

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Finance and Resources
DATE	5 th November 2025
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Tall Ships Aberdeen 2025 Evaluation
REPORT NUMBER	CR&E/25/245
DIRECTOR	David Dunne
CHIEF OFFICER	Julie Wood
REPORT AUTHOR	Matthew Williams
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.2, 1.1.3, 1.1.8, 2.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Committee with an interim evaluation of the Tall Ships Races Aberdeen 2025 including contracted and additional elements of the event, and an interim budget.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 Notes that a designed evaluation document will be circulated in the new year with full budgets included in the year end budget pack;
- 2.2 Instructs the Chief Officer – City Development and Regeneration to engage with cultural and heritage partners to develop Festival of the Sea 2026, in order to build upon the legacy of Tall Ships and by allocating monies from the Coastal Communities Fund and seeking further grants and private sponsorship to support; and
- 2.3 Instructs the Chief Officer – City Development and Regeneration to work with regional youth sail training partners to ensure opportunities for young people from Aberdeen to take part in the Tall Ships Races 2026 on a fully-funded basis; and to seek grants and sponsorship to widen this programme as far as possible.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 Aberdeen successfully staged the Tall Ships Races Aberdeen 2025 as noted in the Urgent Notice of Motion by the Convener and Cllr Greig which was approved by the Special Finance and Resources meeting on 31st July 2025. The event met and exceeded a range of goals, performance indicators and contractual obligations as outlined below. The goals for the event were set out in the Tall Ships Aberdeen 2025 Report from 7th August 2024 (CR&E/24/227) They were:

- Stage a world-class event at the heart of the city.
- Recruit 100+ Aberdonian youth sail trainees to join the Tall Ships Races.
- Recruit 400+ Volunteers to help run the event.
- Deliver a Tall Ships education programme in our schools.
- Create a Discovery Zone on the Castlegate.

- Create high quality sport, culture and entertainment programmes.
- Drive Aberdeen's economic growth.

This Report and attached appendices will outline how those goals were achieved using responses and data from a range of evaluation surveys of visitors, city businesses, trainees, volunteers and retail vendors on the site, as well as financial data from the budget, returns from all food and beverage vendors, and city footfall monitoring via Huq. Anecdotal feedback has also been included where appropriate using written submissions or media recordings.

Meeting the Event Goals

3.2 Stage a world-class event at the heart of the city.

Boosting Aberdeen's reputation and people's pride in the city

The Tall Ships Races Aberdeen 2025 took place very successfully from 19th to 22nd July at Port of Aberdeen and other sites including Castlegate, Union Terrace Gardens, the City Centre and Aberdeen Sports Village. It exceeded the scale and scope of the Tall Ships in 1997 becoming the largest event ever held in the city and the most attended free event in Scotland in 2025.

Key Metrics:

- 496,000 visits to the event
- 94% of visitors rated their experience as Excellent (71%) or Good (23%)
- 91% agreed that the event had a positive impact on their perception of Aberdeen
- 86% agreed that the event increased their pride in the City
- 91% strongly agreed that the event should be repeated
- 0 arrests resulted in Aberdeen being called 'the Friendly City' in national media

Wider reputation: The event had huge positive media impact for the city with a total of 1343 media articles across broadcast, print and online. This included UK and Scottish major news and radio channels with multiple live broadcasts from the Port of Aberdeen. Of all media coverage 74% was positive and 25% balanced. A media overview is attached as Appendix A.

3.3 Recruit 100+ Aberdonian youth sail trainees to join the Tall Ships Races.

Focusing on young people aged 15-25 from all backgrounds.

Recruitment

This was a contractual requirement and reputationally important for Aberdeen with Sail Training International, ship operators and other host ports. Traditionally recruiting trainees from disadvantaged and marginalised backgrounds is very difficult for all Host Ports so this area was a focus for 2024/25.

- 41 presentations were delivered in schools, youth clubs, children's care homes and colleges in the City and Shire
- 40% of all sign-ups were as a direct result of this activity
- Trainee Working Group included
 - Ocean Youth Trust
 - Association of Sail Training Organisations
 - Sea Cadets
 - Previous youth sail trainees
- 673 applications received

Selection and Engagement

- Assessment methodology developed and applied.
- Trainee engagement programme following selection including full day activities in April, May and June.
- Safeguarding programme in consultation with ACC educational visits lead and sail training specialist agency Windseeker, including 15 chaperones travelling with more vulnerable trainees.

