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VISITORS PLACES DESTINATIONS

ABERDEEN 365 EVENTS STRATEGY 2016-2021

REPORT FOR ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

SEPTEMBER 2016

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This Strategy Report is accompanied by two further reports, one providing more operational detail and guidance on implementation and another summarising the five case studies of successful event cities.

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aberdeen is a city with ambition. It is looking to emulate other successful cities in using **events to strengthen its image and reputation** as a place to do business, to invest, to live, to work, to study and to visit reactivating, connecting and animating the city's spaces supporting the objectives of the City Centre Masterplan.

Successful events cities offer festivals and events which are connected to the place inspired by its location, history, heritage, people and living culture. They deliver authentic, high quality occasions which for the most part can only be found and experienced in that way in that particular place. Following this approach this 5 year strategy will transform Aberdeen's events programme from a series of low key, local events **to high octane, big impact cultural and sporting highlights giving the city a national and international profile.**

The strategy here is to develop over the next five years a **String of Pearls**. An approach based on **quality not quantity**, constructed around an annual calendar of **Headline** (major) and **Feature** (niche, specialist) events and festivals that punctuate the year with something significant happening each month. Within the current programme there are a small number of events with immediate potential as Headline or Feature given the right investment and development. The programme can be enhanced through appropriate sporting and cultural bought-in events.

The implementation of the strategy should be driven by Aberdeen City Council through a **new Events Unit** bringing together events-related staff and budgets currently dispersed across different departments and teams. The Events Unit will act as an **enabler, commissioner, and facilitator** rather than a direct deliverer of events and be responsible for programme development, brokering council requirements, procuring and commissioning events, and managing the investment process. Its work will be overseen by an **independent Steering Group** to ensure engagement with the events sector and strategic partners.

This investment process will involve an **annual open call for bids** and all organisers seeking funding must demonstrate how an event will deliver against **clear criteria** including quality, ambition, visitor appeal, capacity building and sustainability. All events should be required to bid under the new arrangements and given the opportunity to 'step up' - to grow, develop or enhance their. There should be a separate **bid fund for bought in events**.

To deliver the Aberdeen 365 Events Strategy programme will require a minimum investment of **£3 to £5 million per annum for at least 5 years**. This is the level invested by the leading comparator cities of Rotterdam and Belfast which are transforming their reputations through events. (The numbers are eye watering. Edinburgh spends £9M of public money on its 12 key festivals from a total of £36M of which the City Council provides around £2M. Manchester City Council allocates £2M to one festival alone – its flagship biennial event Manchester International Festival. At least £35M is estimated to be the requirement for any future European Capital of Culture – Liverpool spent £130M in 2008 of which the city council contributed £75M. Derry spent over £18M on its year as City of Culture. Hull is planning to spend at least £12.5M on its programme of events. Glasgow's budget for its 2014 Commonwealth Games was £472.3M made up of £372m of public money with the remainder coming from commercial income generated through sponsorship, ticket sales, broadcasting rights and merchandise sales.)

This all means that to make an impact in a highly competitive events marketplace significant investment will need to be provided through public funds from Aberdeen City Council, strategic partnership with EventScotland and Creative Scotland and ideally the commercial sector. As the Aberdeen energy sector recovers major Headline Events should be attractive brand sponsorship propositions and individual event organisers would also be expected to generate income from alternative private investors.

ABERDEEN 365 EVENTS STRATEGY - VISION MADE REALITY

Over the next 5 years the Aberdeen 365 Events Strategy will deliver events and festivals that create distinctive experiences for visitors and that support the image and reputation of the city of Aberdeen.

The programme will dramatically increase year round activity and position the city centre as a 'happening' destination. The city centre will gain a reputation as a lively and vibrant place throughout the year with high profile cultural and sporting events and a series of small-scale events where one can dance, play and listen to music.

Aberdeen will be more vibrant than it used to be - there's more to do for young people and people are proud of where they live. Lively bars and cafés overlook city spaces with striking art installations, creating meeting places where outdoor performance and activity attract people to the city centre at all times of the day and evening.

Aberdeen's offer to visitors will be framed around high octane, big impact cultural and sporting 'Headline Events' that will contribute to the international profile of Aberdeen. These stand-out events will draw large crowds of residents and visitors alike, matching the city's cultural narrative and capturing the imagination on an international level.

So what could the 365 Event Strategy programme of Headline Events look like when transforming the vision into a reality?

The SPECTRA light festival produces an event matching that of Fête des Lumières in Lyon and Glow Festival in Eindhoven for an equivalent budget of £1.5m. SPECTRA commissions Europe's most exciting international light installation artists to create site-specific light installations and 3D projection mapping to transform Aberdeen's unique architecture, spaces and coastal landscape.

Runners from across the UK are drawn to the 'Great Aberdeen Run' featuring both 10k and half marathon courses. A buzzing atmosphere over the weekend is heightened by a supporting programme of live cultural happenings in the new events spaces in Broad Street, Castlegate and Union Terrace Gardens. During the run music zones, DJs and live bands accompany the runners entertaining large crowds along the route which incorporates the architectural landmarks of the city including Union Street and Beach Esplanade.

In its new summer spot an enlarged LookAgain celebrates Aberdeen's architecture, innovative visual art and design. It remains authentically grounded in and inspired by Aberdeen whilst successfully attracting larger audiences. An investment of £75k results in an international collaboration with Stavanger's 'Nuart' contemporary street and urban art festival. LookAgain animation is delivered by large-scale street theatre urban and aerial performance companies. The French Transe Express, for a fee of £50k, provides a monumental work to match the imposing scale of Aberdeen.

June hosts The Great City Games on Union Street, a showcase of athletics in an iconic city centre setting. Unique in Scotland, it provides an up close and personal experience for spectators featuring elite athletes from around the world and giving the public the thrill of competition outside of a traditional stadium setting.

July sees a visit from a Tall Ships Race attract a fleet of 100 sail vessels off Aberdeen's coast. They moor up in the harbour, which now benefits from better connectivity with the city and new public access since the investment at Nigg.

In August is a unique performance by the world renowned street theatre company Royal De Luxe with their Saga of the Giants. These colossal creations staged in the heart of the City draw huge crowds, engage local resident as participants and deliver significant media coverage (cf. Liverpool, Reykjavik, London). They are always memorable and leave a city transformed in return for an investment of £1.5 million.

Aberdeen's Summer Festivals, a new collective brand, places a focus on events between May and September that incorporate and support Headline Events and include: Aberdeen Highland Games; Enjoy Music transformed into a 'park & inner city' pop/rock festival, with curated stages across the city; Energetica Festival promoting the eco- credentials of Aberdeen as a global energy city; whilst The Taste of Grampian is transformed into Scotland's biggest food festival as city & shire collaborate in a multi-event format celebrating regional food and drink produce, and chefs and restaurants.

The Summer Festival culminates in early September when Aberdeen hosts the Tour of Britain's Grand Depart, the country's largest annual free-to-spectate sporting event. It will see the riders roll out from Union Street and traverse the length of Beach Esplanade live on national TV - promoting the splendour of city and shire. This winning combination of city and terrain will see Aberdeen recognising the economic benefit of investing £3m to host the UCI World Road Race Championships.

Aberdeen's year concludes with its winter calendar starting with the Beach Esplanade Fireworks in early November, through Christmas lights, Christmas Village and Hogmanay. The new Winter Festival brand offers a distinctive, authentic and creative promotional 'umbrella' to increase the national and international profile of Aberdeen as a UK Christmas visitor destination. The Winter Festival programme is framed around high-profile events, but also integrates the city's wider cultural offer of high class theatre shows, seasonal concerts, and distinctive exhibitions.

2 INTRODUCTION

SCOPE

Aberdeen is a city with ambition. It is looking to strengthen its position as a place to do business, to invest, to live, to work, to study and to visit. It is looking to build on its success as an oil and gas city diversifying into new sectors and economic activity.

