

AGENDA ITEM 13 iii

City of Inverness Area Committee

Minutes of Meeting of the **Events and Festivals Working Group** held in the 2nd Floor Committee Room, Town House, Inverness on Monday, 15 August 2022 at 3.00 pm.

Present:

Highland Council:

Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	}	Working Group Members
Mrs J Hendry	}	
Mr R Mackintosh	}	
Mrs M Reid	}	

Mr I Brown	}	Non Working Group Members
Mr K Gowans	}	

Other Representatives:

Mr M Smith, Inverness BID
Mr M Golding, Visit Inverness Loch Ness Ltd

Officials in Attendance:

Mr A Gunn- ECO, Communities and Place
Mr D Haas, Inverness City Area Manager
Mr S Walsh, Chief Executive, High Life Highland
Ms F Hampton, Director Inverness Castle Project HLH
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Inverness City Area Manager reminded those present of the remit of the Working Group.

Miss J MacLennan in the Chair for Items 1-4.

1. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence, from Working Group Members, was intimated on behalf of Mrs I MacKenzie.

2. Exclusion of the Public

The Working Group **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 no Declaration of Interest from Members of the Working Group.

4. Appointment of Chair

Having been duly proposed and seconded, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair was appointed Chair of the Events and Festivals Working Group.

5. Presentation

A presentation was given by the Chief Executive, High Life Highland on the Inverness Highland Games held on 16 August 2022 along with progress being made on the rest of the events programme for 2022/23 and associated budgets.

Inverness Highland Games

This year's Inverness Highland Games was the first to have taken place since 2019 and the first civic event post the Covid pandemic and Local Government elections. In total, 7034 people had attended, with 3530 advance ticket sales being sold, generating ticket income of £55k. Attendance had increased by 41% and income by 32%, reducing the event's reliance on the Inverness Common Good Fund. Having outlined a number of programme highlights and the press coverage the event had attracted, it was explained a formal event debrief would take place but there were a number of positives to take forward.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- congratulations were expressed for what had been a successful event with many positive comments expressed. This was a good outcome for the Inverness Common Good Fund;
- it was felt that the vendors were spread out with some stands having few customers due to their location. This was simply due to logistics but vendors would be approached for their views and tweaks made were possible;
- the 40% of attendees being from the international sector was to be welcomed;
- it was important to remember the local element of the Games;
- in response to a question it was explained advance ticket sales took place 2 weeks in advance so not to encroach of the Piping Inverness event. This could be revisited however to determine the optimum time for advance sales which had the added benefit of allowing visitors to plan events well in advance, recognising that the Games were one of a suite of events taking place;
- marketing could be linked with the Inverness Hotels Association so that timing of events could be coordinated to encourage visitors to stay longer;
- it was important to support the Inverness Highland Games Committee so that they could feel connected to the event and that they had ownership of it. It was important to look at future proofing the Games by attracting younger Committee Members;
- there had been some disappointment regarding the Branding and that the Games had, to a degree, was perceived to be an HLH Highland Games. Traditional colours of the Games would have been preferred rather than the

turquoise that had been adopted which had also made some of the font difficult to read;

- there had been complaints about the length of the queues at some of the food vendors. In response it was confirmed that, as advance ticket sales increased, so had the number of food vendors. However, it was important to remember that the space available was finite;
- sponsorship represented only a small proportion of income and it was queried if this merited the effort made to attract the said sponsorship. In response, HLH indicated they would continue to seek sponsorship but would not rely on it. There was also a danger that any significant increase in sponsorship could reduce funding from other sources; and
- while many liked to take an event programme home, it was suggested that a digital programme could also be produced.

Discussion then took place as to the potential events for the 2022/23 Winter Festival.

