10,000 - 18,000
- Christmas Lights Switch-on: 2,500 - 4,500
- Winter Wonderland: 2,500 - 5,000

The above events obviously bring direct benefit for the attendees, but in addition the events will create a secondary benefit, this time for the City, through attendees making use of restaurants, bars, retail and hospitality prior to, or after the events taking place. This “secondary spend” will very often be in addition to the normal habits of the attendees and prompted by the event, for example, going to a restaurant or bar on an evening when they would not normally have done so; or having travelled to the event opting to turn their visit into a short City break and staying in a local hotel.

- 6.2.2 The cancellation of the events programme received widespread press and social media coverage. Many of the press articles drew strong links between the cancellation of events and the related negative economic impact, most notably the cancellation of the Red Hot Highland Fling which was expected to generate around £350k for the City economy out with the traditional tourist season (based on economic analysis utilising Event Scotland approved methodologies which was reported to CIAC August 2019). Furthermore, whilst understanding of the decision to cancel the programme in light of the pandemic, key stakeholders such as Inverness BID and from the local hospitality industry were also clear that cancellation of key events would negatively impact their business.
- 6.2.3 Whilst not an ICG funded event, The Royal National Mod was due to be held in Inverness in Oct 2020. The last time this event was held in Inverness was in 2014 and it was estimated to have generated £3.5m for the City economy; this only serves to re-emphasise the importance of events as an attraction and income generator for local businesses and the City.
- 6.2.4 Inverness itself is one of the most visited cities in the UK and has over 300,000 holiday visits from overseas visitors annually (in 2015 only London, Edinburgh and Glasgow had more in the UK). We also know that prior to COVID this figure was rising year on year, therefore it is imperative that the region caters to the inevitable demand by continuously supporting and developing events and attractions.

6.3 Attracting Funding and Support

- 6.3.1 Greater partnership working will open up additional opportunities for the collective. As charities, both Eden Court and HLH have access to funding schemes that could help attract and secure additional funding to compliment or enhance the core programme of events.
- 6.3.2 As the sector recovers from the impact of COVID it is expected that significant levels of funds will be made available to support sector recovery and the reintroduction of events; working as a cross-organisational group and having an ambitious and sustainable plan will ensure we are well placed to secure money and deliver the agreed vision. It is also worth noting that Scottish Government have already provided significant levels of funding to support the sector and most recently launched Scotland’s Events Recovery Fund (SERF) – a £2.75m fund available until the end of 2021 with the specific purpose of encouraging and supporting a re-introduction of events.
- 6.3.3 Additionally, it should also be noted that both Eden Court and HLH have strong relationships with the wider events sector, both regionally and nationally. These strong relationships can help access skills, knowledge, money and experience that will serve to enhance the reputation of ICGF and its events programme and showcase Highland-wide talent that reflects our culture and creativity.

6.3.4 The skills and expertise Eden Court and HLH bring to the table also has financial benefits in terms of avoided cost; if these services were acquired through a contractual arrangement with a private provider, then the cost would likely be prohibitive. Our partners also have a very clear understanding of what we want to achieve and share that ambition – this clarity and shared values would provide a springboard for which a revised programme could launch.

6.4 Wellbeing

6.4.1 Community celebrations such as events and festivals can be a powerful means of promoting community development and wellbeing, including, promoting community co-operation; awareness of community issues; reducing isolation; social development; and educational advantages. There is some evidence to suggest that participants who have positive experiences at festivals and events are likely to increase their overall sense of happiness and consequently their subjective wellbeing.

6.4.2 HLH delivers a range of programmes and activities which support improved wellbeing in close partnership with NHS Highland. There is potential to build a more visible wellbeing aspect into future events and festival for the benefit of participants. Some examples of the work delivered in the wellbeing space, by HLH, include:

- Highland Green Health Partnership: In partnership, HLH enabled people to engage with the outdoors. During the pandemic HLH quickly moved enabling Green Health Home Packs which provide an opportunity to reach out to those most vulnerable in communities to provide packs which contain items such as gardening starter kits and nature identifications cards.
- HLH has developed a range of online events and activities which support people's wellbeing including music tuition for children and learning programmes delivered by its culture team.
- In partnership HLH has supported the "Change Minds" project with the development of an app which enables people with dementia to access museum collections online and through the archives service, aimed at improving their wellbeing.

6.4.3 With further development, aspects of the above, could most certainly be incorporated into a future events and festival programme for arts, culture and community participation.

