

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Finances and Resources
DATE	13 March 2024
EXEMPT	Exempt Appendices 4a and 4b are exempt under paragraph 6 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (other than the authority).
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Christmas Village Feedback Report
REPORT NUMBER	COM/24/064
DIRECTOR	Gale Beattie
CHIEF OFFICER	Julie Wood
REPORT AUTHOR	Matthew Williams
TERMS OF REFERENCE	2.1 & 3.2

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To present the evaluation of the 2023 Christmas Village and to update on the public tender for event delivery in 2024-2026.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee :-

- 2.1 Notes the findings of the evaluation of the 2023 Christmas Village;
- 2.2 Instructs the Chief Officer – City Development and Regeneration to deliver the Christmas Village 2024 in line with the winning response to tender; and
- 2.3 Instructs the Chief Officer – City Development and Regeneration to report back to the Finance and Resources Committee in March 2025 with the evaluation report of the 2024 event.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 Aberdeen Inspired has been a funding partner, with responsibility for the delivery of the Christmas Village event, from its inception in 2015 until the service level agreement ceased in 2019. During this period Aberdeen Inspired contracted John Codona's Pleasure Fairs Ltd., as the Christmas Village Operator to manage the event on its behalf.
- 3.2 In May 2019, the Council's Strategic Commissioning Committee agreed to extend this service level agreement for a further year to include Christmas 2019; and instructed the Chief Officer City Growth to provide a Procurement Business Case detailing options for the Christmas Village from 2020 to 2023.

- 3.3 This approach (PLA019) was supported by Aberdeen Inspired as delivery and funding partner and approved by the Strategic Commissioning Committee in November 2019, with an Open Procedure Invitation to Tender following shortly thereafter. Following a one-year postponement due to the Covid 19 pandemic, the delivery contract was subsequently awarded to John Codona's Pleasure Fairs Ltd for an initial period of one year (2021), with the Council reserving the right to extend the contract by a further 12 months up to a maximum of three events up to and including 2023.
- 3.4 Aberdeen City Council is currently seeking a delivery partner for the Christmas Village 2024-2026 by open tender on Public Contracts Scotland: *Delivery Contract for Aberdeen's Christmas Village 2024-2026*, Reference Number: NOV492515, OCID: ocds-r6ebe6-0000749810. This has run from 13th November and ended on 1st March. City Development and Regeneration Officers will score the tender to be awarded by Procurement by the end-April 2024. Operators of Christmas markets and fairs in other cities were made aware of the opportunity to bid.

2023 Christmas Village Feedback and Union Terrace Gardens Overview

- 3.5 John Codona's Pleasure Fairs Ltd operated Aberdeen's Christmas Village in 2023, supported by Officers of the Council, Aberdeen Inspired, and charity partner Charlie House. In accordance with the contract, the operator procured an independent evaluation of the event. This was undertaken by Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce and the report is attached as Appendix 1. The key findings from the Evaluation are that:
- 96% of visitors thought that the event should be repeated in future
 - 86% of visitors surveyed rated the market as 'good' or 'excellent' – down 2% on prior year
 - 87% said the event improved their opinion of Aberdeen – up 12% on prior year
 - 87% said they were 'very' or 'completely likely' to recommend the event to friends and family – up 12% on prior year
 - 84% rated the location as 'good' or 'excellent'
 - 39% of return visitors thought that the market was better than in previous years
 - The average spend per 'party group' was £68 across the Christmas Village (£25) and wider city centre (£43) – up £3 on prior year
 - 91% of businesses in the Curated in the Quad Market said that the stall was good for their business
 - 78% of city centre businesses surveyed responded that the Christmas Village gave a boost to the city centre
- 3.6 On the basis of the evaluation the Board of Aberdeen Inspired indicated its agreement to continue to support the event in 2024.
- 3.7 Changes made to the Christmas Village in 2023 included the replacement of a thrill ride with a more traditional ferris wheel. This proved popular with family

visitors (the key demographic), but less so with the 16-24 age group who were the most likely group to rate the Village as 'worse'.