Halloween

The proposal was to build on last year's successful Botanics from 26-30 October and explore the possibility of collaborating with Eden Court's Monsterfest taking place at the same time. It would be a ticketed event, with entry still free, as this allowed numbers to be managed and the gardens to be protected.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- the approach to Eden Court was to compliment events, not to encroach on each other;
- the Botanics offered a much safer venue;
- it would not be possible to use the café at the Botanics but vendors would be brought in;
- it was questioned if the workshop at the Botanics could also be used as allocation for additional attractions;
- it was essential that Botanics remained a free event. With the increase in the cost of living, this might be the only event that some families could take their children to;
- it was queried if associated activities, such as colouring in, were necessary;
- hopefully a local company would come forward to operate a shuttle bus service; and
- it was acknowledged that Ness Islands were atmospheric but holding Halloween events there had required factors such as water levels to be taken into account.

5th November

This event would be moving to back to Bught Park. This time however it was queried if a bonfire was a necessary part of the event.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service were strongly in support of having a civic bonfire as it would reduce the number of unsupervised bonfires elsewhere;
- Members saw the bonfire as fundamental to the success of the event;
- a bonfire added extra lighting and added more of a structure to the evening;
- it was acknowledged holding a bonfire had environmental issues and perhaps lower carbon fuel could be used. However, building a bonfire required careful attention to ensure safety and that the bonfire burnt at the correct rate; and
- a competition for local Primary Schools to build a Guy would generate good publicity.

Christmas at Bellfield Park

The proposal was to run this event from 1-26 December. This event, in 2021, had brought in a lot of secondary spend to Inverness and had proved particularly popular when Covid restrictions were in place, attracting visitors from both Inverness and the surrounding area. However, now that Covid restrictions had been lifted, it was possible numbers could reduce.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- it was suggested the tennis courts could also be used to run Exclusively Highland Craft Fairs which would attract a different market. However, the tennis courts were in poor condition and the gates would need to be reconfigured. In addition, this would encroach on the Winter Wonderland markets held at Wild Woodz, Munloch;
- in response, the costings detailed involved lighting, staff costs, security and hiring equipment;
- it was queried, and confirmed, that generators had been used to economise on energy costs;
- shortening the running time of the event would generate some savings. However, caution was urged that any decision to shorten an event was data led and was not prejudicial to the economic benefit that the event brought;
- ticketing the event would enable information to be gathered as to where those attending had come from. This in turn could evidence the benefit generated to local hotels, pubs and restaurants; and
- it was suggested that donations could be sought at the event. Whilst, High Life Highland was able to receive donations as a registered charity, Inverness Common Good Fund were unable to do so. Furthermore, this could confuse the message to the public and create an inaccurate perception.

Christmas Lights

This year it was hoped to tie in the Christmas lights with the new City Lighting Scheme. However, there would be no formal “switching on” ceremony. Although additional resources had been made available to improve Christmas Lights, this would primarily be confined to the High Street. This was in part due to the rising cost and the capacity to deliver.

In this regard, the Working Group **AGREED** that a meeting be arranged between the Provost and Leader of Inverness City and Area and the Council’s Lighting Section to explore the issues that had arisen.

Red Hot Highland Fling

It was intended Manran would headline this year's event but Members were invited to use any possible contacts to suggest additional acts to HLH. The infrastructure for this event was considerable, hence the higher budget allocated. As in previous years, a firework display would also be form part of the event.

Summing Up

During the course of discussion the following points were raised:-

- overall, there was insufficient budget to provide all of the above events and undoubtedly reducing the Winter Festival Programme would have an impact. With increasing costs, it was also important that there was an element of contingency built in;
- it was important to manage expectations if events were cut back;
- it was suggested that some events, particularly the Red Hot Highland Fling, could attract sponsorship from breweries;
- the budget for Events and Festival had remained the same for some years and it was time for this to be revisited; and
- whilst there were suggestions that the local hospitality sector could help contribute, it was important to bear in mind the considerable impact the Covid pandemic had had on this sector and which was only now starting to recover.

Thereafter, the Working Group **AGREED** to instruct officers to proceed as follows:-

- i. that, as Christmas at Bellfiled Park had been a one-off event, this be removed from the Winter Programme and the surplus budget used as a contingency for the other events; and
- ii. that the remaining events proceed and that consideration be given to each Member of the Working Group becoming the spokesperson for a specific event (to be determined).

6. Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group **AGREED** that the next meeting would be held in late September/early October on a date to be determined in consultation with the Chair.

The meeting ended at 5.20 pm