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Our Ref:
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Dear Mr Turner

Scotland - The Perfect Stage

The Highland Council welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation undertaken by EventScotland into the new strategy - Scotland - The Perfect Stage.

With tourism as the area's main industry the Council has a strong interest in events and this response incorporates comments from the Council's Planning & Development Service who have responsibility for tourism development. The Council's Education Culture & Sport Service also has an interest in events particularly through its involvement in and experience from Highland 2007 and their comments have also been included in this response.

1. Does the document cover all the main areas required by a national events strategy and if not what do you feel is missing?

Many of the main areas are covered but there are also elements which the Council feel would benefit from more specific references. The structural links between EventScotland and VisitScotland are referred to in the document but there is no reference to any joint working. EventScotland's strategy needs to be closely enough aligned with VisitScotland activities that it supports the achievement of tourism objectives.

Some specific reference to seasonality would be welcomed - outside Scotland's large cities this is still one of the main issues facing businesses and using events as a way of addressing seasonality is to be encouraged. The Council would suggest that more resources be allocated to encouraging off season events rather than main season events when business levels are already high. For example "The Gathering" in Edinburgh in 2009 will take place at a time when occupancy levels in the city are traditionally at around 80%.

Similarly, it would be helpful for partners to understand the degree to which the new strategy will encourage and support the development of an events portfolio across Scotland and in particular outwith the central belt. This would inform the development of partners' own events and festivals strategies and the subsequent planning processes.

For the same reasons it would be helpful if the strategy included an indication of how the budget held by EventScotland would be allocated to support the delivery of its vision and mission. In simple terms, partners need to know the potential level of support that EventScotland may be able to

provide to event organisers in their area or who wish to host events in their area. This information would assist in shaping the visions or aspirations of many partners' events strategies.

2. Is this strategy one which your organisation would be comfortable aligning to? If not which aspects offer challenges in this respect?

The Highland Council would be happy to work with EventScotland to devise an events and festivals strategy for the Highlands that contributes to the vision of 'Scotland – The Perfect Stage' and which maximises on the economic and social benefits that events can deliver for the Highlands of Scotland.

3. Is the role that your organisation can play identified clearly enough? If not how can we make this clearer?

Our reading of the strategy does not leave us with a clear impression of the nature of the partnership anticipated with The Highland Council and it is our interpretation that this could be more positively articulated. In addition, point 6.4 appears to indicate an 'imposed' role for local authorities which we would resist and would indeed insist that such a relationship be the subject of individual dialogue and agreement.

4. As an organisation involved in delivering a portfolio of events for Scotland do you have sufficient resources to meet the challenges of this strategy?

With competing demands local authorities will always find it difficult to find sufficient resources for all events. However, The Highland Council will provide funding to events, festivals and cultural activity within the region through the Highland 2007 Legacy Programme. The Council would also encourage EventScotland to give more recognition to the support offered by local authorities, often on an "in kind" basis. The Council frequently provides resources in terms of venues, licensing, post event cleaning services and supporting events and this should be recognised as part of the overall funding package for an event.

5. This strategy is a top level document; do you have any particular ideas about what EventScotland should be doing operationally to lead the implementation of this strategy?

The Highland Council would be interested to learn more about the ways in which the operational plans of EventScotland will deliver the strategy. We note your comment in 10.2 that the operational plans of EventScotland will be internal documents only. In the spirit of 'regular and open communication' referred to in 8.6, this may not be a helpful approach in creating the proactive partnerships you seek to establish.

In addition we would be interested in your plans in respect of the following:

- i) The promotion of Gaelic language and culture as a USP for Scotland.
- ii) Persuading the national media to cover events and festivals of all scales across Scotland and particularly outwith Edinburgh and Glasgow.
- iii) Reviewing the classification and levels of intervention of the international and regional funding programmes to address the constructive feedback from event organisers.

Further comments

In addition to answering the specific questions outlined in your covering letter we would like to make the following comments on specific sections within the document:-

1.1 - Our cultural identity and heritage - Whilst welcoming the inclusion of this as one of Scotland's assets, we would recommend that you include Gaelic language or indeed language which is not only a distinctive and important element of our culture but also the basis for a number of successful events across Scotland.

6.5 We feel that conferences and exhibitions can contribute positively to the events portfolio of the Highlands and Scotland and therefore we would recommend that you do not place a blanket 'veto' on considering support for this type of event. In 2007 the Highlands successfully hosted both 'Landscapes and People' and 'The Vital Spark' in September and October respectively with each event attracting a significant number of international delegates to the area outwith the peak tourist season. In October 2009, the Highlands will host 'Scotland's Global Impact – how one small nation changed the world', our national conference on diaspora studies as part of the Homecoming Scotland celebrations. This event aims to attract a minimum of 500 international delegates to Scotland again outwith the tourist season and while the scale of the event may not be large in numbers, it will tick several of the other 'impact' boxes proposed within the strategy. We would suggest that conferences and exhibitions should be considered on the same basis as all other event proposals and not excluded as to do so may be a missed opportunity.

6.6 - Events will be either..... Cultural or Sport - Again we accept that different approaches will often be required but it is not always the case that "sports events are bid for" - the Highlands and indeed other areas of Scotland have many home grown events which have become significant in terms of both numbers and media profile. The Baxters' Loch Ness Marathon is one such example, with other smaller events such as the Highland Cross running / cycling event and the Strathpuffer 24 hour mountain bike event being locally inspired and organised yet they have still attracted significant television coverage.

The Highland Council is also keen to encourage further development of shinty - events that are undoubtedly sporting events but also have a significant cultural element.

6.6 - Events will be either..... Proactive or Reactive - The Council would encourage EventScotland to continue to proactively seek out events but would encourage EventScotland to involve possible partners at as early a stage as possible and with a clear indication of what would be expected of them particularly in financial terms. The recent example of a round of the World Rally Championship being 'offered' to local authorities was one example, with considerable effort being put in by EventScotland to liaise with the event organisers while ultimately the demands on local authorities were clearly well beyond their reach, meaning there was little chance of successfully attracting the event. Similarly, the Council was put under undue pressure to match fund the successful recipients of awards made during the last round of the regional programme without our prior agreement.

7.3 - Measurement - The development of a good practice guide by EventScotland is to be welcomed. However it will be important to ensure that this is suitable for use with events of all scales and also that the range of benefits that can be measured are broad enough and not solely related to economic impact. It has to be recognised that in some cases small, off season events in small or rural locations can be comparatively more beneficial than a peak season city event that while attracting large numbers simply displaces existing business.

8. Communication - Whilst agreeing that elements of the promotion of events should rest with VisitScotland, the Council would expect this section to make more reference to the activities of VisitScotland given their role as the national tourism marketing agency. Bearing in mind the close structural links between EventScotland and VisitScotland some detail on joint working on promotion should be included in this section.

11. Resources – Do you have a strategy to work with partners to 'ensure' that the resources referred to in 11.2 are secured? Otherwise we presume that your strategy will require to be altered

to reflect this change in the operating environment. Finally we would ask you to note that you have omitted Highlands and Islands Enterprise within this section and we assume that this is an oversight.

I trust these comments from The Highland Council will assist you finalise your strategy document.