Successful cities use their cultural credentials (among other things) to reinforce their image, profile and reputation. Aberdeen wants to follow this proven path and, in particular, build the range and scope of events staged in the city to deliver a year round programme of high quality, distinctive events which will appeal to visitors (and residents) and support the promotion of the city across all its agendas.

This report sets out a strategy to guide the investment in, development and delivery of **Aberdeen 365** – an events programme which will establish Aberdeen as a destination for outstanding events. It was produced by Blue Sail and is informed by consultation with key stakeholders in the city, a research review, review of five successful international event cities (case studies available separately), a review of the current events programme and our knowledge and analysis from years of working in this sector.

The Aberdeen 365 Event Strategy focuses on arts, cultural and sporting events and festivals. It is concerned with **quality** not quantity – because only the very highest quality of content and delivery can hope to attract global attention and support Aberdeen’s profile and reputation. It is only with real commitment to such a programme that Aberdeen can achieve its national and global ambitions and sit alongside the leading small cities of the world.

The city centre events programme should aim to increase year round activity and reposition the city centre as a ‘happening’ place. The focus should be on curating a lively and distinctive destination through a number of high profile events, as well as a programme of animation and activity throughout the year that utilises city centre spaces for cultural offerings.

Aberdeen City Masterplan 2015

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The *Regional Economic Strategy* and the *City Centre Masterplan* provide the local context for this events strategy.

Events are not ends in themselves – their purpose is to support the city’s **economic growth** aspirations. Events should directly address two weaknesses identified in the Regional Economic Strategy: “lack of awareness of opportunities and quality of life” and “vibrancy and image of city centre make it hard to attract people to live and work”. Events do this by providing opportunities and content for marketing and promotion validating the message that Aberdeen is a vibrant place with its own distinctive culture delivering unique experiences to its visitors and its residents.

At the national level the tourism strategy *Tourism Scotland 2020* identifies events and festivals as one of the key drivers of the visitor economy and hands responsibility to EventScotland which has articulated the strategic approach in *Scotland – A Perfect Stage*. The focus of the strategy is to support a portfolio of events which are unique, distinctive and embedded in Scottish culture as well as high profile itinerant events attracted to Scotland by its singular appeal as a destination and international reputation as a country which delivers events of the highest quality. It is up to places themselves to identify and programme events which are right for them – there is no national prescription other than the designated themed years which drive tourism development, promotion and to some extent funding streams including those for festivals and events.

To date there has been little funding support from EventScotland for Aberdeen’s event programme reflecting the current scale and local focus. Discussions which have taken place during this work however clearly indicate EventScotland’s desire to work closely with Aberdeen on the implementation of a clear strategy, and explore opportunities to support those events which fit the national objectives around quality, scale, profile and impact.

ABERDEEN’S CULTURAL NARRATIVE

Successful events cities offer festivals and events which are connected to the place inspired by its location, history, heritage, people and living culture. They deliver authentic, high quality events which for the most part can only be found and experienced in that way in that particular place.

This cultural heritage and its celebration can act as a strong and powerful catalyst for contemporary art and culture to respond to and add to.
Creating a New North RGU

Cities which nurture this approach –even for those events which are bought in rather than home grown – tend to be more successful and sustainable. Reykjavik and Rotterdam are good examples of this.

A strong ‘cultural narrative’ which captures the essence of the intrinsic and extrinsic culture of the place in its widest sense provides the strategic framework to judge whether an event is right or not for that place.

Aberdeen is a place with a strong identity. Work is underway by the Chamber of Commerce to articulate this sense of place which will feed into the cultural narrative. *Creating a New North* produced by Robert Gordon University for the North East of Scotland, identifies a number of cultural drivers which have been developed following a recent think tank of events stakeholders to provide the elements of a cultural narrative . These are of course interdependent and intertwined but can broadly be split as follows.

Narrative Element	Example Event
Latitude	Light Summer / Dark Winter nights
Geography	Events connecting city & shire
Coast	Seaborne events (Tall Ships)
Global links	Transnational cultural collaborations
Cityscape	Architecture as creative backdrop
Natural Resources	Local food & drink

Any particular high impact event supported by this strategy should be capable of referencing at least two of the narrative elements.

3 REVIEW

THE ROLE OF CITY FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Festivals and events are acknowledged for improving the quality of life of the local population. They provide occasions for expressing collective belonging to a group or a place, creating opportunities for drawing on shared histories, cultural practices and ideals.

They are an important element in the marketing of tourism. They provide an additional reason for tourists to visit a particular location and can also be the key factor in the tourist's decision to choose one destination over another. They provide enjoyable 'things to do' for visitors, allow informal and rewarding contact with the local population and provide new cultural experiences.

The last fifteen years or so have seen a remarkable rise in the number of events and cultural festivals in cities throughout Europe and elsewhere. International evidence shows that a properly resourced events programme, with a distinctive creative vision, and staged in an interesting and accessible location, can generate significant profile, attract new visitors and deliver substantial economic benefit.

Unlike permanent stadiums and museums, festivals and events are fleet of foot; they're able to switch venues and upscale programming if necessary. They're also much more inclusive. Many are free to the public, utilise existing public spaces and cultural assets, spark interactions among community members and nurture positive images of urban areas, especially those that might need a boost.

Charles Landry in his 2011 profile of the city commissioned by ACC commented that Aberdeen's approach to culture was that it may be 'focusing too much on the issue of cultural participation, and may be overlooking the 'more high-status, representational or image driven benefits that the arts can offer'.

Aberdeen does not enjoy a cultural profile to match its setting, history, or economic prowess; a city that is perceived as distant and remote from the rest of the UK; and lacks a recognised contemporary cultural identity. Aberdeen needs to be bold in its aspirations to gain its place on the UK cultural map.

UK City of Culture 2017 Bid

REVIEW OF ABERDEEN'S EXISTING VENUES AND PUBLIC SPACES PROVISION

We have reviewed the existing provision of venues and public spaces identified in the City Centre Masterplan and with additional provision informed through consultations. We have classified and selected the most relevant to the Aberdeen 365 Events Strategy. These are set out in the table below where we have identified, where possible, the actual or approximate capacities. A summary of each venue and relevant issues that may impact upon their infrastructure or viability and their current programme of activities is also included.

For a city of over 230,350 people, Aberdeen's venue asset infrastructure is well developed, and matches or exceeds many similar sized UK cities. Principal venues are Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre; APA's, His Majesty's Theatre, The Music Hall, and Lemon Tree; ACT community theatre, ACC operated Beach Ballroom; and independent commercial venues, Blue Lamp jazz, and Aberdeen Tunnels live music and club.

The Music Hall and Art Gallery are currently benefiting from a capital investment programme that is expected to deliver significant venue refurbishment. AECC is transferring to a new site delivering 12,500 capacity that will enable an increased event and entertainment programme, providing an essential facility for any aspiring event city.

Hiring suitable performance spaces for concerts and events is an issue for several independent festivals, due principally to a lack of availability caused by venues' regular in-house activities. A number of promoters suggest that there is a need for a mid-size (circa. 400 - 700 capacity) flexible 'arts centre' style venue. The Cultural Mapping of Aberdeen report¹ commented that "the lack of a mid-sized venue may help explain why Aberdeen has no resident ensemble".