Results

The project team beat all expectations by sending 244 trainees, a breakdown of trainee details and the exceedingly high feedback scores can be found in Appendix B

3.4 Recruit 400+ Volunteers to help run the event.

Aligned with the city's new Volunteer Charter (CORS/24/179)

The Volunteer Working Group encompassed over 40 external members drawn from a variety of charitable and sailing organisations from Aberdeen and beyond. A full breakdown of those involved is included in Appendix B The team met monthly delivering a large number of events and locations in the lead-up to volunteer recruitment.

It was determined that 320 volunteers would be optimal for event delivery. They were selected from over 1400 applicants and participated in a number of roles, including nearly 100 Volunteer Liaison Officers who directly looked after the needs of visiting ships and their crews during the event.

Key Outcomes:

- Overall volunteer experience rated at 4.4 stars
- 87% felt valued
- 86% felt they had a tangible impact on the event
- 91% thought that their Team Aberdeen uniform promoted the event well

More details can be found in Appendix B

3.5 Deliver a Tall Ships education programme in our schools.

Meeting curriculum aims and nurturing pupil interest in the event

A full breakdown of the activity strands outlined below can be found in Appendix B

An extensive education programme, including all Primary Schools in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, was managed by Aberdeen City Council's Education and Lifelong Learning teams, the Youth Music Service, and additional activity from the Creative Learning team. The education programme was part-funded by a grant from the UK Shared Prosperity fund. Key strands included:

- Tall Ships Learning Packs and Treasure Boxes
- Adopt a Ship!
- Tall Ships Anthem and the Big Sing!
- Tall Ships Art Competition
- Creative Learning – Fish n' Ships project

Support

The combined education programme was a hugely valuable part of the Tall Ships Races project which went unseen by most in the city. However, the impact on children

and young people, and resulting attendance by families at the event, stands as testimony to the skills and hard work of teachers, musicians and education leaders across the city. In this work they were supported by organisations who provided information for learning packs, materials for the treasure boxes, and classroom learning support, including, Ocean Youth Trust Scotland, Royal Yachting Association, Association of Sail Training Organisations, Aberdeen Line 200 Heritage Group, Whale and Dolphin Conservation, Royal National Lifeboat Institution

More details can be found in Appendix B

3.6 **Create a Discovery Zone on the Castlegate.**

Three days of STEAM activities for children aged c.5-12. Delivered by partners.

Discovery Zone Main Partners

The Discovery Zone on the Castlegate was a great success for the event and project partners. It attracted around 60,000 visits to a wide-range of educational activities for families and helped to disperse activity around the event site and bring the tall ships experience into the city centre. Partners were: University of Aberdeen, North East Scotland College, Skills Development Scotland, MacDuff Marine Aquarium, Aberdeen Line 200 Heritage Group, Aberdeen Science Centre, Sea Cadets, Royal National Lifeboat Institution, Gordon Highlanders Museum, Aberdeen Archives, TechFest, Norco Energy

A full breakdown of additional activities, including the Military Village which saw attendance of 26,500 is included in Appendix B

3.7 **Create high quality sport, culture and entertainment programmes.**

Working with the city's major venues, production companies and creative sector.

There were three main areas of activity – as set out below:

A. Festival of the Sea 2025 programme

The Festival was delivered by partners across the city and beyond with activities which wrapped around and enhanced the main event, giving the opportunity for groups to join in with Tall Ships without having events clash with the fleet visit.

More details are included in Appendix B with the full programme attached as Appendix C which details the 5 exhibitions, 33 further activities and 16 event partners involved in the Festival.

B. Stage Programme

Peterson Seabase: An enormous event space donated by Peterson as part of their in-kind sponsorship of the event. This was used for Quayside Concerts and the main stage daytime programme

Quayside Concerts: A 7000-capacity festival-standard space was created in Peterson Seabase. Kilimanjaro Live Ltd acted as booking support agent. Deacon Blue, Ministry of Sound Orchestra, Tidelines and Kaiser Chiefs were secured with significant support acts. All gigs sold out.

Key Outcomes:

- 22,000 tickets sold
- Direct revenue from tickets was £171,000

- The Tidelines gig raised £31,000 for the Royal National Lifeboat Institution
- 300 customers were facilitated on the Accessible Viewing Platform which was funded by Event Scotland
- Paid social media advertising had nearly 2m impressions

Main Stage Daytime Programme

A free programme with community, amateur and professional acts from the city with a variety of acts including a focus on trad music. This provided a showcase of citywide talent and an opportunity for acts to perform at a scale not usually open to them. A full breakdown of acts can be found in Appendix B.

