

## **City of Inverness Area Committee**

Minutes of the meeting of the **Events and Festivals Working Group** held in the Leader's Meeting Room, Council Headquarters, Inverness on Thursday, 23 April 2026 at 11.00am.

### **Present:**

#### **Members of the Working Group**

Mr I Brown  
Mrs J Hendry  
Ms K MacLean

#### **Non-members of the Group in attendance:**

Mr M Cameron

#### **Officials in Attendance**

Mr D Haas, Senior Community Development Manager Inverness & South  
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

#### **Also in Attendance:**

Ms K Rait, Inverness Events Manager (Independent sub-contractor)  
Mr G Johnston, Inverness BID  
Ms E Harrison, Visit Inverness Loch Ness

### **Mrs J Hendry in the Chair**

#### **1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr R MacKintosh and Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair.

#### **2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **3. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The Working Group **NOTED** the minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 January 2026.

#### **4. Exclusion of the Public**

The Working Group **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50(A) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, 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.

#### **5. City Area Community Events Programme 2026/27**

The Events Manager and Senior Community Development Manager gave presentations on the plans for the Community Events Programme extending to 31 March 2027 and beyond.

### **Inverness International Blues Festival**

The first Inverness International Blues Festival held on Saturday 28 March was a success in delivering a first class line-up of international Artists from the USA and the UK. The Grammy Nominated Southern Avenue along with the Fabulous Thunderbirds led and the feedback from Artists and the Public has been hugely supportive. For a first event it has done well in terms of ticket sales with 1250 attendees with positive feedback from the artists and attendees despite poor weather on the day. The adverse weather had impacted costs in terms of ground matting and additional heating. Information was provided on sponsorship challenges, income and expenditure, with the finances having come in on budget, although noting that the aimed for sponsorship had not been forthcoming.

During discussion, consideration was given to the following:

- information was sought and provided on whether the event had performed as planned, including the budget situation. Assistance provided to the event by partners was summarised and appreciation expressed. Fewer tickets had been sold than had been hoped, and it was acknowledged that new music festivals took time to build up audiences and interest;
- much of the initial branding work, such as the website and design, were upfront costs which would be of benefit on an ongoing basis;
- the net cost / profit for each event was queried and would be provided as part of Item 6;
- attention was drawn to the financial benefits of running the bar at events in-house. Consideration was given to the merits of purchasing bar infrastructure;
- the impact and additional cost of the severe weather experienced during the event were summarised and discussed;
- it was pointed out that the tickets had been priced lower than the commercial average for this type of event and, with regard to repeating the event, a special Members-only meeting would be called, to include the Provost, to consider whether a future Blues Festival was an overall beneficial and continued to fit with the vision set for Events & Festivals, noting that the aim of the Working Group was not to generate maximum profit but to ensure the Fund was used for the benefit of the residents of the burgh of Inverness;
- the event had not attracted a sufficient number of younger people, and this led to a discussion of the popularity of Blues music with people in the Highlands, especially younger people. Feedback from those who had attended had been good;
- information was sought and provided on the tendering process for the provision of shuttle bus services;
- assurance was sought and provided that a full post-event debrief was undertaken, to help with the management and marketing of future events. A key lesson was the importance of an appropriate lead-in time for the event

- to facilitate publicity; and
- the timing of future events was considered, with reference made to the challenging weather conditions that could be faced outwith the summer, but acknowledging the aim to attract visitors to Inverness during the shoulder months when accommodation and other facility providers were quiet, and to avoid clashes with other commercial events.

Following further discussion on the need to decide as early as possible whether to hold a second Blues festival, and whether the 2027 Council elections would impact on this decision, the Group **AGREED** to hold a special Members-only meeting of the Working Group in early to mid-June 2026 to evaluate the benefits of holding a second Blues Festival against the objectives of the Events & Festivals Working Group.

### **Royal Air Force (RAF) Proposed Event – 19-21 June 2026**

A summary was provided of the plans and costs for the event, including an outline of the site. The event would be free to attend, with school groups likely to attend on the Friday.

### **Inverness Highland Games 2026**

An update was provided on ticket sales, which were significantly ahead of previous years, the social media campaign that was underway, the tender process for traders, which was now closed, sponsorship packages, and improvements being made following feedback from previous year, with attention drawn to the management of queues during the first hour to speed up the entry process.

During discussion, a shuttle bus service from the Torvean park and ride facility was suggested. Information was sought and provided on infrastructure issues, such as marquees and bar provision.

### **Bonfire Night**

In response to a suggestion to use drones instead of fireworks, attention was drawn to the cost and weather challenges. While the bonfire and firework display caused environmental concerns, attention was drawn to the important role played by organised displays in reducing the number of people using fireworks and bonfires at home.

## **6. Budget – Update – 2026/27**

Once the events programme for 2026/27 had been confirmed, reports on programmed spend would be taken to future meetings of the Working Group.

The Working Group **NOTED** the budget position.

## **7. Date of Next Meeting**

The Working Group **NOTED** that the date of the next meeting would be

Thursday 21 May at 2pm and that a further Members only meeting would be arranged for June 2026, as detailed at Item 5.

Meeting ended at 12.30pm.