Successful public spaces help to animate city centres day and night, and the City Centre Masterplan has the reactivation and connectivity of Aberdeen's existing public spaces as a priority. However, in Aberdeen, outdoor public space can be problematical, specifically:

¹ BOP Cultural mapping of Aberdeen

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- ▶ Urban fabric: the dimensions of public event spaces in the city centre are limiting with no large sized public space. None of the three principal city centre public spaces, Castlegate, Union Terrace and Union Terrace Gardens are ideal for outdoor performance.
 - ▶ Logistical: transport issues in the city centre constrain street closures. This will potentially impact on staging major sporting events - marathon, cycle races or City Games.
 - ▶ A more co-operative, flexible and understanding approach to the requirements of event practitioners through developing 'event friendly' policies from the council. And limited independent professional event management expertise and resource from those delivering.
 - ▶ The Masterplan refers to Castlegate as the 'central civic space'. However, the space is small in scale and compromised by the position of the Mercat Cross. Future development will need to allow for at least part of Castlegate to be a flat floor - and possibly additional performance infrastructure. An open public space would enable activities such as music, dance and street arts festivals, (*e.g. Merchant Quarter Festival, Glasgow*) exhibitions, schools and community performances, food festivals, and Christmas market etc.
 - ▶ The Masterplan also proposes Union Terrace Gardens redevelopment as a public hub with performance amphitheatre. This would offer an attractive space for small-scale performance and installations. However, there are logistical issues around public and technical infrastructure access.
 - ▶ Broad Street pedestrianisation and the adjoining Marischal Square development will provide a new city centre event ready space, including those previously held on Union Terrace. Although design plans are at an early stage, it has potential as an attractive location for small to mid-scale street based animations and events.
 - ▶ Marischal College Quad - as a public courtyard style space - also has potential for small-scale public events interventions (cf. Somerset House, London). However public access is inhibited by the glass doors which designate 'private space'.

Venue/Space	Event Capacity	Venue Overview	Current Programming
AECC	4,800 seated 8,500 standing	Currently located at Bridge of Don. Transferring to new site near Aberdeen Airport in 2019. Will feature arena capacity increased to 12,500 with a moveable stage, greater exhibition space and 3 hotels on site. Its location restricts linkages to city centre.	The AECC hosts over 550 events a year attracting over 207,000 visitors. Entertainment programme is approx. 40 large rock & pop concerts per year, major comedy tours, Disney on ice, sporting events. Core business is exhibitions and conferences
His Majesty's Theatre	1,470 seated	Managed and operated by APA. Located on Rosemount Viaduct, Frank Matcham designed was refurbished and glass extension added in 2005.	Major A-list performing arts venue presenting theatre, opera and dance. Attracts visits from national companies such as Scottish Ballet and Scottish Opera.
Music Hall	1,282 seated 1,500 standing	Managed and operated by Aberdeen Performing Arts (APA). Category A listed Georgian building located on Union Street. £7m renovation underway to upgrade auditorium & create new spaces. Reopening in 2018 and will have a significant new entrance onto Union Street.	Major venue for classical, pop and folk concerts and comedy shows. On reopening it plans to add more daytime and late night events in a new 100 seat performance space, and more events and activities for young people, children and families and international programming.

<p>Lemon Tree</p>	<p>Lounge 550 standing 300 seated. The Studio 166 seated</p>	<p>Managed and operated by APA. Unassuming, intimate fringe style theatre venue on West North Street.</p>	<p>APA utilises the venue for an artistic programme of up and coming experimental and alternative music, theatre, dance, performance art, comedy, spoken word. Home of the city Youth Theatre.</p>
<p>Arts Centre & Theatre Aberdeen (ACT Aberdeen)</p>	<p>350 seated - fixed rake</p>	<p>City Centre community run multi-arts venue occupying a category A-listed converted church. Managed by Castlegate Arts, a limited charity, dependent on volunteers to keep it running. Its size and proximity to Lemon Tree require it to develop a distinct offer. It is in need of significant refurbishment across front of house, backstage, and stage areas which are limited by tech and access issues.</p>	<p>Artistic Activities: Regular programming by local amateur companies and professional small-scale dance, drama and music companies. Other Activity: Workshops, club meetings; regular exhibitions of work by local artists</p>
<p>Aberdeen Art Gallery & Cowdray Hall</p>	<p>Cowdray Hall 250</p>	<p>The Art Gallery complex on the corner of Blackfriars Street and Schoolhill comprises Art Gallery, War Memorial Hall and Cowdray Hall It will re-open in Winter 2017 after a full-scale transformation project for the Gallery redevelopment to expand exhibition galleries and open up the frontage of the building complex to improve the visitor welcome.</p>	<p>A major provincial art gallery, with exhibitions of visual art, design, heritage, craft, decorative arts. Strong collection of 19th and 20th century English and Scottish as well as contemporary art. Cowdray Hall programmed mainly classical music recitals; occasional dance performances. conferences</p>

Queens Links & Beach Esplanade	In excess of 10,000	Area comprises of open land and beach footpath adjacent to busy dual carriageway which is known to cause issues in respect of road closures affecting local residents at major events. Queens Links used for major touring tented entertainment. Performance infrastructure required: Mobile stage; electricity power supply points; performer changing space. For audience: Road closure, shuttle bus/park & ride, signed safe walkways.	Large scale circus, light entertainment shows (Ladyboys of Bangkok), Aberdeen fireworks display, and community sporting activities, e.g. weekly Park Run, annual charity Color Run.
Aberdeen Sports Village	500 Aquatics Centre	Located in Seaton areas, the ASV is a joint venture between ACC and University of Aberdeen A new purpose-built venue, its facilities include indoor and outdoor athletics tracks, sports halls, full-size indoor football pitch, aquatics centre comprising 50m pool and diving pool. Its audience capacity is too small to attract or afford major international events and Aberdeen's location hinders attracting UK events.	Events have included: Commonwealth Water Polo Championships, and Europe U21 Netball Tournament. Host in 2020 LEN European Swimming & Diving Junior Championships. It was a 2012 Olympics training camp . It also hosts the annual Golden Games.
Hazlehead Park	30,000 (attendance at Northsound 2007)	Hazlehead Park is a large public park in the Hazlehead area. 180 hectares in size, it was opened to the public in 1920. Ticketed event would need significant fencing structure to stop unauthorised entry.	Aberdeen Highland Games, Celebrate Aberdeen, Enjoy Music Festival The park has a significant collection of sculpture.

Duthie Park	Approx. 5,000 (main grass area)	Situated by the banks of the River Dee, well located close to city centre good distance from built up residential area. Attractive grass area for public events. Ticketed event would need significant fencing structure to stop unauthorised entry.	Hosts BP Big screen opera in the park 1 night each summer
Union Terrace Gardens	Approx. audience capacities (central grassed area) 1,800. 2,500 Standing. 800 Seated (picnic) or 1,800 (theatre style)	Union Terrace Gardens in Denburn Valley stands close to mid-point of Union Street. It has been a public park for two centuries. Steep sides of ravine afford some protection from elements but cause access issues. Performance infrastructure: Flexible performance space (mobile flat floor or raised stage); electricity power supply, water and drainage at underground points; vehicle access for unloading, performer changing space and artists' parking.	Host venue of: Spectra, Winter Festival, Celebrate Aberdeen, community concerts and events

<p>Union Street</p>	<p>In excess of 100,000 along paved extent</p>	<p>The City’s principal street is a straight mile long thoroughfare with outstanding vista. Currently major issues exist in events requiring road closures. The Masterplan's proposed removal of cars and rationalisation of bus infrastructure also with expanding pedestrian footway will deliver a major opportunity to create a safe environment street activities environment and as a location for major events. Performance infrastructure required: Mobile staging; electricity power supply points; performer changing space.</p>	<p>Events use is primarily parades: Armed Forces Day, ATUC May Day, Celebrate Aberdeen, Christmas Lights Switch-on, and Winter Festival Reindeer parade. Celebrate Aberdeen’s Union Street Mile running event.</p>
<p>Union Terrace</p>	<p>Approx. 2,000 on pavements</p>	<p>Union Terrace links Union Street and Rosemount Viaduct and His Majesty's Theatre. Although a visually attractive thoroughfare it’s narrowness and residential properties & parking on one side do not make for a satisfactory event space. It also requires road closures for events. Performance infrastructure required : Mobile stages; electricity power & water supply at underground points; Road closures, Market Stalls, vehicle access & parking for traders unloading</p>	<p>Winter Festival market, Continental street markets</p>

