

SERVICE UPDATE

<u>Name of Function:</u>	City Development and Regeneration
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<u>Title of Update:</u>	Event 365 Plan 2023/24
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Context

A new Events Plan for Aberdeen was approved by the Finance and Resources Committee on 1/2/2023 and the Chief Officer – City Growth was instructed to re-convene the Event 365 Group and update annually on progress.

The Plan includes under the ‘events’ banner the annual City Events programme; additional City Council managed events; a wide-variety of arts, culture and sporting events organised and delivered by sector partners in the city; and major conventions and trade exhibitions. Many of these events will also be in receipt of Council funding or organisational support from Officers.

A pyramid approach to events is shown in the Plan, building from a wide base of local events, moving through regional, national, international and mega events. It includes the aspiration to host events at all levels with further aspiration to grow events to the next level up in the pyramid.

Evaluation is key to the Plan which outlines that events are to be judged against social impact criteria, including the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP), as well as economic and environmental criteria. This ensures that the Council’s aims for the Plan are met, including growing Aberdeen’s reputation as a centre of events excellence capable of hosting major international events and mega events.

The Plan shows that the pandemic had negatively affected venues and companies which support events, as well as audience habits, expectations, and event attendance and that events could play a crucial role in post-pandemic recovery by driving footfall and supporting creative and sporting venues alongside the wider economy.

Economic, social and environmental sustainability is key to the success of the Plan with audience focus on environmental impacts an increasingly important factor in the perception of events.

Project Updates

Event 365 Group

As instructed the Event 365 Group was reconvened with a renewed focus on event operations, collaborations and future opportunities. Meeting quarterly it comprises events, culture and sporting leaders across the city and includes members from venue-based organisations alongside those who organise events across multiple spaces in the city. Also included are national and regional stakeholders in the events and tourism sectors.

The Event 365 Group is chaired by the Service Manager - Commercial who has responsibility for the City Events team and authored the 365 Events Plan. Members include high-level representatives from Aberdeen Archives, Art Gallery and Museums, Aberdeen Arts Centre, Aberdeen City Council Officers (one each from City Events, Culture, Tourism), Aberdeen Inspired, Aberdeen Jazz Festival, Aberdeen Performing Arts, Aberdeen Science Centre, Aberdeen Sports Village, Aberdeenshire Council, City Moves, Culture Aberdeen, EventScotland, P&J Live, Robert Gordon University, Sport Aberdeen, University of Aberdeen, VisitAberdeenshire, VisitScotland and an independent events organiser.

The Group receives updates on the National Events Strategy and funding opportunities from EventScotland as well as national and local tourism strategies from VisitScotland and VisitAberdeenshire. The Group gives informal feedback on recent events; reviews evaluation reports; provides direction regarding changes to existing events; reviews new event proposals and opportunities for hosting or collaboration on forthcoming events.

Tangible benefits so far have included: wider awareness of future events across the city; greater involvement in the EventScotland strategy consultation; co-working on the festive window displays and lighting in Union Terrace Gardens; cultural and sporting programme additions to the upcoming Festival of the Sea; opportunities to engage with students studying for a degree in Events Management BA (Hons) at Robert Gordon University; member inclusion in successful funding applications for the City Events programme; and sense-checking commercial options in order to minimise rising event costs or provide additional revenue.

The Group has received quarterly updates on the Tall Ships Races Aberdeen 2025 from Officers with responsibility for the event. As a result they are planning involvement and programming across multiple strands of the event, including lending equipment; educational and cultural programming across multiple art forms and venues, including newly commissioned work from local artists and

performers; and the use of Aberdeen Sports Village for a large part of the sporting programme.

While some activities may have happened without the Group, the opportunities to connect regularly at a senior level, gain support for events, and grow professional networks have been invaluable. Members have openly shared their sector connections and supplier information in order to advance the aims of the group. This has resulted in swift action to offer and respond to event bids and opportunities and the strengthening of event programmes to create more impactful events for the people of Aberdeen.

Event Plan Objectives

The Events Plan outlined eight objectives for the development and delivery of events happening in the city.

- Positively impact the city's economy, businesses and venues by making the city a stage – helping develop the city's cultural, creative and knowledge sectors.
- Inspire everyone's creativity and nurture a child friendly city.
- Bring people together, connecting Aberdeen to the world.
- Help shape the city's creative and sporting future.
- Promote skills and volunteering opportunities.
- Increase wellbeing and active lifestyles.
- Encourage sustainable travel and minimise event carbon emissions and waste.
- Measure and report impacts and outcomes.

These objectives have been met to varying degrees in a number of different ways. The outline below includes events that have taken place over the past year, either supported by the activities and members of the Event 365 Group or with a level of Council funding for the venues and organisations involved. This list is by no means exhaustive, but intended to give a sense of scope:

As outlined in the Plan the Council's own City Events year-round programme continued and included the Highland Games, Fireworks Display and Christmas activities, including the Christmas Village and parade and Spectra 2024, plus additional major city centre parades and support for civic occasions.

