

## **Appendix 2 -An events strategy for Aberdeen City Council**

### **Scope**

A strategy for events in the city will cover the existing cultural and events programme, built and natural heritage and civic events. For the purposes of this document, culture is not strictly defined, but a 'broad brush' approach is applied. The development of an events strategy will allow the current offer to be reviewed, and where appropriate, incorporated into a yearlong rolling programme of high quality cultural events with the following ambitions:

- To establish the city as a host for a range of high quality innovative events
- To provide a year round offer with bespoke activity throughout the seasons
- To establish and maintain a series of signature events originating in Aberdeen, which reflect the essential characteristics of the city, and contribute to the development of a 'cultural narrative' for Aberdeen
- To generate economic, physical and social benefits for the city, its residents and visitors

The scope of the events strategy will include

- A review of existing cultural and city events funded and/or delivered by the city council, with a revised and enhanced culture programme, including built, intangible and tangible heritage
- A review of civic events and activity currently managed through the Office of the Chief Executive
- A consideration of the infrastructure needs to deliver our ambitions, including potential bids for UK and EU city of Culture, or World Heritage Status

An events strategy will incorporate the four themes of the cultural strategy, currently being revised;

- Engagement in arts and culture: opportunities to actively participate and engage with the cultural life of the city for all residents and visitors
- Creative and artistic development: developing a wide range of opportunities for artists and creative practitioners to contribute to the cultural life of the city, to make new work and to retain artists
- Events and festivals: developing a bespoke set of events as part of an annual programme, with a co-ordinated and curated approach, marketing and promotion
- The city's cultural narrative: devising an events programme which is fundamentally rooted in the characteristics of the city and its people, acknowledging the changing demographic and influences from Northern Europe

## **Background**

In June 2013 Aberdeen City Council submitted an unsuccessful bid to become UK City of Culture 2017. During the period following the bid, the Council made a public commitment to deliver a step change in cultural activity and infrastructure over the period running up to 2017/18. During this time staff and partner organisations, including the UK City of Culture project board, identified a number of high level objectives which would support the city's ambitions for culture. These developments necessitate a 'step change' in the cultural offering over a long period in order to deliver lasting change and improvement.

Feedback from the bid for UK City of Culture was received from Regeneris, the consultants employed by the DCMS. It stated:

*'Aberdeen has great potential in terms of its potential resources and the significant interest that public and private partners have in upping Aberdeen's game. However this bid does not deliver the quality of outline programme or the clarity and vision and assurance of deliverability...there is great potential for the city to use the momentum from this bid process to take forward development of its cultural offer and deliver relationships with business sponsors'*

The debrief process identified, amongst others, the following key benefits of the bidding process:

- Positive media coverage of Aberdeen, raising the profile of the city and engaging the public imagination
- Engagement between the city's cultural establishments and the private sector has been approved
- By signalling an ambition to improve the cultural life of the city, the awareness of the benefits this could bring to individuals and communities has been raised significantly
- Providing a dynamic and drive for capital initiatives such as the redevelopment of the Art Gallery, Museums Collection Centre and Music Hall, and revenue funded initiatives including Big Noise Torry, the Made in Aberdeen awards and the Diamond Jubilee bursary scheme.

Recognising the benefits of the bid, the Council committed an additional £3.5m to an enhanced culture programme from 2014-2018. This has enabled a more strategic and long term approach to be taken to attracting and planning major cultural initiatives, such as Spectra, the Light Festival for the city, established in 2014. Current Council investment is in the region of £12m per year into culture, with city events and civic budgets.

In 2014, RGU launched 'Creating a New North' a report which laid out the challenges and opportunities for the region, in terms of articulating its cultural identity. The report stated 'the basic building blocks are all in place, what is required now is the development of a coherent vision that a range of individuals and organisations can rally around and contribute to'.

The Strategic Infrastructure Plan identifies key infrastructure projects which will make a significant contribution to the development of the city, including spaces and places for the cultural life of the city to grow and flourish: it also identified some of the key barriers to growth, including 'Attracting workers/visitors and marketing of the city/city image' as being essential for the future sustainability of the city.

The city centre masterplan, currently being developed by BDP, has, as one of its objectives: 'Ensuring the city centre reflects its distinctive local culture in the enhanced provision of cultural events, programmes and infrastructure, so Aberdeen is like no other place'

In 2013 the Council commissioned BOP consultants to develop a cultural assets map for the city. As well as prioritising infrastructure projects, the report made the following recommendations:

- Develop the producers, experiences and content that will help Aberdeen stand out
- Prioritise key cultural infrastructure projects
- Revitalise the city centre through a cultural placemaking approach
- Emphasise Aberdeen's distinctive heritage
- Scope the cultural potential of existing international linkages with the Northern Arc and other cities.

### **Capital initiatives**

The redevelopment of Aberdeen Art Gallery and the Museums Store, at a cost of £33m, will significantly enhance the capacity of the city to undertake major exhibitions and events. The capital plans for the Music Hall, the finest Victorian concert hall in Scotland, will provide a much improved venue for comedy and music in Aberdeen. Work to turn the Triple Kirks site into office accommodation will add a significant dynamic to the city centre.

