

Title of Report:	Strategic Review of Council's Tourism Events Remit
Committee Report Submitted To:	The Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	16 November 2021
For Decision or For Information	For Decision

Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)	
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

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	£15,000
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES
Capital/Revenue	Revenue
Code	
Staffing Costs	n/a

Screening Requirements	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 present to Elected Members on the review of the delivery and strategic approach for the development and future management of the Tourism Events remit. This report was previously tabled at the April Leisure and Development Committee meeting and was deferred to an Elected Members Workshop, which took place in August 2021, for further consideration.

2.0 Background

At the October 2019 Leisure and Development Committee meeting, Members requested that a review takes place of Council events and the external support provided by Council to other events.

At the March 2020 Leisure and Development meeting it was approved to appoint external expertise to assist the Tourism and Recreation team to deliver on the review of the existing remit and make recommendations for the development of a framework and strategic approach for Tourism Events for the next 10 years.

The report was finalised in February 2021 and at the April 2021 Leisure and Development Committee, the findings of the external review were presented to Elected Members. Following discussion, it was agreed that 'the matter be referred to a workshop and allow members the opportunity to consider the outcome of the Blue Sail report further'.

A subsequent Councillor Workshop was held on 11th August 2021 to discuss the report and its findings in further detail.

3.0 Terms of Reference

Key areas for review included the existing provision of events in the area, how they are resourced, managed and evaluated with a view to the development of a framework for the strategic approach of tourism events for the next ten years.

Key requirements of the Terms of Reference included:

- Review the current portfolio of Council Events within wider tourism and economic context.
- Review the current portfolio of Council Events and their capacity to deliver against the following:
 - a. Enhance the visitor experience.
 - b. Increase visitor numbers and spend.
 - c. Ensure year round motivators.
 - d. Develop a positive profile.
 - e. Create a legacy.
- Review the parameters of the Tourism Events Funding Programme within wider tourism and economic context.
- Identify issues, challenges and approach for Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council in the delivery of tourism events.
- Include an assessment of third sector, community, cultural and business events organised by other parties and partner organisations, and Council's involvement with these should be set against the wider tourism and economic context of both the Northern Ireland market and beyond.
- Address how Council can grow existing events, identify new areas for growth with targets and explore partnership opportunities.

- Review the resource and structural requirements - both human and financial required to support the delivery of the ten-year Events Approach.

4.0 Appointment of External Assistance

In May 2020 Council issued a tender for appointment of services outlined above and Blue Sail were appointed to undertake the commission of carrying out an independent review and making recommendations for how Council supports tourism events. Consultation took place with a range of stakeholders including Elected Members, employees, Tourism Northern Ireland, Tourism Ireland and third-party event organisers.

The review was categorised under the following headings:

- Vision.
- The Strategic Approach.
- Roles and Responsibilities.
- Investment Strategy.
- Implementation Plan.

A final report was issued in February 2021 and is attached as **Annex A** for Members consideration.

5.0 Current Status of the Events Remit:

The key comments from the review in respect of the events status quo are as follows:

Positives:

- The Events Team has a good reputation and is well respected.
- The delivery and operational aspects of events is well done.
- The area has successfully hosted international major events such as The Open Championship and Giro d'Italia.
- There are a small number of distinctive events which have potential for growth.
- The relationship with Tourism Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland (marketing and events teams) is good and improving.
- The area has an outstanding landscape, with an iconic name in 'Causeway'.
- Food & drink and music are particularly strong themes with tourism appeal.

Negatives:

- The events programme is mainly small-scale and locally focused.
- The marketing & PR of events in terms of targeting, content and timing could be improved.
- There is a lack of an integrated approach and collaboration within council with the Events Team isolated and overstretched.
- Much of the current support results from the legacy of council unification and the perceived need to be 'fair to all'.
- There is a lack of collaboration with business and commercial sectors.
- The approach to events is cautious, risk averse & lacking confidence.
- Managing health and safety around events is an ongoing challenge.

- There is a lack of professional events production and specialist infrastructure businesses locally.

While the positives do provide a platform on which to build, the negatives are evident and result in a lack of clarity, focus, vision, innovation and ambition around events which is inhibiting their impact and potential.

6.0 Key Recommendations from Report:

The review makes a number of recommendations specific to event delivery.