<p>Broad Street with Marischal Square</p>	<p>In excess of 10,000</p>	<p>The Broad Street pedestrianisation and the adjoining Marischal Square development will provide a new city centre event ready space. Although design plans are at an early stage, it has potential as a location for mid to large scale street based animations and events. Performance infrastructure required: Mobile staging; electricity power and water supply points; performer changing space.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Castlegate</p>	<p>Approx. 2,000</p>	<p>Historic market place considered in Masterplan as the 'central civic space' for Aberdeen forming a desired destination at the end of Union Street. The space, surrounded by less than family friendly properties, is small in scale and severely compromised by the intrusive central position of the Mercat Cross. As an event space its most critical requirement will be for a flat paved floor + installation of power & water.</p>	<p>In 2016 events include: Christmas Tree and lights switch-on ceremony; Look Again Festival's Mirrored Pavilion installation; Aberdeen Oktoberfest with marquee erected for 1,000 people.</p>
<p>Marischal College Quad</p>	<p>300</p>	<p>Located in a landmark building the quadrangle courtyard space is within City Council offices. Public access through impressive gothic has entrance impeded by glass doors. The Quad is affected by swirling gusts of air Performance infrastructure required : Mobile staging; electricity power and water supply points</p>	<p>Irregular use for small touring exhibitions (Oor Wullie) and location for registry wedding photos.</p>

<p>St Nicholas' Roof Garden</p>	<p>200</p>	<p>The roof garden is situated above St Nicholas and is accessible from Upperkirkgate and St Nicholas Street. It incorporates a children's play area, picnic area, seats and display of flowers. This detached multi-level area has limited open space or good sight-lines to accommodate audiences.</p>	<p>A venue for Jazz Festival's Jazz on the Green AIYF and True North festival performances</p>
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ABERDEEN'S CURRENT EVENT PROGRAMME

Aberdeen's programme suggests a city that has only recently discovered cultural festivals and events and does not yet have major attractions to pull in audiences and visitors. There are a limited number of small-scale professional festivals and events but with one or two notable exceptions, these lack scale and ambition and have not achieved profile beyond the city. However, there is now a broad based resolve to exploit the potential of festivals and events to enhance the city brand and as an economic stimulus.

In the course of this work we reviewed a number of European comparator cities that are widely recognised as exponents of best practice in the strategic co-ordination and promotion of festivals and events (report available separately). Although there are variations in governance and operational models, they present a number of consistent themes which Aberdeen can learn from:

- ▶ Primarily for citizens recognising that local audiences are what sustain the event and ensure they support public sector funding decisions
- ▶ Successfully challenged/changed external perceptions, and increased pride and self-confidence of residents in their city
- ▶ Exploit the authenticity and distinctiveness of the city
- ▶ Provide a crucial stimulus to tourism
- ▶ Major headline events supported by a year round programme of smaller events.

***Horsens** re-invented itself utilising festivals and events to alter residents perceptions and change negative city brand. **Reykjavik** used cultural events to change attitudes and increase pride and self-confidence of residents in their city. **Rotterdam** uses festivals and events to build a contemporary creative city narrative, celebrate cultural diversity, and strengthen identity as globally prominent city.*

Aberdeen City Council's 2013 Cultural Mapping Report² noted that "Aberdeen's festival offer, though varied and often strong, is rather 'niche' in its appeal – indeed, its strongest elements are often its most specialised". We agree that the majority of festivals and events are specialist in nature, small in scale, and in the process of finding their feet, both artistically and financially. SPECTRA apart, most have yet to attract large audiences.

As a seaport with strong international ties and cosmopolitan population, Aberdeen events and festivals programming is unexpectedly more about 'local' than 'international'. The current programming is primarily aimed at Aberdeen residents, demographically already considered 'culturally confident'. The localness is demonstrated in that 90% of audiences live in or close to the city³. Reykjavík also views festivals as principally for its citizens; however, it has used the benefits of local authenticity to build high quality events that also deliver tourism and wider objectives.

The Aberdeen festivals and events programme possesses elements that reflect the distinctive and unique culture of the North East of Scotland⁴. There is also a contemporary (and sometimes challenging) artistic perspective which positively replicates the city's global business reputation for innovation and technology. However, this is at variance with an internal perception that Aberdeen's events are inhibited in the face of a cautious, risk averse city that is not comfortable with the new and untested.

Many events are multi-venue, both promoted indoors and outside. A number prominently use the backdrop of Aberdeen's city spaces and architecturally striking buildings to deliver site specific events. On the margins of the city centre the Beach Esplanade is used for touring tented circus, light entertainment shows, and sporting activities, whilst Hazlehead and Duthie Parks are used for both cultural and community events such as Aberdeen Highland Games, Celebrate Aberdeen and BP Big Screen.

² BOP Cultural Mapping of Aberdeen 2013

³ Aberdeen Festivals 2015 Catchment Analysis (Culture Republic)

⁴ Creating a New North RGU

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR ABERDEEN

The UK City of Culture bid states that “Aberdeen’s association with the oil industry, comes at the cost of being considered a culturally vibrant city ... the city’s location in the North East of Scotland has led to a perception that it is nationally and internationally isolated from the main cultural centres and this in turn has led to reluctance by national and touring cultural organisations to make or present significant work in the city”.⁵ This view is widely held in the city.

Aberdeen has proportionately low investment by the arts funding system; only Citymoves Dance Agency, Peacock Visual Arts, Aberdeen Performing Arts (APA), Edinburgh based Centre for the Moving Image (CMI) which runs Belmont Cinema, and Jazz Scotland producers of Aberdeen Jazz Festival are supported by Creative Scotland as Regularly Funded Organisations, although project grants have been made to Sound and LookAgain festivals.

Aberdeen’s relationship with Creative Scotland appears to be improving, but there remains an expectation of handouts rather than proactively demonstrating to Creative Scotland what additionality Aberdeen offers within the wider Scottish national context.

Event Scotland has provided Aberdeen organisations with only a small level of grant funding. During 2016 the University of Aberdeen and LookAgain had grants for projects linked to the Year of Innovation, Architecture and Design. Despite positive intentions expressed by Event Scotland, Aberdeen is largely seen as focusing on local events with no event in its portfolio that currently fits Event Scotland’s mega (e.g. Commonwealth Games) or signature events categories (large scale, iconic events which confirm Scotland’s status as a world leading international events destination e.g. Edinburgh’s Festivals, portfolio of golf events including regular staging of Open Championships).

Aberdeen has a small professional arts sector, with an absence of nationally established professional performing arts organisations resident in the city unlike most comparator cities which have established creative practitioner ecologies.

⁵ Illuminating the North UK City of Culture 2017 Bid

The two Universities are significant festivals and events stakeholders playing influential roles in the city's events programme as 4 out of the 10 Aberdeen Festivals members. These 4 are either promoted by a university (MayFest, a University of Aberdeen campus-centric event) or very reliant upon them (TechFest, Sound, LookAgain). Often university events are as much about public engagement and research objectives than having a wider purpose. University of Aberdeen also runs the Aberdeen Sports Village in partnership with Aberdeen City Council.

Despite the numbers of creative graduates educated in Aberdeen, the city struggles to retain talent. It is suggested⁶ that "creative talent is therefore understandably attracted to the already established scenes and opportunities that Edinburgh, Glasgow and London offer".

Sponsorship for the city's festival and events over the past 18 months has seen a dramatic reduction due to the downturn in oil and gas sector. Available funding seems to be going to Corporate Social Responsibility activity rather than cultural sponsorship.