- 3.8 Efforts were made to increase the local food offer, with 18 local food and beverage companies included onsite. 83% of survey respondents found the food 'good' or 'excellent'. In addition, 22 local sub-contractors were involved in the delivery of the event. A further 56 small scale makers of food and retail goods were included in the 'Curated in the Quad' market, the vast majority from Aberdeen postcodes. Full list in Appendix 2.
- 3.9 While exact visitor numbers for the Village cannot be ascertained due to high footfall for offices, shops and hospitality businesses nearby, Springboard data for City Centre footfall showed an increase in the Upperkirkgate area of 43% over the Christmas Village dates (compared to the period immediately before). This outstrips the 7% increase for the City Centre as a whole over the same period.
- 3.10 Union Terrace Gardens was brought into the Christmas programme using successful bids for external funding and the reallocation of existing budgets, thereby covering all costs. The gardens provided a relaxed festive space to complement the busier atmosphere of Broad Street. New attractions included:
- Festive lighting of the park including fairy lights, uplighters and colourful adaptation of the existing lighting scheme
 - Aberdeen Inspired's 'ABERDEEN' letters sited in the park displaying a Christmas theme
 - Use of the glazed arches on the upper terrace with displays from Event 365 Partners: Aberdeen Performing Arts (History of Panto at His Majesty's Theatre) and Aberdeen Arts Centre (50th Anniversary Aberdeen Skyline) and Aberdeen Art Gallery (Festive Marketing). City Events (Christmas Characters) were added following the Christmas parade.
 - Weekend performances from local choirs and music groups, including Con Anima, Albacapella, Granite City Chorus, Silver City Singers, Chalmers McKay Piping Group and Granite City Brass.
 - Relocation of a large part of the interactive sculpture trail to the park area
 - A small festive market (Sunday 10th December) operated by Common Sense Café on the terrace opposite His Majesty's Theatre
- 3.11 The Nativity Scene was moved to the glazed arch at the end of the accessible entrance from Union Street as the previous unit was damaged beyond repair and expensive to replace. Consequently, the Blessing, including Christmas carols, took place in the park. Feedback from Aberdeen Churches Together was positive and schools attendance increased from 2019.
- 3.12 Music performers found their experience generally positive, although somewhat weather dependent for the numbers watching. All of the organisations involved received a donation of £150 for participating. While successful, these events would benefit from increased marketing in future.
- 3.13 Social media responses and comments regarding Union Terrace Gardens were very positive and it is planned to use the park in future, and incorporate it into

formal evaluation, particularly if the new Christmas Village operator also adds value to this space.

- 3.14 Appendix 3 contains an illustrated overview of some of the Christmas activities in Aberdeen, including the newly lit Union Terrace Gardens.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Accounts for the 2023 Event are provided in Exempt Appendices 4a Christmas Village Production Costs 2023 and 4b Christmas Village Trading 2023
- 4.2 Funding of £150,000 for the 2023 Christmas Village was approved from the Common Good Fund as part of the Council's 2023/2024 budget setting process.
- 4.3 There was additional financial support of £50,000 from Aberdeen Inspired.
- 4.4 Additional grant funding awards (UKSPF and LACER) covered the costs of Union Terrace activities in 2023. This included the purchase of some of the lighting assets to be used again in future years.
- 4.5 Grant funding will be sought to support the additional elements of the programme again in 2024. This will provisionally include additional aspects of the lighting scheme, support for creative partners staging arch displays, and donations for participating music groups.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 A new contract will be drawn-up by the Legal team once the current tender has been scored and awarded. It is not expected to significantly vary from the current contract.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 As part of the Council's tender process for the current contract, bidders were scored on how their plans would assist the Council in furthering its sustainability and community benefits objectives in relation to this contract. This will be included in any new contract.
- 6.2 A summary of the sustainable practices adopted by John Codona's Pleasure Fairs Ltd. for the Christmas Village 2023 is contained within Appendix 5 of this report.
- 6.3 Due to the 'mains' power supply on Broad Street being insufficient for some of the larger infrastructure requirements at the event, there is a reliance of temporary mobile generators. These have a negative environmental impact.
- 6.4 To minimise this negative impact, improved mains power was used in the Quadrangle allowing the market to operate using solely mains. This was also

true for Union Terrace Gardens. These measures support the Council's duty to adapt to climate change.

