

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Tourism and Recreation Event Programme – Halloween, Atlantic Sessions and Christmas Delivery Options 2021</b>
<b>Committee Report Submitted To:</b>	<b>Leisure &amp; Development Committee</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>21 September 2021</b>
<b>For Decision or For Information</b>	<b>For Decision</b>

<b>Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)</b>	
Strategic Theme	Promote our tourist offer locally and internationally
Outcome	Improve prosperity  To provide a balanced portfolio for major events across the Borough and facilitate partnership with other event promoters.
Lead Officer	Head of Tourism and Recreation

<b>Budgetary Considerations</b>	
Cost of Proposal	<b>Maximum £127,220 Plus potentially £20,000 funding for Atlantic Sessions</b>
Included in Current Year Estimates	<b>Yes</b>
Capital/Revenue	Revenue
Code	
Staffing Costs	n/a

<b>Screening Requirements</b>	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	n/a	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	n/a	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	n/a	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	n/a	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	n/a	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	n/a	Date:

## **1.0 Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to outline proposals to deliver Council led events for the remainder of 2021. Approval is sought to proceed with preferred options with the recognition that the Public Health Authority and Government restrictions may alter the format and viability prior to scheduled dates.

## **2.0 Background**

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council has a significant remit with regard to the support, delivery and facilitation of tourism events within the region. The past 18 months have been challenging and have significantly impacted on both Council-led events and those events provided by the third sector.

At the March 2021 Leisure and Development Committee, Elected Members agreed that the Council Events Programme for 2021 would be marked virtually, where possible. To date, this has included Ballymoney Spring Fair, Rhythm of the Bann, Rathlin Sound Maritime Festival, Auld Lammas Fair and Salmon and Whiskey.

A decision on post-September delivery was deferred until later in the year to allow time for monitoring the impact of the pandemic and resulting Covid-19 restrictions on events and mass gatherings. This forms the basis of this report.

## **3.0 Impact of Covid-19 on 2021 Council Managed Events**

As per 2020, the majority of Council managed events planned for 2021 have been cancelled in the physical world. This was a direct result of Public Health Agency (PHA) guidance in relation to COVID 19, and in particular as a result of a government ban on events and 'mass gatherings'. The events affected were Ballymoney Spring Fair, Easter Seasonal Programme, Rhythm of the Bann, NW200 Race Week Festival, Rathlin Sound Maritime Festival, Salmon and Whiskey Festival, Seasonal Summer Street Theatre Programme, Summer Fireworks, Summer Entertainment and Auld Lammas Fair.

In 2020, both the Tourism and Recreation Halloween and Christmas programmes were delivered in a virtual format, with content uploaded to the Visit Causeway and Events Facebook pages. Atlantic Sessions was also delivered via a virtual format.

## **4.0 Latest Government Advice/Guidance**

COVID 19 related regulations and guidance has been subject to many changes over the last year. Council has received limited guidance on cultural, entertainment and recreational gatherings. Advice states that the event organiser is responsible for carrying out necessary risk assessments and take all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of the coronavirus.

As of 26 July 2021, the latest restrictions from the NI Executive in relation to outdoor gatherings state that the organiser or operator must:

- *Carry out a risk assessment if the gathering exceeds 30 people.*
- *Take all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of the coronavirus.*
- *If requested to do so by a relevant person, provide:*
  - a) *a copy of the risk assessment and*
  - b) *an account of the reasonable measures taken.*
- *Maintain social distancing, as well as good hand and respiratory hygiene practices.*

*The regulations also state that when travelling to events, spectators should walk, cycle or use private transport, shared only with members of the same household where possible.*

The NI Executive has recently issued guidance on conducting risk assessments and this includes examples of mitigation measures.

Event organisers must adhere to the Health and Safety at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 and Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 in all aspects of event planning and delivery.