6.5 Reputation

6.5.1 The ICGF events and festivals programme has developed a first-rate reputation both locally and nationally and whilst separately each organisation has a strong reputation and rich heritage, it is believed that as a group that would be amplified; for example, this could attract investment, interest and support in advancing as a forward thinking and collaborative group

6.5.2 It is also important, as the City recovers from the pandemic and adapts to an evolving landscape, the group build on the excellent work to date which has helped foster a strong sense of community through the City's key events.

6.5.3 There are a number of transformational projects and initiatives underway in the City - Inverness Castle, The Victorian Market, Accessing Inverness (under ICATN) and proposals to increase Hotel capacity within the City - which will all serve to enhance the City for many years to come.

- 6.5.4 For example, the work to transform Inverness Castle and the Castlehill area into a world class visitor attraction is well underway. The design process places the ability to host events and festivals as one of the key features driving the development of the creative content within the new attraction to ensure that the Castle and its environs can play a positive role in supporting the Inverness events and festivals programme in the City. At this stage in the project, work is focusing on ensuring that the necessary infrastructure is being added to the design specification to enable indoor and outdoor events and festivals to be hosted in and around the Castle.
- 6.5.5 It is imperative that the events programme compliments these developments and shows a more cohesive and joined up approach to improving the City for its residents and visitors through infrastructure and interactions
- 6.5.6 Events have proven to be essential in supporting the community and making the City a welcoming place and failure to continue this rich tradition could have a negative impact on the reputation of the ICGF and the City.

6.6 Health and Safety

- 6.6.1 Not only does the events programme provide a sense of community, it also helps ensure that events are hosted adhering to strict health and safety practices – it could be argued that the continued and permanent absence of co-ordinated events would see an increase in unregulated ad-hoc events; this could result in any number of issues that require interventions from emergency services.
- 6.6.2 In relation to Bonfire Night, Ross Nixon, Group Commander at Scottish Fire & Rescue Service said, “If Scottish Government guidelines permit, SFRS would support the continuation of organised events around Bonfire Night in 2021 as they undoubtedly bring the community together at a central location and reduce the likelihood of anti-social activity related to wilful fire raising.”

7. Next Steps

- 7.1 The following key milestones will be the immediate focus for the working group -
- Further analysis to discuss enhanced partnership working and substantiate operational considerations including organisational roles and responsibilities
 - Use proposed operating model to inform resource requirements

A paper updating Members on findings will be taken to the May CIAC for approval before further progressing the following key high-level tasks –

- Identify, develop and cost potential recovery events for Q3 and Q4 2021/22
- Use introductory events (and lessons learned) to inform the development of a re-occurring programme

Designation: Executive Chief Officer - Transformation

Date: 28/01/2021

Received by Committee Services on 9 February 2021 at 12:01pm

Appendix 1: Proposed Vision, Values and Objectives

ICGF Workshop Output 14th December 2020



Inverness Common Good Fund Events & Festivals

Workshop objective: To discuss and agree the Vision, Values and Objectives that will enable and support improved partnership working that will act as the vehicle for any future Events & Festivals programme for the Inverness City area.

Vision

We will spearhead the development of a vibrant, inclusive and iconic programme of Events and Festivals that celebrate the unique identity and culture of our City and Region. We will build on previous successes, striving to utilise expertise and talent from across the Highlands and attract additional sources of external funding to help support economic prosperity and encourage physical and mental wellbeing for the City, its residents and visitors.

Our vision is a point of reference. It will inform future events and working practices and serve as a high-level document we can use to build confidence with our delivery partners and potential funders.

Values

Inclusive: We will remove barriers to ensure that all activity is inclusive and accessible, enabling participation and engagement with the City of Inverness's most vulnerable residents.

Ambitious: We will be ambitious and aspire towards producing an iconic programme of events and festivals that profile the Highland's cultural excellence.

Collaborative: We will work collectively to maximise the expertise and capacity of a broad network of Highland cultural organisations and individuals, striving to ensure value for money.

Dynamic: We will build upon past success by producing a programme that adapts and responds to changing cultural contexts and to opportunities that arise.

Responsible: We will adopt strong and clear governance to help ensure events and festivals will be conducted in a safe, secure and compliant manner that recognises the wider environmental and community impacts.

Our values set out core beliefs that are shared and embraced across the cross-organisational group and our partners. They reflect the behaviours and considerations we promote that will help us achieve our vision.