- 6.5 As part of the event's marketing plan, efforts were made to promote and encourage sustainable and active transport options.

7. RISK

The assessment of risk contained within the table below is considered to be consistent with the Council's Risk Appetite Statement.

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	No competent Christmas Village operator bids to deliver the event in 2024-2026	Efforts have been made to make all likely competent bidders aware of the opportunity through Public Contracts Scotland.	M	Yes
Compliance	Aberdeen City Council's appointed Christmas Village delivery partner fails to comply with statutory obligations, whilst delivering an event on Council land.	The council's contract with the operator will set out their legal obligations as the 'occupier' under the Occupiers Liability Act (Scotland) 1960. Additionally, the contract will stipulate that they are responsible for ensuring that all aspects of their work-related activity are safe, fit for purpose and compliant with all relevant codes of practise, regulations & industry best practise. Finally, the contract will stipulate that health and safety documentation, relating to the event, must be submitted to Aberdeen City Council and that all relevant regulatory	L	Yes

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
		<p>permissions are in place. These documents include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Event Manual • Contingency Plan • Crowd Management Plan • Traffic Management Plan • Wind Management Plan • Counter Terrorism Plan • Noise management Plan • Risk Assessment • Fire Risk Assessment • Communications Plan • Marketing Plan • Insurance • Sub-Contractors Documentation • Food Safety Documentation <p>These documents will be shared with multi-agency partners six weeks prior to the event to allow for feedback and advice to be given as required.</p>		
Operational	The event restricts access to Marischal College, which prevents members of the public accessing necessary services.	Measures will be put in place to maintain public access to Aberdeen City Council services and Police Scotland's customer service centre.	L	Yes

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Financial	If Aberdeen Inspired pull their funding contribution, the event will no longer be viable and Aberdeen City Council may need to find an additional £50,000	Officers have engaged with Aberdeen Inspired who have given assurance that this contribution is secure	L	Yes
Reputational	Constituents are used to a high-quality Christmas Village. Failure to meet expectations poses a risk for the Council and the city.	The selected delivery partners will be assessed on their ability to evidence successful, high-quality events of this nature.	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	No significant risks identified against the category.			

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
	Impact of Report
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement	The proposals in this report support the delivery of the Partnership's Policy Statement for a Vibrant City: Aim to make Aberdeen a premier destination for festivals, productions, conferences, bands and events.

	And a Prosperous City: Develop our economy in a genuine partnership with the private sector, third sector and residents
<u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	<p>The proposals within this report support the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 2.1 Supporting labour market to recover from impact of Covid-19 on employment.</p> <p>Events supported by the Council, such as the Christmas Village, provide an opportunity to promote and enhance the long-term economic prosperity of Aberdeen and the wider region by attracting additional visitors to the city for the event. In turn this attracts additional commercial activity in the city. Officers work with partners including Visit Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen Inspired to maximise the benefit of events on city-centre businesses.</p>
Regional and City Strategies	The proposals support the Regional Economic Strategy, the City Centre Masterplan, Events 365 Plan and Empty Shops Plan by strengthening local supply chains and contributing towards local business growth; working with culture and tourism partners; and contributing to aims to eat and shop locally.

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	New Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required.
Other	Not required.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 Appendix 1: Aberdeen Christmas Village 2023 Research Report AGCC
- 11.2 Appendix 2: Local Contractors Suppliers and Traders ACV 2023
- 11.3 Appendix 3: Christmas in Aberdeen Illustrated Overview
- 11.4 Appendix 4a: Christmas Village Production Costs 2023 – Exempt
- 11.5 Appendix 4b: Christmas Village Trading 2023 – Exempt
- 11.6 Appendix 5: Christmas Village Sustainability Report

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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