There is frustration across the creative sector at the city's lack of confidence and self-belief: that it promotes an insular mentality that has cultivated an un-cohesive and un-collaborative cultural sector, with motives often being financially driven for a "share of a funding pot" rather than working collectively together for the good of the city.

⁶ Illuminating the North UK City of Culture 2017 Bid

The Role of Aberdeen City Council

Various issues were voiced by those we consulted with regarding relationships with ACC. These are listed below with our thoughts on how these might be addressed.

- ▶ The challenge for the future development of events and festival in Aberdeen will be the support given for a consistent strategic approach by both Aberdeen City Council's members and senior executive
- ▶ Fragmented funding schemes across a range of ACC departmental budgets is a major issue. There is a fundamental need to consolidate funding streams into a single budget with strategically driven programme objectives and clear and transparent criteria.
- ▶ Funding decisions are frequently made too late in the event events planning process have serious ramifications on programming and event management arrangements. The grant process should recognise the need for major events to plan at least a year in advance of the event. The funding policy should introduce a 3 year funding programme for major events with an annual funding round for smaller scale events. Delegated authority to officers will help to speed up decision making.
- ▶ Understanding that festivals and events require breathing space to bed-in and grow, and that demands for immediate results are unrealistic. A three year funding programme with clear objectives for each year of support will enable more security for the events
- ▶ Ad hoc decision making and lack of focus on strategic outcomes. The adoption of a strategic approach and consistent application of funding criteria
- ▶ The grant portfolio contains some festivals that receive relatively generous funding seemingly based on historic precedent rather than any relationship to their current quality or impact. This partiality would be addressed in the implementation of more rigorous funding criteria
- ▶ Requirement for Aberdeen to bid for and procure major sporting and cultural 'blockbuster' events. All comparator cities have access to a designated bidding fund for making pitches. This investment is normally generated from one or more of grant allocation, reserves, business tax or hotel tax
- ▶ An improved collaborative partnership between ACC and Aberdeen Inspired that avoids competitive commissioning, funding and event delivery. This will be critical to the delivery of a joined up events strategy that will contribute a step change for city based events activity.

Aberdeen City Council Events Budgets

We have attempted to identify the total budget for supporting the events programme in the city. This information has been difficult to fully quantify due to a lack of clarity and budget accountability across relevant ACC departments as to the full cost of the events. The table below summarises our findings:

City Events Programme	
Revenue	£175,000
Other expenditure	£70,000
	£245,000
Common Good Fund	
	£325,000
	£325,000
Culture Programme	
Granite Noir	£40,000
Spectra	£230,000
Beach Ballroom	£20,000
True North	£40,000
Youth Arts Hub	£50,000
Creative Spaces/Make	£75,000
AAG Closure	£40,000
Library events	£35,000
Year of History	£110,000
Made in Aberdeen	£20,000
Festivals Collective	£50,000

Diamond Jubilee/Travel	£20,000
	£730,000
Core Funding	
AIYF	£122,393
	£122,393
Commissioned Development	
Dancelive	£20,000
Sound	£18,000
Jazz Aberdeen	£11,250
	£49,250
Total	£1,471,643

4 STRATEGIC APPROACH

STRING OF PEARLS

It is imperative that Aberdeen's offer should be framed around high octane, big impact cultural and sporting highlights to achieve the ambition for events in the city. However potential audiences are limited by the local population catchment which makes it challenging to deliver events of the required scale. In addition Aberdeen also has a number of high quality 'niche' festivals which, while never likely to attract huge audiences, are of a quality and standard to support the positioning of the city as a vibrant, happening place.

Our vision is therefore of a **String of Pearls**. A strategic approach constructed on an annual calendar of **Headline** (major) and **Feature** (niche, specialist) events and festivals that punctuate the year with something happening each month.

These would be delivered as stand-alone events of national and international status – most home-grown but some bought in - or as a series of events branded under umbrella themes e.g. Summer / Winter festivals.

EVENTS CATEGORIES

We propose that Aberdeen's events and festivals are classified under four distinct groups:

Headline Events

These are established, new start-ups or bought-in events that can secure a national and international profile for Aberdeen and attract large numbers of visitors. The aspiration should be for innovative events that: display excellence in quality and high levels of ambition; deliver major impact; can attract new audiences; will be of level of impact to achieve significant media coverage; and will generate more overnight stays in the city.

They will primarily consist of work not previously seen or performed in Scotland. This programme of annually recurring activities would be supported by procured one-off events of national or international status. From the current programme, only SPECTRA verges on achieving Headline status.

Feature Events

Established, growing or one off events that have potential and ambition to achieve national profile and attract visitors to the city. They may currently lack the resources to achieve these goals but will clearly be able to demonstrate how - with enhanced funding and programming - they can deliver strong artistic quality and high levels of ambition, achieve greater public profile and attract visitors to the city. We suggest that Aberdeen Truenorth, Sound, DanceLive and LookAgain have the potential to be Feature Events.

City Events

These are cultural and sporting events delivered at city level that although of a recognised quality are predominantly aimed at residents with have limited impact or attraction to visiting audiences beyond Aberdeen environs. We suggest that Aberdeen Jazz Festival, Aberdeen International Youth Festival and Celebrate Aberdeen currently fit this category. We would group touring tented circus and light entertainment shows that take place on Queens Links, Beach Boulevard as city level events.

Community Events

There are a number of smaller scale community or community of interest festivals and events taking place across the city which although important for those communities will not be part of the Aberdeen 365 approach. These included thos taking place in Duthie and Hazlehead Parks and communities such as Torry. ACC provides advice and guidance, and runs several grant schemes including the Common Good and Community Festive Funds which eligible organisations can apply to for project funding. The rationale for funding them lies outside the objectives identified for Aberdeen 365.

STRING OF PEARLS EVENTS

We have reviewed Aberdeen's current events and classified them according to the proposed strategic framework. It is important to note that this categorisation is in terms of what events are currently delivering. Under the new strategic approach there should be the opportunity for all events to 'step up' - to grow, develop or enhance their programme against the criteria for each category. We have provided various comments and suggestions for each below:

Headline Events

- ▶ **SPECTRA**, an ACC event, is a light festival that uses the architecture and spaces of urban Aberdeen. It has shown that the city's residents are receptive to innovative work with significant artistic impact. However, compared to comparator light festivals (Lumiere Durham; Fetes des Lumieres, Lyon; Glow Festival, Eindhoven) SPECTRA is doing so on a relatively low budget. This restricts its vision and ambition and it ultimately falls short of providing the 'wow'⁷ factor. A more substantive budget would enable the commissioning of leading international light installation artists, creating uniquely site specific work effectively using public spaces such as the length of Union Street.

Feature Events

- ▶ **Truenorth** is a product of APA's championing of culture in the North East. The 2016 programme places greater emphasis on a broader less regionally distinctive, singer songwriter genre. In the future, a fusing with APA's own Northern Arc roots music themed programme could potentially provide a festival with as uniquely distinguishing an offer as Glasgow's Celtic Connections.
- ▶ **LookAgain**, produced by Aberdeen based SMART in partnership with RGU, is a festival that aims to get "residents curious about their own city". It has the potential for a bigger scale. As an outdoor event it could advantageously relocate to the summer. A major step change in this event could be delivered through the additionality of collaborating with Stavanger's 'Nuart' currently being pursued by Aberdeen Inspired. Consideration should also be given to programming outdoor performance arts to animate the City centre. These elements could deliver a unique and innovative festival with international scope, engage broader audiences and build capacity, whilst remaining authentically grounded in Aberdeen
- ▶ **Sound** led by the University of Aberdeen and Woodend Barn promotes Scotland's 'leading festival of new music'. It provides a rare instance in Aberdeen of a cultural event of national status, attracting national profile and media coverage. However it is specialist and so unlikely to achieve more than modest visitor impacts nor engagement with wider local audiences.
- ▶ **DanceLive**, established 10 years ago, is the only festival of contemporary dance in Scotland. It is organised by CityMoves dance agency which is preparing to become independent from ACC. The current aims of the Festival are to present new work from guest companies, and provide a national showcase for dance and choreography from the region. The cultural mapping of Aberdeen report (ibid) states that "Contemporary dance would seem

⁷ Regeneris Consulting UK CoC Feedback Points

to be the art form in which Aberdeen is closest to having a nationally significant presence". However the future development of the Festival will require: a cogent and consistent programming policy; an artistic director with high-level professional expertise and networks; addressing the lack of a dedicated dance house; dance education in the city to build required dance ecology, attracting and retaining professional and aspiring dance artists (cf. Dance City Newcastle, Deda Derby).