In essence what is needed are fewer, better events, promoted more effectively - and more enabling and less 'doing' by a new refocused Events Unit. To achieve this will require a new schedule of definitions which very clearly identify those events which are able to deliver wider tourism and economic impact, and those whose priority is social benefit. For the Tourism Events team to deliver on its remit to support, facilitate and develop the wider events sector in the area, a balance in resource commitment must be achieved to allow them to deliver this function as well as plan, programme and deliver high quality Council tourism events.

The new approach will also require looking afresh at the current programme to identify those with the ambition and aspiration for growth and able to step up to more stringent demands. It will also involve looking for opportunities for new events or events delivered in different ways.

The new approach which is recommended is based on the premise that tourism events will bring economic benefits to the area through visitor spend, increased income for businesses, jobs, and support for the infrastructure of goods and services enjoyed by local people.

The aim is to inspire and sustain tourism events which can deliver against the following strategic objectives:

- Attract visits, bed-nights and spend from Northern Ireland's domestic and international target markets/segments through high-quality, distinctive programming.
- Enhance image, profile and reputation of Causeway Coast and Glens as Northern Ireland's premier rural and coastal tourist destination.
- Showcase and deliver an authentic sense of place based on the heritage, culture and landscape of Causeway Coast and Glens.
- Are a catalyst for creativity, innovation and distinctiveness.
- Are supported and promoted by partners & stakeholders within and outside the Council.

Further general recommendations from the review on the future direction of the events remit are as follows:

- A more ambitious, creative programme comprising a small number of very high-quality, distinctive events, promoted more effectively is required to achieve significant tourism impact. This would be in addition to a varied programme of local events which are focused on local audiences.
- This will require a different approach by the Council and a clearer remit for the tourism events team which should be based on enabling others within and outside the Council.

- The tourism events team will focus on managing partnerships, building capacity and skills to support the local events sector, identifying appropriate one-off events to bid for, commissioning and developing events to optimise the benefits to the Borough.
- It is recommended the role of the tourism events team is to focus on a small number of high-impact events rather than the many small local events which currently overstretch the team's capacity.

The recommendations from the Blue Sail report are under two key headings:

- Strategic Approach.
- Roles and Responsibilities.

7.0 Strategic Approach:

The review recommends that events should be categorised by 3 types, and will include both council-run, council-funded and independent events:

7.1 Major – large scale international events taking place every 3/5 years e.g. Golf Championships. Criteria includes:

- Global profile for the area.
- Deliver legacy impact which supports tourism.
- Delivered through national and international partnerships with TNI and rights holders.

7.2 Signature – high-quality, distinctive events which deliver a strong sense of place and can attract tourist visitors, 4/5 each year. Criteria includes:

- Fit with *Embrace a Giant* Spirit NI brand.
- Demonstrate a high level of quality and ambition in their planning and programming.
- Financing should encompass multiple income streams.
- Capable of achieving international media profile that enhance image and profile of the borough.

7.3 Local Events – small or medium scale events focused on towns, villages or communities of interest celebrating local traditions, seasonal festivities etc. attracting local audiences. Criteria includes:

- Must demonstrate participation, involvement, sense of identity and contribute to social well-being of a community.
- Have a clearly identified target audience and a strategy to attract/engage them.
- Organisers must be legally constituted and for larger grants provide evidence of management capacity and expertise.
- Must demonstrate commitment to promoting social cohesion, social inclusion, equality of opportunity and good community relations.

Major and Signature are 'tourism events' which will be the priority for the Events Unit. Likely Signature Events will include:

- Developing Auld Lammas, strengthening its heritage and distinctiveness.
- Stendhal Festival.
- Atlantic Sessions.

- A new 'Causeway Food & Drink' festival bringing together a number of smaller niche events and developing a new ambitious region-wide programme.

Local events will be supported by the Council's town teams, community and cultural services, arts services as appropriate and generally delivered by local organisations.

8.0 Roles and Responsibilities

The review recommends that as a general principle the Council will take an approach of enabling others by advising, signposting and supporting in order to build capacity, encourage innovation, creativity and release potential.

The role of the new re-focused Events Unit should include:

- A new strategic role to lead, develop and advise on Major and Signature events.
- An operational role to manage funding and investment for Major and Signature events and advise other Council colleagues and external event organisers on logistical and operational issues.
- Capacity-building for developing and strengthening the skills, knowledge and networks of organisations, communities and businesses to enable the Causeway Coast and Glens events sector to grow.

