

City of Inverness Area Committee

Minutes of Meeting of the **Events and Festivals Working Group** held remotely on Monday 17 August 2020 at 10.00 am.

Present:

Highland Council:

Mr G Ross
Mrs I Mackenzie
Mr D Macpherson
Mr C Smith

Other Representatives:

Mr J Mackenzie-Blackman, Chief Executive, Eden Court Highlands
Ms R Bell, Eden Court Highlands
Mr M Golding, Visit Loch Ness
Ms J Cuddy, Manager, Eastgate Shopping Centre
Ms J Murray, Victorian Market Manager

Officials in Attendance:

Mr D Haas, Inverness City Area Manager
Mr G Reynolds, Inverness Events Manager
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator

Mr G Ross in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr I Brown and Mr M Smith.

2. Exclusion of the Public

Members **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50(A) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public should 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 Paragraph 6 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting

There had been circulated Minutes from the previous Meeting held on 2 March 2020, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

5. Financial Monitoring

There had been circulated Report No E&F02/20 by the Inverness City Area

Manager dated 5 August 2020 setting out the revenue monitoring position for the period to 31 July 2020 and showing the actual expenditure to date.

The Events Manager advised that due to the Covid-19 emergency period and the suspension of events and festivals, expenditure had been incurred only in relation to staff costs and purchase of merchandise.

Thereafter, the Working Group **NOTED** the revenue monitoring position to 31 July 2020.

6. 2020-21 Programme/ Scottish Government Update

The Events Manager advised that it was anticipated the Scottish Government would announce on 24 August 2020 the possible easing of some the Covid-19 smaller event related restrictions. However, it was not expected that major events would be permitted until the end of Phase 4 of the Scottish Government's Recovery Plan. There was a need to proceed carefully in respect of smaller events and to ensure venues were reviewed, redesigned, and comprehensively risked assessed to be as safe as possible. He also highlighted the concerns in regard to the impact of the pandemic on the events industry.

The Inverness City Area Manager reported that the events industry was in a state of flux and subject to ongoing change. The emphasis was on responding to that change and through work undertaken with partners to be in a strong place to take advantage of opportunities. He also welcomed the collaborative approach taken with Eden Court in respect of the Winter festival.

Mr J Mackenzie-Blackman advised that Eden Court was mainly reliant on production companies and producers for bringing in productions, and it was anticipated there would not be the normal programme of shows and events until March 2021 at the earliest. However, short term funding received from the Scottish Government provided the resource for Eden Court to deliver an interim programme with social distancing. He was fully aware of the important role Eden Court in the wider economy of the City Centre and provided an outline of the timescales for reopening the building, starting with the café, cinema and maybe some live performances, including outdoors.

Mr M Golding, Visit Loch Ness reported that from a tourism perspective the current position was positive in terms of activity providers and attractions. Hotels and self-catering establishments were largely filling their new capacities and the general footfall was encouraging. There was cautious optimism at present, however at the same time an awareness of the need to focus on the product offering and promotion over the winter to attract people into the area, with events and festivals being a key element of this offering.

Ms J Cuddy advised that while footfall was significantly down on the previous year, customers were in the main purchasing goods rather than browsing. Retailers had observed a significant increase in tourists over the recent period which was encouraging, and the current focus was on achieving a balance in terms of marketing and compliance with the Scottish Government advice. She also provided an update on proposed events in October and in the festive period, some of which would be done virtually.

During discussion, the Chair emphasised that in terms of the crucial importance of events and festivals to the economy recovery of the City and the wider area.

The Working Group **NOTED** the update.

7. City and Area Recovery Group

The Inverness City Area Manager and Events Manager provided a summary of the content and recommendations contained in the report on the Covid-19 review of events and festivals to be submitted to the City of Inverness Area Committee on 27 August 2020

During detailed discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the proposed Riverlights Project would attract people to the City and support the local economy and should be welcomed;
- the winter festival creates a strong destination product and adds vibrancy to the City and there was also the potential for the wider communities to offer their own contribution to the festival should events be possible this year;
- the importance of the festival being adequately resourced, and in this regard the City of Inverness Area Committee be asked to approve a retention of £140,000 from the 2020/21 Inverness Common Good Fund Events and Festivals budget;
- the need for a joined-up approach involving the food and drink industry, arts and crafts, and music organisations and groups as an alternative to major events to provide for the enjoyment and participation of all ages and abilities and to support the local economy;
- the potential to have organised outdoor Halloween and Bonfire Night events subject to social distancing and other precautionary measures, including fireworks displays which could be viewed by the public at home. However, it was emphasised that currently plans could not be made for any type of event which would cause people to gather;
- an assurance was sought and provided that officers were mindful of the implications of a further lockdown in terms of the postponement of potential events;
- support for the development of a Covid-19 Safe Events Space at the Northern Meeting Park, Inverness, and for a programme of activities and events to be staged in this space to be curated by a working group; and
- the potential for other smaller scale events to be held in City Centre such as street food fair to encourage footfall, and for this to be taken forward by a small working group.

Following further discussion, the Group **AGREED** to recommend that up to £140,000 be reallocated from the 2020/21 Inverness Common Good Fund Events and Festivals Budget toward the cost of replacement events as described in the report for the Winter Festival period, in consultation with Members of the City Area Recovery Group.

The Group further **AGREED**:-

- i. to support the development of a Covid-19 Safe Events Space at the Northern Meeting Park, Inverness, along with the potential for smaller

events, to be curated by a working group, which would meet Covid-19 and any other applicable guidelines and policies in the event of restrictions being eased sufficiently; and

- ii. that potential for other smaller events to be held the City Centre to encourage footfall and taken forward by a small working group be investigated.

8. Any Other Business

Following discussion, the Group **AGREED** that consideration be given to potential events to mark the 100th anniversary of the first official Cabinet meeting held outwith London, this having been hosted in the Town House, Inverness.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group **NOTED** that the next scheduled meeting would be held on 30 November 2020 and **AGREED** that additional meetings be arranged in the interim period as and when required to take forward the replacement events and festivals programme.

The meeting closed at 11.30am.