Objectives

To deliver a **dynamic approach to producing events** that is flexible and responsive to opportunities to attract new funding and develop mutually beneficial partnerships.

To develop a programme that is **outcomes-driven** and that embeds processes of monitoring and evaluation that enables evidence-based future decision-making.

To demonstrate **value for money** by supporting activities that have the potential to leverage additional funding and attract earned income and mitigate the need for additional public funding.

We will support events that **value, trust and strengthen individual and organisations** engaged in cultural activities that make a unique contribution to society and economy.

To enable a **year-round programme of activity throughout the seasons** with a co-ordinated approach to marketing and promotion.

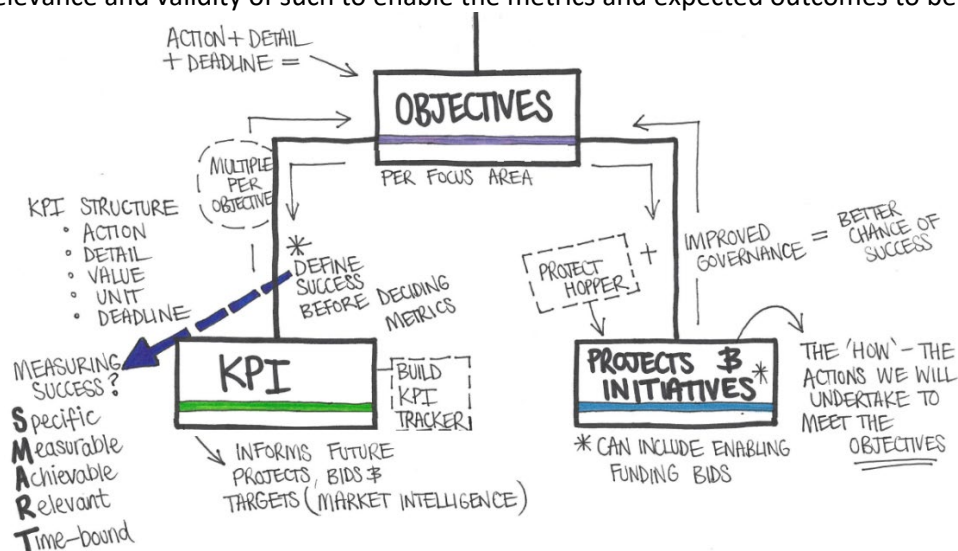
To curate an events programme that is rooted in **the characteristics of the City and its people**, acknowledging the City's past whilst looking to its future.

Our objectives outline what we want to achieve through this intervention. They are high level statements of intent that will help shape programme and help inform the expected outcomes from individual events.

Next Steps

Stage 2 of the development will be progressed. This will be primarily driven through engagement with partners and officers as it needs to be informed and influenced at an operational level. It will include:

- Translating the vision into deliverable packages of work so that it can be easily understood how projects and initiatives will be shaped (including analysis of potential operating models, governance structures and costed working practices).
- Assessing existing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), then analysing and agreeing the relevance and validity of such to enable the metrics and expected outcomes to be agreed.



This will result in a paper - capturing the agreed Vision, Values and Objectives and a proposed approach to delivering events and festivals – going to the City of Inverness Area Committee on February 18th 2021.

Appendix 2: Overview of Risks and Mitigation

Risk ID	Risk Category	Risk	Risk Mitigation(s)
EF1	Financial	The proposed arrangement may result in delivery of core events being more costly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further analysis to understand potential cost increase/variation • Appraise operating models (including defined roles and responsibilities) to define expectations • Continued strong governance and budgetary monitoring • Increased use of partners commercial knowledge/experience • Ongoing reporting and sign-off through CIAC
EF2	Financial	Lack of clarity/certainty on availability of ICG funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper to CIAC seeking confirmation of budget and designation of funds
EF3	Resourcing	Partner organisations may have insufficient available resource to develop proposals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use analysis to substantiate resource requirements and agree resource implications in advance of sequencing • Future development of events (or any programme) will reflect available budget and project resource
EF4	Resourcing	Lack of dedicated resource to develop proposals and inform future programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use analysis to substantiate resource requirements and agree resource implications in advance of sequencing • Determine appetite for recruiting to vacant post (or adopt partnership model) or alternative post
EF5	Reputational	Reputational fallout due to lack of popular and longstanding events being delivered (as currently no programme or resource to deliver)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work to better understand ICG appetite for continuing with events and agree initial operating model