

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Finances and Resources
DATE	26 March 2025
EXEMPT	Report is not but Appendix 3 is 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	CR&E/25/069
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 2024 Christmas Village.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee :-

- 2.1 Notes the findings of the evaluation of the 2024 Christmas Village; and
- 2.2 Notes that the Christmas Village is under contract until the 2026 iteration and that funding is in place for the Christmas Village in 2025; and
- 2.4 Instructs the Chief Officer – City Development and Regeneration to report back to the Finance and Resources Committee in March 2026 with the evaluation report of the 2025 event.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 Aberdeen's Christmas Village is delivered through a partnership structure whereby Aberdeen City Council are the primary funder and Aberdeen Inspired support the Curated in the Quad Christmas Market. A third party is appointed to carry out the operational management of the event. The event is overseen by the City Events team who lead both the event operations and event communications workstreams.
- 3.2 Following an open tender process the contract to operate the Christmas Village 2024-2026 was awarded to John Codona's Pleasure Fairs Ltd in late-April 2024. Details for reference: Public Contracts Scotland: *Delivery Contract for Aberdeen's Christmas Village 2024-2026*, Reference Number: NOV492515, OCID: ocds-r6ebe6-0000749810. (see recommendation 2.2)

- 3.3 John Codona's Pleasure Fairs Ltd tendered a successful bid to operate Aberdeen's Christmas Village, based on delivery at the Broad Street and Marischal Quadrangle sites, with additional activation in Union Terrace Gardens, including a light trail between the sites and additional lighting in the park itself. The bid also included a strong commitment to local food and use of local sub-contractors and suppliers.
- 3.4 Based on the 2023 Christmas Village Feedback it was agreed that an additional thrill ride should be added to the 2024 Village on Broad Street, and that the Christmas Market element would be expanded to allow for a wider selection of local produce and products.

2024 Christmas Village Feedback

- 3.5 John Codona's Pleasure Fairs Ltd operated Aberdeen's Christmas Village in 2024, 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:

- 98% of visitors thought that the event should be repeated in future
 - 91% of visitors surveyed rated the market as 'good' or 'excellent' – up 5% on prior year
 - 87% of visitors from outside the city said that the Christmas Village improved their perception of Aberdeen
 - 87% said they were 'very likely' or 'certain' to recommend the event to friends and family – the same % as prior year
 - 90% rated the location as 'good' or 'excellent' – up 6% on prior year, with 98% saying that it felt like a safe environment
 - 40% of return visitors thought that the market was better than in previous years, while 53% thought it was the same
 - 62% said that the Christmas Village was their main reason for visiting the city centre, with 23% visiting the city centre and Village together – up a combined 6% on prior year
 - The average spend per 'party group' was £46 across the Christmas Village and city centre – an unexpected fall of £23, perhaps reflecting the Village being the primary destination, with spend inside the Village rising by £8.
 - 66% of city centre businesses surveyed responded that the Christmas Village gave a boost to the city centre – down 12% on prior year, perhaps due to the spending pattern identified above
 - 97% of businesses in the Curated in the Quad Market said that the stall was good for their business – up 6% on prior year
- 3.6 On the basis of the evaluation the Board of Aberdeen Inspired has indicated its agreement to continue to support the event in 2025.

- 3.7 Changes made to the Christmas Village in 2024 included the addition of a thrill ride alongside the more traditional Ferris wheel from the previous year. This proved popular with family visitors (the key demographic), as well as the 16-24 age group who had reacted negatively to the removal of a thrill ride in 2023.
- 3.8 The operator invested approximately £75,000 in assets to support the delivery of the event over the life of the contract. This included the purchase of 15 additional Christmas Market chalets to increase opportunities for local businesses and 12 new giant light decorations to boost local charity involvement and further activate Union Terrace Gardens and the streets linking the Gardens to Broad Street. This was a contractual requirement.
- 3.9 The local food offer was grown further, with 22 local food and beverage companies included onsite. 89% of survey respondents found the food 'good' or 'excellent', an increase of 6% on 2023. In addition, 31 local sub-contractors were involved in the delivery of the event. A further 64 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 included in Appendix 2.
- 3.10 While exact visitor numbers for the Village cannot be ascertained due to high footfall for offices, shops and hospitality businesses nearby, footfall data for this area showed an increase of 30% on prior year. While the Christmas Village will have a positive impact the change may be largely due to the negative impact of stormy weather in 2023.
- 3.11 In 2023 Union Terrace Gardens was brought into the Christmas programme following successful bids for external funding. The gardens provided a relaxed festive space to complement the busier atmosphere of Broad Street. For 2024 the renewed approach included:
- Festive lighting of the park including fairy lights, uplighters and colourful adaptation of the existing park 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 festive displays
 - Additional large-scale light sculptures as part of a trail linking Union Terrace Gardens to the Broad Street Christmas Village
 - QR Code for the trail with integrated charity donations
- 3.12 The Nativity Scene was displayed once again in the glazed arch at the end of the accessible entrance from Union Street with the ceremony of Blessing, including Christmas carols, taking place in the park. There was positive feedback from those attending.
- 3.13 The City Council Comms team, working alongside Aberdeen Inspired, designed and launched a new visual identity for the Christmas Village using traditional festive red and gold with contemporary star motifs. This was well received by the public and successfully updated the graphic approach to the event.
- 3.14 Community benefits have become an important part of the event, these are outlined in Appendix 4, but include:

- Showcasing local performing arts, with choirs performing in Marischal Square, and included at the official opening. The addition of 15 new chalets to boost donation to Charlie House by over 50%
- Donation of an exclusive ice-skating session for families supported by Charlie House
- Free to attend Festive Fun Day with access to all rides and skating for free. This was attended by 600 guests, including those from Aberdeen Lads Club, Befriend a Child, WeToo!, Team Jak Foundation, Greyhope School, Heathryburn Primary, Inspire, Bramble Brae Primary
- Working partnership with WeToo! Including fortnightly, relaxed skating sessions with, free of music and flashing lights. Funds raised go directly to WeToo! A sensory space was also created with WeToo! Away from the main site and including Sensory Borrow Backpacks to support a guest visit. An online visual guide to help with advance visit preparation was also created with WeToo! ensuring enhanced accessibility.
- The new lighting trail allowed partnership with 12 local charities with QR code including a donations link. A full list is included in Appendix 4

3.15 This Report seeks instruction that the Chief Officer – City Development and Regeneration reports back to the Finance and Resources Committee in March 2026 with an equivalent evaluation report of the 2025 event (Recommendation 2.3).

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Accounts for the 2024 Event are provided in Exempt Appendix 3
- 4.2 Aberdeen City Council funding of £150,000 for the 2025 Christmas Village was approved from the Common Good Fund as part of the Council's 2025/2026 budget setting process.
- 4.3 There will be additional financial support of £50,000 from Aberdeen Inspired for the 2025 event.
- 4.4 Council-owned lighting assets purchased through grant funding awards in 2023 were re-deployed in Union Terrace Gardens in 2024 as per the original applications.
- 4.5 No additional grant funding for the event was secured in 2024/25, although this remains an aspiration for future years, particularly to provide live music on the event sites. Commercial sponsorship and support partnerships will also be explored.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Operator contract is in place following successful tender outcome in 2024. The contract is to deliver the 2024, 2025 and 2026 iterations of the Village.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 As part of the Council's tender process bidders were scored on how their plans would assist the Council in furthering its sustainability and community benefits objectives.
- 6.2 An outline of the sustainable practices adopted by John Codona's Pleasure Fairs Ltd. for 2024 can be found in Appendix 4. Sustainability measures include local food and drink sourcing, switching to sustainable packaging, local storage and re-use and upcycling of event dressing and theming, and best practice waste management
- 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, use of which is minimised by sharing resource. Investment in further electric outlets on Broad Street would mitigate this 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 act in the way best calculated to contribute to the delivery of the targets set in or under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009
- 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	Movement of part of the event to another site if repairs to Marischal Quadrangle are ongoing	Scoping of amended site in case required Officers working with the event partners and operator to ensure continuity Comms and Marketing plan to communicate any changes to the public	M	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?
Compliance	Aberdeen City Council's appointed Christmas Village delivery partner fails to comply with statutory obligations, whilst delivering an event on Council land.	<p>The council's contract with the operator sets out their legal obligations as the 'occupier' under the Occupiers' Liability (Scotland) Act 1960. Additionally, the contract stipulates that the operator is 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.</p> <p>Finally, the contract stipulates that health and safety documentation, relating to the event, must be submitted to Aberdeen City Council and that all relevant regulatory 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 	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?
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sub-Contractors Documentation • Food Safety Documentation <p>These documents are 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 movement in and around the Marischal College, Marischal Square, Broad St and Queen St areas	<p>Measures will be put in place to maintain public access to buildings including Police Scotland's customer service centre.</p> <p>Changes to bus routes, stops and taxi access will be communicated as in prior years and in partnership with the relevant operators.</p>	L	Yes
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	The experienced delivery partners are managed through a workstream process to ensure delivery of a high-quality event	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?
	meet expectations poses a risk for the Council and the city.	Any expectation management will be carried out by the Comms team working with project partners		
Environment / Climate	No significant risks identified against the category.			

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
	Impact of Report
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement	<p>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.</p> <p>And a Prosperous City: Develop our economy in a genuine partnership with the private sector, third sector and residents</p>
<u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	<p>9. 100% of our children with Additional Support Needs/disabilities will experience a positive destination</p> <p>13. Addressing climate change by reducing Aberdeen's carbon</p> <p>14. Increase sustainable travel</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.
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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 2024 Research Report

11.2 Appendix 2: Local Contractors Suppliers and Traders

11.3 Appendix 3 Production Costs and Trading Accounts - Exempt

11.4 Appendix 4: Christmas Village Sustainability and Community Benefits

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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