It is accepted that the Tourism Events Team will continue to deliver on Council led events. These events will be high value and sustainable, that fit with the character of the area and are resourced appropriately. It is important to recognise again the balance of the Tourism Events service with regard to delivery, facilitation and supporting the third sector and the management of funding programmes.

The responsibilities of other departments in the council with a significant interest in events will be clarified and included in departmental business plans.

A strategic Steering Group for the development and evolution of tourism events should be established to review assessing viability, impact, sustainability and product life cycle profiling of existing Council-led events. This health check will help in the phasing out of tired events and the phasing in of new events that positively contribute to the local economy. In the revive stage Elected Members and Senior Officers should be asked to contribute to this process.

9.0 Role of the Events Unit

The review states that the principle underlying the operation of the Events Unit is to create a single approach to festivals and events in the region and provide a co-ordinated response to helping them achieve their potential. However, the Events Unit also has expertise in managing events which will be useful for the Council. It is recognised that the Tourism Events team will be required to deliver Council led events but it is essential that they have the capacity and the time resources within their remit to support and facilitate others who bring major event benefits to our area. This expertise should be used not to deliver or programme events but to support others in doing so.

The Events Unit should remain within the Tourism and Recreation Service Area of the Leisure and Development Department but will also have an advisory, signposting and liaison role with other departments across the Council.

The Events Unit should focus on providing high-quality professional leadership for the sector, enabling and facilitating ambition and growth, working across the Causeway Coast & Glens region with festival and event organisers and through other departments of the Council.

A priority will be on managing partnerships, building capacity, identifying appropriate one-off events to bid for, commissioning and developing events to optimise the benefits to the Borough.

Its role will include managing the allocation of council funding according to clear criteria and priorities.

The Events Unit has a number of distinct roles – one strategic, and the other operational.

The Strategic Role involves:

- Enabling and supporting the development and production of Major and Signature events.
- Providing leadership to the borough's events sector and building and fostering capacity across the sector.

The Operational Role involves:

The continued direct delivery of events for certain Signature events will require a further role which will involve:

- Managing funding and investment.
- Advising Council colleagues and event organisers on logistical and operational issues.

The continued direct delivery of events for certain Signature events will require a further role which will involve:

- Operational project management.
- Event management documentation preparation.

10.0 Implementation

The review identifies key steps required to implement the new approach over the 10-year horizon of the strategy. These are as follows:

Reset: 2021 – Putting in place new mechanisms, approaches, producing development plans for Signature Events, and developing skills and capabilities.

Revive: 2022-23 – New events portfolio in place, continuing implementation of new approach and developing skills and capabilities.

Restage: 2024-2031 – Establish, develop and refresh the events portfolio.

The review notes that events have a natural lifecycle. They generally take at least 3 years to establish, and then after 5 or so years benefit from a major review and possible refresh. For some events, which are of a particular time and moment, it may be appropriate to run only for a few years and then cease altogether. This new approach should build in regular, objective reviews of all categories of events.

11.0 Councillor Workshop - 11th August

As stated at the April Leisure and Development Committee meeting, the decision on the strategic approach as deferred to allow Elected Members to further consider the report. 23 Elected Members attended and Officers presented on the overview with the proposed strategic approach, along with the key findings and recommendations. Elected Members were in broad agreement with the findings which included both positive and negative aspects that have impacted on the event service delivery, including the need for greater focus, clarity, marketing and more ambitious programming. There was also a broad consensus with Elected Members that a good strategic direction for the Event Remit was to have a greater focus on building capacity and supporting the local events sector. To allow

for this balance it was recognised that the Tourism Events team should directly deliver fewer but better resourced events.

12.0 Next Steps

Subject to Elected Members approval on the strategic approach proposed within the Blue Sail report and as summarised within this report, Officers would progress with the Reset, Revive and Restage approaches, outlined in the implementation plan. As part of the Reset process, Officers will revert to the Leisure and Development Committee with proposals on the approach for the adjustments in the current Council events portfolio, best fit markets for future events and development of the Tourism Event funding approach. Officers will also present a report outlining key resource requirements including staffing resources for the Tourism Event remit. It is proposed to bring this report prior to Christmas 2021.

13.0 Recommendation

The Leisure and Development Committee is asked to recommend the approval of the 10-year strategic approach as outlined in this report for the Tourism Event remit for Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council.