Transit Stage Programme

This stage was located on Regent Quay and utilised the Council's trailer stage for a free daytime and evening programme. The line-up consisted of regional high-quality bands showcasing the range and diversity of acts in the city. A full breakdown can be found in Appendix B.

Family Zone

The Streamline yard on Blaikie's Quay was secured. This allowed extra space for a Family Zone. A Children's Stage was added with a programme of entertainment and events which included Zumba, dancing and storytelling including in the Doric language.

C. Official Events

In addition a range of official events took place, many supported by cultural and heritage activities. These included the Opening Ceremony with youth and community performances, and the Crew Parade featuring the Band of His Majesty's Royal Marines.

An overview of Tall Ships concerts and events can be found in Appendix B

3.8 Drive Aberdeen's economic growth.

By increasing visits to the city for the event, post-event tourism, and heightened economic activity by programme participants.

Economic impact measures:

Performance Indicator	Total
Gross Spend	£21.8m
Gross Value Added	£32.2m
Employment (FTEs)	703

Projection was for between £12.5m and £20m GVA so the event impact has far exceeded expectations.

Increasing visits to the city:

There were 496,000 visits to the event.

This includes 406,000 visits at Port of Aberdeen, Peterson Seabase, Discovery Zone on Castlegate, King Street Funfair, and Military Village in Union Terrace Gardens. Plus a further 90,000 visits to Aberdeen Beach, Torry Battery and Peterson Seabase for the arrival and departure of the fleet, the Red Arrows display, and the Deacon Blue concert.

Visits by location (Sat-Tues):

Location	Percentage
Aberdeen City	48.5%
Aberdeenshire	30.4%
Elsewhere Scotland and UK	18.9%
Overseas	2.2%

Heightened economic activity by programme participants

Direct income after any taxes or associated costs:

Revenue Source	Income
Combined hospitality and bar	£293,000
Combined retail sales	£19,000
Park and Ride	£21,000
Concert Programme	£158,000
Sponsorship (in cash)	£266,000
Sponsorship (in kind valuation)	£241,000
Grant support	£1.08m
TOTAL	£2.08m

Other economic data shows an increase in hotel occupancy and room rates, positive business impacts for stall holders, and a majority of city businesses reporting that the event was good for their business with 44% seeing increased turnover.

Post-event tourism

Noting the reach of the Comms programme in 3.2, and the total race route coverage in France, Norway and Denmark, this objective is likely to be met as the profile of the city was raised across the UK and Europe. Data gathered by VisitAberdeenshire's Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Model, including data from accommodation providers, will be used to monitor effects on future tourism.

3.9 Legacy

A number of measures were outlined in Tall Ships Aberdeen 2025 (CR&E/24/227). Realisation of these objectives is underway. Use of the Festival of the Sea 2026 and continuing sail traineeships as ways to build on the event are outlined in 3.14 and 3.15.

- 3.10 On 30th September a jobs fair was held at the Beach Ballroom as part of ABZ Works existing programme. All trainees and volunteers were invited to attend, and all sponsors with live recruitment were invited.
- 3.11 On 9th October a sponsor debrief was held at Aberdeen Art Gallery which saw the soft launch of a campaign to bring in sponsors for major city events including Festival of the Sea, Christmas Village, Spectra and NuArt. The aim is to keep sponsors engaged via a 'one-stop-shop' to ensure that each opportunity is matched to their aims e.g. corporate social responsibility, client entertainment or brand visibility.
- 3.12 Educational assets outlined in Appendix B have been retained by schools for future use. This could be linked to future Festivals of the Sea, providing a flexible approach to involvement in those events.
- 3.13 Links with cultural organisations will be maintained through future Festivals of the Sea with certain assets, such as the BookBench sculptures, re-used in future years.

- 3.14 The event sought to build Aberdeen's reputation as the perfect stage for major international events. Measures taken included winning the Host Port Seminar for the city (see Appendix B, Civic Events), attendance by the CEO and officers from EventScotland, and visits by the First Minister of Scotland and the Minister for Business of Scotland.

3.15 **Festival of the Sea 2026**

To capitalise on the success of the Tall Ships and drive further tourism in the years ahead, Officers recommend proceeding with plans for Festival of the Sea 2026 (see 2.3) with costs met from the Coastal Communities Fund, a UK-wide programme created and funded by the UK Government with the aim of encouraging the economic development of UK coastal communities, alongside external grant funding or sponsorship. This will fulfil some of the legacy aims laid out in Tall Ships Aberdeen 2025 (CR&E/24/227) including:

- Re-use of existing cultural and educational assets (as noted above)
- Maintaining sponsor and supporter relationships through engagement for Festival of the Sea and other high-profile events in the city.