### **Revenue funded**

Recent initiatives have included the establishment of Aberdeen Festivals Collective, a group of nine festivals in the city who share marketing and commission audience research: the Culture network, a group of twenty cultural organisations who are developing the next culture plan: the Creative Spaces awards scheme which matches creative practitioners and organisations with empty spaces, providing training, funding and networking: the recently announced portfolio of investment in the city by Creative Scotland from 2015-2018 brings further revenue investment for Aberdeen Performing Arts, peacock Visual Arts, CMI and citymoves to the city. A place partnership agreement with Creative Scotland has supported the new Light Festival 'Spectra' and cultural events to be 'tested' with a view to a longer term development of the infrastructure of the city.

Feedback from the bid for UK City of Culture 2017 indicated that the DCMS believed that Aberdeen had not only the infrastructure but also the capabilities to deliver a successful bid for UK City of Culture. This has been borne out by the major logistical challenges undertaken when planning for the visit of the Olympic Torch to the city in 2012.

Aberdeen City Council's City Events Team currently delivers a dynamic but compact programme of events and activities focused on promoting Aberdeen as a great place to live and visit. These events are less focussed on the economic benefits and more on the social benefits to the local community and visitors, instilling a sense of civic pride while promoting a shared knowledge and history of the City and wider region.

In the past these events have attracted visitors to Aberdeen but the majority of the audience is local coming from Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. In the future there needs to be a greater focus on attracting visitors from outwith the region to stimulate tourism growth and the benefits for other businesses and services.

Working with the new Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Tourism Company will be key to driving new and larger audiences to the events and festivals held in the region in the future.

### **Why is an events strategy needed?**

Cultural provision in the city council is currently delivered through the Education and Children's services directorate, through the Museums and Galleries, Creative Learning, Libraries and Information Services, beach Ballroom and Cultural policy and partnerships Teams. A city events programme is planned, managed and co-ordinated using funds from the Common Good and revenue budget, by Officers in the Office of the Chief Executive, and is a programme which has evolved over a number of years. The Civic programme of events is also managed within the office of the Chief Executive. There are also events organised in other departments (+50 Festival etc) that need to be considered in relation to this exercise. There is no current co-ordination or curation of the three separate events strands, and quality control is limited. For a city of its size, the events have limited national or even regional profile, with a lack of distinctiveness which roots them in the NE of Scotland and wider Northern Europe. Events tend to be traditional, safe, and lack a 'wow' factor. Whilst the programmes are in the main designed to appeal to visitors, the reality is that they do not attract other than a few individuals who don't already reside in the city.

Budgets are held separately for all three programmes, meaning the collective benefit and 'buying power' is not maximised, budgets are not used efficiently, and the impacts on the economy are not clear. There are gaps in knowledge and research which need to be addressed, Private Sector investment is not maximised, or co-ordinated, and marketing does not always present a consistent profile.

Whilst the strategy should seek to recommend a budget moving forward which is pitched at the right level to attract and develop the cultural life of the city, it should be recognised that a more cohesive approach, purely by realigning existing revenue spent on events, would create an events programme for the city council greater than the sum of its current parts.

### **What should an events strategy deliver?**

- A signature programme with one or more large scale events of national significance
- A clear cultural narrative which strengthens the relevance of all activity to Aberdeen, it's essential characteristics and international alliances
- A strategic direction for the development of infrastructure, activity, people and places
- An inclusive approach to events which values and recognises the diversity of communities in Aberdeen
- A framework for the allocation of existing revenue, a package of sponsorship opportunities for the private sector, and an opportunity for developer contributions
- A network of local and city centre events
- A robust evaluation framework and audience intelligence as a basis for development
- A plan for securing cultural events of national significance, such as the Turner prize

### **Tender**

The appointment of a suitable consultant for the development of the events strategy will be allocated through a public tender process. The tender will be in two stages, Stage 1 costed at £15,000 and Stage 2, costed at £7,500

### **Stage 1 - February - June 2016**

1. Conduct a review of all existing provision, audiences, effectiveness, quality and viability
2. Scope opportunities, local, national and international
3. Through a process of public and stakeholder consultation, devise a strategic framework which enables the delivery of a bespoke programme of events distinct to and embedded in the city
4. Where there are gaps in knowledge arising, work with local organisations to develop audience intelligence
5. Review existing budgets, develop a comprehensive proposed events list, which matches venues to proposed activity, showing connection to the critical infrastructure projects described above
6. Identify where existing budgets can be aligned and potential funding sources

7. Scope and analyse existing and potential delivery models to deliver a successful programme
8. Ensure recommendations are rooted in a full understanding of the city, including the demographic make-up, economy, the environment and the changing role of the city centre

## **Stage 2 – June – September 2016**

1. Provide a timeline of local, national and international opportunities for a 5 year rolling programme
2. Integrate a set of sponsorship opportunities and packages within the proposed programme, including costings for events
3. Ensure all staffing, marketing, monitoring arrangements are embedded in the plan
4. Consider the benefits and make recommendations, if appropriate, of an independent sponsors group/business club
5. Agree a framework of support for fringe/community events: insurance, funding programmes and administration, for example

The final events strategy will be presented to Elected Members in October 2016 and will form part of the budget setting process for 2017/18.

## **Stakeholder involvement**

Aberdeen Inspired

Robert Gordon University, University of Aberdeen

ACSEF, Scottish Enterprise

Visit Scotland

Aberdeenshire Council

Cairngorms National Park, Scottish National heritage

National Performing Companies

Aberdeen Festivals Collective, the Culture network

Aberdeen Performing Arts

## **Steering group – proposed membership**

Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Tourism Company

Aberdeen City Council – city events, civic, marketing, economic development, planning and culture teams

Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce

Event Scotland

Creative Scotland

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