City Events

- ▶ **Aberdeen Jazz Festival** has grown out of the city's intimate Blue Lamp jazz club. Its programming and scale limits its national profile beyond contemporary jazz cognoscenti. In 2016, investment from Aberdeen Inspired and local traders enabled it to promote *Jazz on the Green*, events in outdoor spaces across the city centre's Merchant's Quarter, Belmont Street, Union Square and St Nicholas Street. Jazz on the Green provides a benchmark for future city centre events in the city.
- ▶ **Enjoy Music** an outdoor one day pop music festival in its second year, produced by local music promoter Digital Love, it takes place in early June in Hazlehead Park. The event is small-scale but is the only pop/rock style festival of its kind in Aberdeen and offers potential for growing, either in situ or as a 'park & city' festival such as Sheffield's Tramlines inner city music festival, where live music venues and promoters collaborate to curate stages and venues across the city.
- ▶ **Aberdeen International Youth Festival** is over 40 years old and is generally considered to be a tired format trading on past reputation. It fails to display the innovative spark of new, fresher festivals, nor effectively uses the festival to showcase Aberdeen's aspiring young talent. It has a limited appeal beyond a demographic audience that "contrary to the name of the festival, the International attendees noted in the total [Aberdeen Festivals Catchment] analysis, did not attend this festival"⁸. The prevailing view is that AIYF survives due to political influence rather than to any judicious evaluation of its quality, benefiting from an ACC grant that significantly exceeds any to other festivals. A more participatory youth music concept to run under a summer festivals umbrella could be delivered by a specialist music tours operator (cf. Harrogate Youth Music Festival) in collaboration with ACC Schools & Music Service, with savings transferred to city festivals that more effectively fulfil Event Strategy criteria.

⁸ Aberdeen Festivals 2015 Catchment Analysis, Culture Republic

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- ▶ **Celebrate Aberdeen** offers the conceptual potential for a large-scale, participatory city-wide cultural event (cf. Rotterdam’s Zomercarnaval). It incorporates community performing arts activities yet it appears to have little engagement with the ‘professional’ cultural sector in the City. The City of Culture bid identified that “there is a struggle to attract talent to the city ... and that while the city’s amateur cultural scene is strong, the routes between amateur and professional are non-existent”. Upscaling the event beyond the parade to incorporate more cultural organisations and collaborative participation, could provide a unique celebration of Aberdeen (e.g. block buster Art Gallery exhibitions, live concerts in Music Hall, aspiring DJ in The Tunnels) providing an attractive proposition for visitors (cf. Reykjavik Culture Night). It could additionally offer gateway opportunities for skills development to aid future cultural capacity building.
 - ▶ **BP Big Screen** The annual screening of a Royal Opera House broadcast of opera and ballet in Duthie Park has limited popular appeal and free entry delivers a poor return on ACC’s £20k investment. However, open air and pop-up cinema has seen massive growth in recent years garnering popular and wide appeal in the UK. Using carefully selected settings for a mobile screen (e.g. pedestrianised Broad Street, city parks or the beach) aligned to attractive family programming and a mobile screen could achieve greater impact at a significantly reduced cost.
 - ▶ **Granite Noir** is a new crime festival to be launched in February 2017. It will be a partnership of Aberdeen Performing Arts, the Anatomy Rooms, Belmont Filmhouse and ACC’s Library and Archive Services. Its aim is to be rooted in the City’s location and landscape and explore unusual spaces and places. As the best-selling literary genre, crime fiction festivals have expanded rapidly across Europe over the past decade Granite Noir will need to work hard to attract significant audiences or profile outside the city.

NEW EVENTS

The current programme could be enhanced by new events – home grown and bought-bought in. We have identified the following as opportunities (which are developed in more detail in the operational report)

Home grown Events

- ▶ **Aberdeen Winter Festival** - Aberdeen has a series of events that punctuate key moments in the winter calendar ranging from the Beach Esplanade Fireworks in early November, through Christmas lights, Christmas Village and Hogmanay through to SPECTRA in February. Aberdeen Inspired has recognised the benefit of high profile events during the Christmas season to enhance the City's reputation as a festive retail destination and to attract visitors. Aberdeen needs to offer more than the ubiquitous 'faux' German chalet proposition of many UK Christmas Market cities, but stamp a distinctive marker as a UK Christmas destination. This could be achieved by promoting Aberdeen region's crafts, produce and entertainment alongside the international northern arc links. However, to achieve this will require a fully functioning collaborative partnership between ACC and Aberdeen Inspired, which does not currently exist. It should also engage more widely to ensure both a joined-up approach and creative input. The potential exists to build the 'Winter Festival' brand. A distinctive, authentic and creative, promotional 'umbrella' branding that creates the opportunity to increase the national and international profile of Aberdeen as a winter visitor destination. The Winter Festival programme will be essentially framed around high-profile events, but should also integrate the City's wider cultural offer promoting theatre shows, seasonal concerts, and distinctive exhibitions.
- ▶ **Aberdeen Summer Festival** - An umbrella Summer Festival brand between June and August (cf. Cardiff Festival summer-in-the-city) would promote events such as, Aberdeen Highland Games, Enjoy Music, AIYF and Celebrate Aberdeen. It could also incorporate the Energetica Festival and Taste of Grampian (if extended to a regional + city multi-event format). LookAgain as an outdoor city event would benefit from repositioning to the summer.
- ▶ **Food & Drink Festival** – this could take Taste of Grampian as a jumping off point for a week-long festival to promote local food and drink and to encourage off-season tourism. Local restaurants, cafes and pubs would participate by adding locally sourced dishes to their menus. Food and drink trails and events across the region

Reykjavik has a growing reputation as an alternative Christmas destination; Turku, is identified as the official 'Christmas Capital' of Finland where events are organised by the city during this period.

York Food & Drink Festival is a 10 day event run in partnership with York City Council. The festival focuses on Yorkshire food and drink, produce and chefs and restaurants. Around 400,000 visitors attend.

could further boost its appeal.

- ▶ **Summer Screen** – outdoor screening using a mobile inflatable screen
- ▶ **Music Festival** – the programme could benefit from an outdoor music festival. This could either build on Enjoy Music or be new.
- ▶ **Midsummer Festival** – the long summer days provided an opportunity for some sort of midsummer celebration – music, culture or lighting eg a summer edition of SPECTRA.

Bought in Events

Aberdeen’s annual calendar of events should be supported by big impact, cultural and sporting events that are procured as one-off events of national or international status.

