

City of Inverness Area Committee

Minutes of Meeting of the **Events and Festivals Working Group** held remotely on Monday, 20 September 2021 at 10.00 am.

Present:

Highland Council:

Mr I Brown
Mr D Macpherson
Mrs I Mackenzie
Mrs C Caddick

Other Representatives:

Mr M Smith, Manager, Inverness BID
Ms J Cuddy, Manager, Eastgate Shopping Centre
Mr M Golding – Visit Loch Ness
Ms L McGlennon – Eden Court

Officials in Attendance:

Mr D Haas, Inverness City Area Manager
Ms F Hampton, Director Inverness Castle Project HLH (Management and Admin)
Ms A MacLeod, Events Development Manager HLH (Management and Admin)
Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance

Preliminaries

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were submitted for Mr C Smith.

2. Exclusion of the Public

Members **RESOLVED** that the public be excluded from the meeting during discussion of the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 06 September 2021 were **NOTED**, and it was **AGREED** Mrs I MacKenzie should be included on the sederunt.

5. Presentation

Following on from the decisions taken at the Working Group meeting held on 6 September, matters had progressed. A presentation was given on the updated plans for an Events Programme by the Inverness Events Development Manager, as detailed below.

Update to Scottish Government Event Sector Guidance

Proof of vaccination would be required from 1st October 2021 for unseated outdoor live events, with more than 4,000 people in the audience, and for any event, of any nature, which had more than 10,000 people in attendance.

Halloween

Proposed events included:

- Inverness Botanic Gardens, 'Night at the Botanics' in the week leading up to Halloween;
- daytime spooky family activities across Halloween weekend;
- Halloween food market;
- Arts in Motion; and
- a City-wide window dressing campaign.

Fireworks Night

Members' input was sought on the following options, which would be approved via the Safety Advisory Group.

Option 1 - no firework display, the current position of all other Scottish cities;
Option 2 – display only at Inverness Castle; and
Option 3 – display only at Northern Meeting Park.

- Members were supportive of the plan to hold a firework display that could be viewed from a reasonable distance, to ensure crowds did not gather in one place, with safety being the key priority;
- clarification was sought and provided that the firework event organiser offered flexibility to cancel closer to the event, if Covid guidance or other issues so required. Discussion took place on the advantages of the Castle versus the Northern Meeting Park;
- alternative activities proposed included a light show, and show-casing Highland arts & crafts and food & drink. Given the short timescales, alternative ideas would be more useful for future years. It was pointed out that there was a growing resistance to the use of fireworks, which included environmental concerns and stress to animals;
- with regard to value for money from a firework display, reference was made to the prevention of firework-related accidents at home;
- it was suggested that if the firework event attracted 120 additional visitors to Inverness, it would make the display economically worthwhile; and
- early and clear communication about the event was urged.

Christmas Lights – Inverness Sparkles!

Event proposals included:

- investment in lights for the city centre, including the Council's lighting team identifying current resource available, options to order new thematic lights, and costing of repair to Ness Islands festoon;
- Trails/Illuminations/Building Projections;
- exploring specialist, external resource and costing options;
- the Eastgate Hospice Christmas Tree being taken into the programme rather than being an independent event;
- supporting the addition of extra lights;
- a Christmas Garden at Bellfield Park;
- Christmas Markets;
- Food and Drink Trail;
- Santa's Sleigh across the City; and
- Santa Run at the New West Link Park Run.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- a family-friendly walk rather than Park Run might be more popular;
- guidance was being sought from the Scottish Government on safety implications for city centre wide-scale events, such as the food and drink trail, which could be attended by significant numbers but spread geographically and by time. From a communications point of view, these would not be classified as an 'event';
- the importance of clear, early communication with the public about the programme and safety considerations was emphasised;
- it was unlikely the arrival of Santa's Sleigh at the Town House and the reindeer events could go ahead this year as they would involve too many people gathering in one place;
- the situation with regard to Christmas trees was summarised, with the Hospice tree in the Eastgate Centre, and trees planned for outside the Town House. Members voiced support for purchasing improved Christmas lighting for the city centre, with a further suggestion that some year-round lighting would be beneficial. Activities outwith Inverness could be taken forward by the Council's corporate amenities team. There would be no Christmas tree at the Castle this year as it was a building site;
- it was suggested 'Sparkles' as a name had childish connotations; and
- suggestion that owners of empty properties in the city centre be contacted about brightening up their shop fronts would be passed on to Inverness BID and the Council's regeneration team, though it was thought unlikely this would prove fruitful this year, where the focus would remain on the streets of the city centre.

Hogmanay

Event proposals included:

- support offer within city centre businesses; and

- liaison with BID and Visit Inverness Loch Ness with regard to hospitality.

During discussion the following issues were considered:

- suggestions included expansion of the Christmas trails / illuminations / activities etc, and a New Year's Day, or longer, 'fresh start' event, such as an organised walk, possibly linked to a charity that supported people who suffered from loneliness or isolation during the festive period;
- discussion took place on whether shops, restaurants etc would be open on New Year's Day, which was unlikely;
- the possibility of New Year's Eve fireworks and / or a light show should be investigated;
- the Red Hot Highland Fling normally attracted around 10k participants and it was hoped these people would have alternative places to go to celebrate;
- it was important to work with partners to provide a signposting service to other events that were organised in and around Inverness; and
- assurance was sought and provided that the Gathering Place on the River Ness would be operational before the end of the year, and that the pantomime was going ahead at Eden Court this year.

The Working Group:

- i. **AGREED** to the above proposals being developed into the following Events Programme for the Winter Festival 2021/22:
 - Halloween – as proposed above;
 - Bonfire night – A fireworks display from Inverness Castle or if not feasible, from Norther Meeting Park strictly subject to arrangements meeting with the approval of the Licensing Authority's Safety Advisory Group and to any other matters of concern being addressed to the satisfaction of the Council;
 - Christmas Lights – Inverness Sparkles – as proposed above; and
 - Hogmanay – as proposed above.
- ii. **AGREED** that the Events Programme would be developed and finalised by officers strictly subject to the budget for each of the Events noted above being prepared and presented to the next meeting of the Working Group. Noting that Members indicated that they would be minded to approve the budgets for the respective events so long as they fell within allocated sums; and
- iii. **NOTED** the presentation and that the City Events and Festivals programme for the Winter Festival period was subject to change depending on the nature of COVID-19 Guidance and Council Policy in force at the time.

6. Financial Monitoring

Members **NOTED** that financial monitoring would be reported to the next meeting with event budgets in the event that an Events Programme has been agreed.

7. Date of Next Meeting

Members **NOTED** that the date of the next meeting will be Thursday 21 October at 11am.

The meeting ended at 11.10am