- 3.16 As part of the legacy for the event, it is recommended that Aberdeen City Council commits to working with Scottish sail training organisations, including Ocean Youth Trust and Swan Trust to continue to build a culture of youth sail training in the city through the Festival of the Sea 2026 (see 2.4). This will reinforce positive links with the international sail training community and help the city build toward any future sailing events. This would be subject to grant or sponsor funding being found, and at a cost of around £2,000 per trainee where fully-funded.

3.17 **Target Operating Model 1.2**

Noting the event's strategic fit with the Council's health-centred prevention approach as part of Target Operating Model 1.2. The assessment outlined above and in the attached appendices shows that the event aims were fulfilled in terms of activity which attracted visitors to the event, encouraged participation in mental and physical activity, and created and sustained jobs. The event met the objectives of fostering community cohesion, participation in culture and active travel. Supporting evidence:

Metric	Measurement
Total Visits	496,500
Walked or Cycled to the event	20%
Employment Impact (FTEs)	703
Felt increased pride in Aberdeen	86%

4. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 Tall Ships Aberdeen 2025 Report in August 2024 (CR&E/24/227) noted the original budget from 2022 projected a total cost of £2.99m (including 15% contingency) with Council contribution estimated at £1.18m and liability for a £955,000 funding gap. A potential total cost to the Council of the event of £2.14m
- 4.2 The Report outlined an increase in cost to £3.85m (including 15% contingency) with a Council contribution of £1.18m and liability for a £1.97m funding gap (or £1.33m after external funding to that date). A potential total cost to the Council of the event of £2.51m

- 4.3 The contribution from the Council included core support of £1.18m, plus a further £702,000 from the funding gap. The total cost to the Council of the event was therefore £1.8m, including a 5% contingency pending some final invoices and income payments.
- 4.4 Allocation of monies from the 2025 Coastal Communities Fund to support the Festival of the Sea 2026 in order to leverage external grant funds, provide information to potential sponsors, and allow for timely engagement with culture and sport partners to co-create the programme.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 No direct implications arise from the recommendations. Previous contractual obligations to Sail Training International have been fulfilled.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 No direct implications arise from the recommendations.

7. RISK

Category	Risk	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk level	Target Risks Level Low (L) Medium (M) High (H)	Does target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	Failure to capitalise on the success of the event or learn lessons as part of a full evaluation	Evaluation processes are underway, alongside the other legacy measures outlined above.	L	Yes
Compliance	No risks identified	None	L	Yes
Operational	Staffing levels	Current pressure on the City Events team and other areas could lead to a reduced Festival of the Sea programme.	M	Yes
Financial	Failure of grant or commercial income to support	A scaled-down version of the event would be delivered using all or part of the Coastal Communities Fund.	L	Yes

	Festival of the Sea			
Reputational	Risk of reputational damage if event does not meet public expectation following Tall Ships 2025	Officers will work to maximise effective use of budget. Comms strategy would be revised to manage expectations	M	Yes
Environment / Climate	No risks identified	None	L	Yes

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
	Impact of Report
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement	All applicants were requested to detail the contribution of their project to Aberdeen City Council policy and strategies, and these were assessed by officers to ensure clear links.
<u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	2.8 Support 25 individuals to gain employability skills through volunteering opportunities by 2026
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	4.4 Increase by 5% the number of S1-S6 pupils who report that they feel confident by 2025. As outcome of continued sail training commitment.
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	15.1 Increase to 65% the proportion of people who feel they can regularly experience good quality natural space by 2026. 15.3 25% of people report that they understand the importance of nature on both their neighbourhood and individual wellbeing by 2026 Through engagement with the city's coastal environments.

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	Full impact assessment completed
Data Protection Impact Assessment	None
Other	Not required

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Tall Ships Project, Urgent Business Committee, 21st October 2022 (COM/22/251, section 4)
- 10.2 Tall Ships Aberdeen 2025, Finance and Resources Committee, 7th August 2024, (CR&E/24/227)

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 Appendix A: Tall Ships Comms Report
- 11.2 Appendix B: Tall Ships Additional Information
- 11.3 Appendix C: Festival of the Sea Programme

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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