- ▶ **Outdoor Sporting Events** - Tour of Britain cycle race, UCI World Road Race Championships, WTC Ironman championship; Swatch FIVB Beach Volleyball World Tour; ITU Triathlon World Championship Series, and IAAF Half Marathon. These events would benefit from a city and shire collaboration and joint proposition.
- ▶ **Great Aberdeen Run & Great City Games**- Great North Run Company has been approached to create the Great Aberdeen Run, as part of the national Great Run Series. It is worth noting however that Event Scotland does not invest in the Great Scottish Run as they consider nothing unique about it. A possible future outcome is a City Games on Union Street attracting world-class athletes.
- ▶ **Indoor Sporting Events** - Aberdeen Sports Village (ASV) has proven capability and market knowledge to attract international sports championships to Aberdeen. Its Business Strategy sets out its intention to “identify and aim to host a minimum of 4 international level events and 8 national level events per year”. However, there is usually a significant cost in the competitive process to procure major events and ASV will require pitch investment funding in order to bid for prestigious events that match Headline Events criteria.
- ▶ **Sea based events** - connectivity to the sea and maritime history is lacking from the current events programme. This could be addressed, for example, by a visit from The Tall Ships Race or a Tall Ships Regatta to coincide with the opening of the new Nigg Bay harbour.

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- ▶ **AECC** - The AECC has proven success in delivering major international business conference and events. It is the venue for the Offshore Europe conference and exhibition, an event that is widely regarded as providing an opportunity for a public celebration and cultural showcase, comparable to the Stavanger ONS Festival. This is likely to have good sponsorship potential and a positive role for the universities. The new 12,500 capacity AECC at Bucksburn opening in 2019 will have the potential to host large scale cultural and indoor sporting events which would boost and validate Aberdeen's national and international profile as an events city. Potential events could include **MTV Europe Music Awards, MOBO Awards and BBC Sports Personality of the Year**
 - ▶ **Spectaculars** – a quick (but not cheap) way to achieve something of scale is to buy in 'spectaculars' such as Liverpool's Spider or Hull's Place des Anges. UK cities' investment in urban outdoor performance spectacles provide demonstrable visitor impacts and media coverage. Using established international companies could deliver high profile, impactful events in a relatively short time-frame.
 - ▶ **Commissions** – special commission are neither quick nor cheap but they have the benefit of being original, of the place and reflecting the city's narrative; and the potential to attract media attention and visits. Manchester International Festival has built a considerable reputation for the city through a festival entirely dedicated to original commissions.

5 MAKING IT HAPPEN

FUTURE SUPPORT STRUCTURES

We have considered whether support for the different types of festivals and events in the City should be combined under one department or organisation. We feel that there are many synergies between sports events and cultural events both at a logistical and promotional level. We also believe that it is important to engage with cultural community festivals. Ideally one body should be responsible for commissioning, bidding for, co-ordinating and, where necessary, directly delivering events in order to achieve the objectives of the Events Strategy and make most efficient use of resources.

We recommend establishing a comprehensive **Events Unit** to support, develop and fund the sector in the city, working in partnership with other key funders including Aberdeen Inspired, Creative Scotland and Event Scotland.

In-house or outsourced

We have looked at other models in the UK and Europe and summarise the advantages and disadvantages of outsourcing vs. keeping support within the Council as follows:

Outsourced	In-house
<p>Advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Strong, long- term commitment for festivals ▶ Quicker decision making and reduced bureaucracy ▶ Ability to fundraise and partner ▶ Less subject to changing political priorities 	<p>Advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Can be set up quickly and cheaply ▶ Does not require long-term commitment ▶ Closer liaison with council departments ▶ Access to council support services

<p>Disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Requirement for minimum 3-5 year financial commitment from Council ▶ Larger organisation required ▶ Difficulty and cost in procuring an arms-length organisation 	<p>Disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Not easy to fundraise ▶ Council bureaucracy can hold up decision making ▶ Subject to political interference and changing political priorities
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***Glasgow Major Events Forum** was established in 2005 by Glasgow City Council bringing together public and private agencies with the aim of developing Glasgow as an events city. The Forum agreed a programme of events and targets for bought-in events through to 2020. An appraisal model was developed with clear criteria for any event supported through the Forum. The Forum is chaired by the city council and included Glasgow Life (outsourced leisure and cultural services, Scottish Enterprise, SECC and others). The DMO – Glasgow City Marketing Bureau – take a leading role in delivering the strategy, marketing and bidding for events.*

***Festivals Edinburgh**, a strategic umbrella organisation created in 2007 by the Directors of Edinburgh’s 12 major festivals has the sole focus to maintain the Festivals’ and Festival City’s global competitive edge, via major collaborative projects and strategic initiatives. Its mission is to:*

- *act on behalf of and represent the collective strengths of the Edinburgh Festivals*
- *develop and deliver collaborative projects and initiatives which support growth, product development, leadership and audiences*
- *help sustain the Festivals and Edinburgh and Scotland’s pre-eminence as the world’s leading festival destination.*

*It is funded by members with project funding from City of Edinburgh Council, Creative Scotland, EventScotland and Scottish Government which come together as a **Festivals Forum** with other strategic partners and a remit to ensure that Edinburgh maintains its position as the pre-eminent Festival City.*

Options

1. **Enhanced Status Quo** ‘Virtual’ team approach as tasks, roles and decisions remain in current ACC Cultural and Events departments. Disparate funding pots consolidated into a single budget and bid process.
2. **New Dedicated Events Unit.** Situated within ACC that brings together staff from Cultural and Events departments. Disparate funding pots consolidated into single budget and bid process. Independent stakeholder Steering Group established ensuring delivery of the Event Strategy with responsibility for setting strategic priorities, commissioning Headline Events, and managing the distribution of events funding.
3. **Events Aberdeen** sits as an arms-length external stand-alone independent not-for-profit organisation (Rotterdam model) or set-up within Visit Aberdeenshire (Reykjavik model). Disparate ACC funding pots consolidated into a single budget and transferred under a service level agreement to Events Aberdeen which would also manage the bid process funding events. It would act as liaison with ACC for sector policy and operational matters across the events and festivals sector. An independent board will be responsible for setting strategic priorities, commissioning Headline Events, and decision making in approving funds

Events Aberdeen would be headed up by a proven high calibre events professional with excellent national and international networks. Working to the Board the role will be responsible for managing and maintaining key stakeholder relations, guiding and managing the overall programme strategy, actively seek and create consortium bids for major events, and to have general management responsibility for Events Aberdeen

On balance, we recommend initially establishing a New Dedicated Events Unit within the CEO’s office of Aberdeen City Council. The Events Unit should be reviewed and evaluated after 3 years and consideration given to Option 3.

SERVICES

The principle underlying the operation of the unit is to create a single approach to festivals and events that the city wishes to see succeed, and provide a co-ordinated approach to helping them achieve their potential. It would provide:

Programme Development

The Events Unit will act as an enabler, commissioner, and facilitator rather than a direct deliverer of events. The programme would be developed and advanced through a process of stakeholder engagement, commissioning and collaborative working to create and shape a high-quality annual calendar of activity. Opportunities should be taken to broker linkages among events organisers, encourage use of public spaces and manage a clash diary for the city.

Broker and navigator within the City Council

This has been identified as a key role in supporting existing and new events. The Events Unit would be a single point of contact for festivals and events with good working relations with relevant council departments including licensing, highways, cleansing, property and communications. Close relationships with external agencies such as the police and emergency services, Aberdeen Inspired, Aberdeen Festivals, Aberdeen Culture Network, Creative Scotland and Event Scotland would be required.

Manage the investment process

Using clear criteria (see below) for funding of events at each level of Headline, Feature City and Community layers, it would support and advise applicants and manage expectations. Staff would make recommendations to the Steering Group for decision.

Procuring and commissioning events

Using clear criteria, the Events Unit would engage with local, national and international external organisations and agencies to identify and bid for one-off Headline sporting and cultural events. Staff would make recommendations to the Steering Group for approval and bid funding sign off. An essential criterion would be that an external local lead or co-partner(s) is secured. The priorities of the national events strategy and national themed years will be another driver.

Community Events Management Support

The ACC City Events team has provided hands-on management advice and guidance to community events - this is not a role that would be expected for a dedicated Events Unit.