The Tourism Events team, working on the advice they have received to date for the NI Executive, Public Health Authority (PHA) / Department for Communities (DfC) and our Environmental Health department, is keen to bring back a strong degree of normality to the Council led event scheduling, whilst being vigilant and taking measures to reduce the potential for any situations that may put the public at risk.

Therefore, moving forward any Atlantic Sessions, Halloween or Christmas events operating in the physical world will be subject to mitigations detailed within the risk assessment, in line with evolving restrictions. Based on UK Government advice, these mitigations may include but are not limited to the following:

- Social Distancing (maintaining spectators within bubbles).
- Ticketed events which are pre-booked.
- Contact Tracing.
- Enhanced COVID stewarding / marshals.
- Queueing systems.
- More time - limited duration events.
- Restricted numbers of spectators at events at any one time.
- COVID-safe programming eg. avoiding close contact programming.
- Enhanced cleansing and sanitisation.

## **5.0 Consultation and Assessment of Event Delivery Options**

Officers have continued to liaise and seek advice from various agencies in relation to the potential planning opportunities for Halloween and Christmas events in 2021.

The Tourism Events Team has attended regular meetings with colleagues from other Local Authorities. Feedback and benchmarking has shown that some Councils are planning to reduce / adapt their event programme for Halloween / Christmas in line with COVID restrictions. The detail of this is available in **Annex A**.

For Halloween, Atlantic Sessions and Christmas, Officers have considered at the type of delivery that could be possible, based on information, advice, Government restrictions and event planning lead-in times. Internal and external risks have been assessed and these have influenced the type of proposal for each event.

## **6.0 Proposals for Council Managed Events – October to December 2021**

Officers are now seeking direction from Elected Members on Halloween, Atlantic Sessions and Christmas event delivery options for 2021. Traditionally Halloween and Christmas are free non-ticketed events in open venues with multiple access and egress points, attracting between 2,000 - 10,000 spectators per event. Atlantic Sessions normally takes place at indoor venues throughout Portrush and Portstewart.

Whilst there is a gradual movement towards further relaxation of restrictions, it is clear that bringing together people, in the form of mass gatherings, will increase the likelihood of spreading COVID19. If Council wishes to return to a degree of normality

with the established Event Programme, then significant additional measures must be put in place to reduce the potential for transmission.

With this, significant additional resources will be required in an attempt to reduce any potential impact from the COVID 19 pandemic. The number of spectators for each event will need to be reduced to approximately a quarter of normal capacity and with regard to firework displays, the Tourism Events Team has concerns on how people, are managed outside of the event perimeter.

Fireworks events could / should be ticketed and major infrastructure established to ensure social distancing. Council cannot ask for vaccine certification or enforce mask wearing.

#### 6.1 Halloween Events scheduled in October 2021

A range of alternative delivery options are outlined below for consideration by Elected Members. It is important to note that the delivery of these events will be dependent on current Government restrictions and advice/guidance from the NI Executive and Public Health Authority. Therefore, any format approved by Elected Members may require change. Additional support and infrastructure will be required depending on which option Elected Members choose.

- **Option 1** – Delivery of a Halloween events programme that **includes fireworks** displays, music, entertainment, onsite performers including storytellers, jugglers, stilt walkers, firepoi, standing statues and trade vendors.
- This will take place at agreed locations at Limavady, Ballycastle, Coleraine and Ballymoney.
- Parade and Fancy Dress Competitions will be discouraged due to the large crowds which these programming elements traditionally attract, as well as close contact workshops. Amusements will not be possible on site with this option, in order to maximise crowd capacity while maintaining social distancing.
- Risk assessments and mitigation measures to reduce close contact will be required and with this significant additional resources including crowd control barriers and extra stewarding. Whilst Officers will do the utmost, within the resources available, to mitigate for risks it is important that Elected Members are aware that this approach cannot completely mitigate for the risks associated with the Coronavirus pandemic.
- **Option 2** – A limited ground programme supplemented by virtual activity. The ground programme will take place as per Option 1, **without fireworks**, in agreed locations Limavady, Ballycastle, Coleraine and Ballymoney. This will include: amusements, music, entertainment, onsite performers including storytellers, jugglers, stilt walkers, firepoi, standing statues and trade vendors etc.
- **Option 3** - Full cancellation of Council led Halloween events.