In accordance with the aspiration for international events the city held the European Pipe Band Championships 2023 in Duthie Park, with City Events Officers currently investigating options for further hosting from 2026. This event was given an additional family focus with a dinosaur trail in the Winter Gardens and outdoor sports activities elsewhere in the park. Nearly 13,000 people attended the event (including participants) with a GVA impact calculation of around £962,000.

The wider annual calendar included highly-respected events with national and international reach including Granite Noir and NUART. Additional financial

support was given to Aberdeen's Mela in 2023 in order to help grow the event and support its move to a new site on Queen's Links and meet the Plan's ambition for it to become a more regional rather than local event. The funding uplift has been maintained in 2024 which should help secure an upward trajectory.

Christmas celebrations in the city were extended with the activation of Union Terrace Gardens as an event site. This included new festive lighting, window displays in the arches, and the relocation of the Nativity, blessing service and sculpture trail. Activities in the park will increase in 2024, furthering the Plan's aim of events as a driver for city centre footfall and increased economic activity.

As outlined in the Plan, P&J Live hosted the 50th anniversary of the major international energy expo Offshore Europe which saw this key energy event returning to the city following interruption during the pandemic. With over 800 stands and nearly 30,000 visitors the economic impact of the event was estimated at around £50 million.

Among sporting highlights, Aberdeen Sports Village hosted the Citi Para Swimming World Series with the British Para-swimming Winter Meet 2024. Curl Aberdeen hosted the European Curling Championships 2023. Both brought major press, television and online video coverage for Aberdeen, alongside participants from over 22 countries and in excess of 4000 hotel bed nights.

As a precursor to Tall Ships Races Aberdeen 2025, Aberdeen hosted 3 tall ships in July 2023 as part of the 'Cruise in Company' for ships en route to Lerwick in Shetland. Over 1000 members of the public attended in one afternoon to welcome over 250 crew members from 14 different countries.

Included in the Plan as a potential new event, the Festival of the Sea will make its debut in July this year. Activities for people of all ages and backgrounds will take place in multiple venues across the city, including the Maritime Museum, Aberdeen Art Gallery, Aberdeen Science Centre, Aberdeen Sports Village and community spaces in Fittie and Torry. Union Terrace Gardens will see a weekend of family activities, theatrical performances and storytelling. Tall Ships-related activities will also feature, including a two week visit to Aberdeen's North Harbour by Lerwick-based tall ship, *Swan*. Her crew will take potential 2025 youth sail trainees on half-day taster sessions sailing off the coast of Aberdeen.

In accordance with the aims of the Plan, Council events have seen a renewed focus on children and young people, improving accessibility and sustainability, and promoting public transport to events. Some successes include:

- Improved accessibility strategy for Spectra through work with WeToo! and Abledeen who once again provided mobility equipment, plus a new initiative with neurodivergence specialists A-ND and sensory bus 'Binky' which provided a safe and relaxing space for families that needed it during the event. An alternative entry system was also created for visitors unable to queue due to disabilities, mobility issues

or additional needs. This helped to reduce waiting times for those visitors and any discomfort that they might have otherwise experienced. These improvements were made as a direct result of the 2023 evaluation feedback from the general public.

- Sustainable public transport promotions with First Bus for Spectra and the Christmas Village and Parade, and extensive Park and Ride facilities for the European Pipe Band Championships coupled with ticketing promotions with ScotRail.
- Successful grant funding applications have increased operational, economic and environmental sustainability. Purchases included a 7-metre trailer stage, outdoor lighting and decorative elements, and Hostile Vehicle Mitigation barriers. These purchases will:
 - Save multiple hire costs annually
 - Allow logistical support for other community events organisers
 - Enable quicker site activation and development of events
 - Meet new legislation and sector best practice guidelines
 - Provide opportunity for commercial hire income
 - Save carbon miles by reducing travel to/from event sites

Outlook

There are improvements to be made in meeting the aims of the Plan. In particular, to create more standard evaluation methods across the diversity of events in the city. The new EventScotland national methodology is expected very soon and the Event 365 Group will subsequently investigate how it can be most usefully applied for Aberdeen.

The Tall Ships Races Aberdeen 2025 are the major international event in the forward calendar and it is hoped that it will provide a platform to showcase Aberdeen's ability to successfully host major events, draw audiences and exceed the expectations of major events rights holders. Event 365 Group members have already been included in funding applications and offered venues and equipment in support of the event.

A full review of EventScotland's newly launched national strategy will be undertaken at the next Event 365 Group meeting to see how it informs the work of the group in future.

There may be further opportunities to tie events to tourism marketing and promotions, especially as cruise tourism grows and with areas of focus such as agritourism, adventure tourism and a dark skies initiative for the wider area.