#### 6.2 Atlantic Sessions scheduled in November 2021

Atlantic Sessions is a Council led event that is delivered in conjunction with the hospitality trade in Portrush and Portstewart. The event traditionally takes place in coffee shops, restaurants and bars. The complexities with regard to live music in venues and the fact that Council does not have full control, of how the event takes place in these venues dictates that for 2021 this format should be avoided. Consultation with the local trade has taken place and there is general agreement.

- **Option 1** – It is proposed that a Council managed outdoor event takes place at Flowerfield Arts Centre, Portstewart and will be a ticketed concert. It is proposed that Naturally North Coast Market and Taste Causeway food producers will be present at the event. Artists to be confirmed. The necessary infrastructure will be required to be put in place to increase social distancing and mitigate for COVID19. An application for funding to run the Atlantic Sessions event has been made to Tourism NI and a decision is pending.
- **Option 2** – Carry out a digital and social media campaign, promoting Atlantic Sessions during the week and broadcasting recorded footage from previous years of the festival.
- **Option 3** - Full cancellation of Atlantic Sessions.

### 6.3 Council Managed Christmas Events scheduled in November/December 2021

- **Option 1** – Delivery of a Council events programme for Christmas. Subject to NI Executive and PHA guidance and restrictions, it is proposed to partially revert to traditional Christmas activities but with mitigations in place to protect the public and reduce crowd densities. The traditional Christmas switch on may not be appropriate due to crowd density and activities such as the Santa experience and traditional distribution of selection boxes may also not be appropriate due to the close contact nature of the activity which also attracts large queues. Any on the ground activity will need to be ticketed and strictly controlled with significant stewarding and separation infrastructure.
- If the traditional switch on / Santa experience is not deemed to be safe with mitigations in place, the Events Team will pursue a contingency plan to include a Christmas themed cavalcade travelling through towns on switch - on day and visiting local communities where possible. This would include Santa, the Elves, Christmas - themed characters and the Mayor. Families will be encouraged to stay within their own area where possible. Timing for Christmas Lights switch-ons would need to be coordinated to prevent large crowds gathering. The distribution of selection boxes if deemed safe, may be explored through issue to community groups / schools.

The Tourism Events team will also look at options for pop-up town entertainment in conjunction with the Town Centre team. Town Centre venues will be evaluated in terms of the appropriateness for events and measures put in place to ensure safe access and egress for the public. After risk assessment and again taking NI Executive and PHA advice and guidance, alternative sites may need to be explored and deployed at short notice.

- **Option 2** - A short Borough-wide video may be explored with an address to citizens from the Mayor, with footage from across the four main towns. Details of the Christmas lights switch-on will be publicised but not the times, to prevent crowds gathering at town centres.
- **Option 3** – Christmas programme of activities is cancelled, with the exception of the Festive Fund.

Table 1 below details the maximum estimated costs to deliver Option 1 across the 3 events.

Table 1:

Event	Date	Budget Requirement 2021
Seasonal Halloween Events x 4	<b>TBC</b> Wednesday 27 <sup>th</sup> - Saturday 30 <sup>th</sup> October Ballymoney - Wednesday 27 <sup>th</sup> Limavady - Thursday 28 <sup>th</sup> Coleraine - Friday 29 <sup>th</sup> Ballycastle - Saturday 30 <sup>th</sup> October	£32,220 Plus £20,000 contingency for COVID19 mitigation measures.
Atlantic Sessions	<b>TBC</b> 19 – 21 November 2021	£20,000 (funded) Plus £5,000 contingency for COVID19 mitigation measures
Seasonal Christmas Light Switch On's (to include Festive Fund)	November and December <b>TBC</b> Ballymoney - 18 <sup>th</sup> November Limavady - 20 <sup>th</sup> November Ballycastle - 25 <sup>th</sup> November Coleraine - 26 <sup>th</sup> November Portstewart - 27 <sup>th</sup> November Dungiven - 27 <sup>th</sup> November Garvagh - 29 <sup>th</sup> November Portrush - 3 <sup>rd</sup> December Kilrea - 4 <sup>th</sup> December	£55,000 (includes Festive Fund and Management Costs £5,000) Plus £15,000 contingency for COVID19 mitigation measures
<b>Total Request</b>	<b>£127,220 plus potentially £20,000 funding for Atlantic Sessions.</b>	

## 7.0 Feedback on Options from Multi Agency Partners

In respect of Halloween fireworks displays, the Events Team has consulted with the Department of Justice (DoJ), who are responsible for the issue of Firework Display licenses in Northern Ireland. A greater level of event planning detail is now required. Examples include details on Risk Assessments, determination of whether or not events should be ticketed and clear evidence that mitigations have been put in place to allow for COVID guidelines.

Consultation with PSNI has also taken place and they have stated that whilst the regulations permit events to be planned, adherence to COVID restrictions must be applied, where relevant.

## **8.0 Next Steps**

Further to Elected Members consideration, Officers request that the preferred option for each event is given to allow for immediate planning.

## **9.0 Recommendation**

Whilst officers believe that Option 1 in all cases is desirable, Members must be cognisant of the risks.

The Leisure and Development Committee is requested to consider the information in this report and recommend a preferred option for Halloween, Atlantic Sessions and Christmas delivery 2021.

**Annex A:**

<b>Council</b>	<b>Halloween</b>	<b>Christmas</b>
<b>Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council</b>	2 proposed events - plans not finalised.	Plans not finalised.
<b>Ards and North Down Borough Council</b>	No Halloween Plans.	A number of Christmas Switch - On events planned for the end of November. Details TBC.
<b>Armagh Banbridge &amp; Craigavon</b>	Considering annual Halloween Fireworks events.	Looking tentatively at our Georgian Festival in November.
<b>Belfast City Council</b>	Due to Covid-19, Belfast City Council have taken the decision not to host their annual Halloween event with fireworks display in 2021.	Moving away from the traditional light switch-on event for 2021.  Scoping new plans for a city - wide Christmas animation programme for the public to explore the streets of Belfast in their own time in evenings.
<b>Derry City and Strabane District Council</b>	Illuminated trail across the city.  Daytime events and street animation between 12 noon and 5pm.  Fireworks - still to be confirmed - multiple locations, being considered with mitigations, rather than one large display.	Detail not currently available - meeting scheduled 8 <sup>th</sup> September.
<b>Fermanagh and Omagh District Council - Enniskillen</b>	No Fireworks.	Detail currently not available – meeting scheduled 8 <sup>th</sup> September.
<b>Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council</b>	Plans not confirmed.	Lisburn Light Festival will probably run during the month of December (TBC). There will be no official switch-on in 2021.
<b>Mid and East Antrim Borough Council</b>	Plans not confirmed.	Detail not currently available - meeting scheduled 8 <sup>th</sup> September.
<b>Mid Ulster District Council - Dungannon</b>	Currently avoiding larger events and firework displays.	Smaller pop up events in town centres planned.



<b>Newry, Mourne and Down District Council</b>	Assessing Halloween. Possible smaller scale events and programming in town centres.	Detail not currently available - meeting scheduled 8 <sup>th</sup> September.
<b>Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council</b>	Possible firework displays and small on the ground activities - ticketed.	Possible Christmas switch on events and town centre animation. Exploring options for Santa visits.