Community grant applicants should be directed to the EventScotland practical guide to event management which provides a resource of general advice and support material for event managers. Primarily, designed as a support tool for the National Events Programme it is also relevant to the wider events sector providing a useful step-by-step guide to the planning process, together with sample checklists and adaptable templates.

www.eventscotland.org/development/our-key-publications/event-management-a-practical-guide .

A community focused Event Toolkit which could be tailored to Aberdeen's particular needs and requirements has been produced by Dumfries & Galloway. www.eventscotland.org/development/our-key-publications/downloads/get/119.pdf .

We recommend that applicants should be required to demonstrate effective project planning and how they would deliver a quality event even at local level. However the rigorous requirements for larger scale events are less relevant and can be onerous for small scale community events so we recommend that the City Council reviews how this can be loosened within the constraints of licensing and health and safety.

One option might be that all outdoor events receiving funding could be required to engage a professional event manager to prepare the Event Management plan as part of the funding agreement. This professional input would allow the Events Unit to have a lighter-touch regime.

STAFFING

A dedicated Events Unit would bring together currently dispersed staff with responsibility for events, management of city spaces, health and safety/SAG and marketing within the Office of the Chief Executive. This model has been successfully applied in Rotterdam and Stavanger among other cities and ensures better focus, less duplication and less confusion around the delivery of the strategy. It is more effective and efficient and will ensure that staff are working as one team to consistent priorities and objectives. It will be for the city council to determine numbers of staff and management arrangements within the new Events Unit but we suggest the following posts and experience as a starting point:

- ▶ **Director** – General management responsibility for the Events Unit; combines both strategic direction and overseeing commissioning programme; responsible for managing and maintaining ACC and key stakeholder relations; ensure single investment fund managed to deliver strategy, and monitor delivery to agreed budgets. Experience in the management of diverse major events; extensive UK and international networks.
- ▶ **Project Manager** – Unit’s interface with the existing events and infrastructure in Aberdeen; provide guidance on quality and ambition of proposals. Track record in collaborative partnership working essential with knowledge of the national events scene and key stakeholders desirable
- ▶ **Technical & Operations Manager & Assistant Technical & Operations Manager** - Ensuring all events fully compliant with ACC risk assessment and health & safety procedures, advise events producers where necessary on production issues including: licensing and permissions; health & safety; stewarding; and sustainability best practice
- ▶ **Development Manager** - To cultivate & champion commercial and public sector partnerships; acquire investment for commission projects
- ▶ **Marketing & PR Manager** promote the Events programme as a whole rather than for individual projects; work with events and VisitAberdeenshire to maximise all resources to increase the effectiveness of individual event’ marketing.
- ▶ **Finance Manager** - administer the day to day financial activities of the Unit. This will include ensuring financial compliance for ACC and public sector funders.
- ▶ **Events Co-ordinator** – provides administrative support to the Unit and co-ordinating the Community Programme.

This arrangement should be in place as soon as possible so that work can begin on the next year’s events programme as soon as possible.

GOVERNANCE

Ideally the unit would be a partnership initiative with other stakeholders closely involved in setting priorities, providing funds and support. The Events Unit should therefore have an independent Steering Group, with one or two Council members involved to ensure democratic representation. Other group members could include: Aberdeenshire Council; Aberdeen Inspired, Visit Aberdeenshire, AECC, ONE, a commercial sponsor such as Statoil, and up to three representatives from Aberdeen's cultural and sports sectors. We recommend keeping membership at a maximum of 9 to facilitate effective decision making, with appointments made on a rolling basis for 3 years.

We would hope that Creative Scotland and Event Scotland would be represented on this group and that this might lead to shared investment decisions. We recommend that an independent Chair, with proven high-level events knowledge and influence, is appointed by the Council (cf. Liverpool appointed Phil Redmond cultural ambassador for its cultural partnership to create a world-class calendar of cultural events and activities in 2018).

A transparent appointment and management process should be established to avoid conflicts of interest likely to prejudice the independence and objectivity of any member of the Steering Group who is employed, a board member, trustee, or director of any organisation seeking a grant.

The bidding process for funding support would be managed by the Events Unit team. The final decision would be the responsibility of the Steering Group.

FUNDING

It is important to understand that arts and cultural festivals, with the exception of commercial music festivals, are usually not-for-profit charities that require on-going public investment. Over time the festivals and events can improve their commercial income (from ticket sales, sponsorship and other activities) and council support can reduce but they will **always** require some subsidy.

Comparator cities have all put in place consolidated budgets offering multi-year funding with clear criteria to ensure quality and sustainability and have separate budgets for major events bids. ACC currently provides support for existing events and festivals on an ad-hoc basis. A number of funding pots have unsystematically been established across a range of ACC departmental budgets of which we have identified: Commissioned Development, Core

Funding, Made in Aberdeen Bursaries, Culture Programme, City Event revenue programme, Common Good Fund and Lord Provost's Civic Events. Based on figures made available to us, we would expect the consolidated Council annual budget for the Events Unit to be circa. **£1.5 million**.

Our recommendation is that the Event Unit funding scheme commences with the budget year 2017/18 with **all** funding applied under the new arrangements (other than contractual arrangements already entered into). The process should be as transparent as possible. Proposals for support should be solicited through an Open Call process in October 2016 so that as far as possible the new strategy will be implemented for the 2017 event programme. Each application will be judged on its ability to deliver against the strategic funding criteria. All successful events should have a funding agreement and be required to complete an annual review of performance against agreed targets.

A practical issue for Headline and Feature Events is that due to timescales, growth plans will need to be built into an application for 3 year funding and potentially not drawn down until year 3. Funding not committed in years 1 & 2 should be used to initiate a restricted Bid Fund for procuring one-off headline events of national or international status.

Potential annual grant bands for each category

Headline Events	£100,000 +
Feature Events	£30,000- £100,000
City Events	£10,000 - £30,000
Community Events	£2,000-£10,000

Criteria

We recommend that the Events Unit applies a robust, consistent set of criteria on which to base investment decisions to ensure the objectives of the Events Strategy are achieved.

Any organiser seeking funding must demonstrate how an event will deliver against the following:

- ▶ Does it promote a positive city image?
- ▶ Does it fulfil a cultural narrative strand for the city?
- ▶ Does it demonstrate both high quality and a high level of ambition?
- ▶ Will it attract wide and broadly-based audiences?
- ▶ Will it have the potential to attract visitors and generate spend from VisitAberdeenshire's target markets/segments in the UK, Germany, Norway and Netherlands (see Visit Aberdeenshire's marketing plan for more details)?
- ▶ Does it provide opportunities for Aberdeen artists?
- ▶ Can it provide capacity building opportunities for sector development?
- ▶ Does it have a sustainable business model and management that can deliver?
- ▶ Will the festival sign up to the evaluation criteria and conditions?

6 APPENDIX 1 CURRENT EVENTS

There are a number of different types of festivals and events in Aberdeen, and whilst there is crossover between groups, the following categories demonstrate the range.

Larger Arts and Cultural Festivals and Events

There are a range of arts and cultural festivals of small to mid-scale in the City. Most are members of Aberdeen Festivals:

- ▶ Spectra
- ▶ Dance Live
- ▶ True North
- ▶ Sound
- ▶ Look Again
- ▶ Aberdeen Jazz Festival
- ▶ MayFest
- ▶ TechFest
- ▶ AIYF
- ▶ NEOS
- ▶ Enjoy Music
- ▶ Granite Noir - a new crime and film festival having its first edition in February 2017.

City and Community Events

- ▶ Armed Forces Day Parade
- ▶ ATUC May Day Parade
- ▶ Celebrate Aberdeen Parade
- ▶ Christmas Lights Switch-On Parade / Christmas Tree Lights switch-on
- ▶ Aberdeen Fireworks Display
- ▶ BP Big Screen in Duthie Park
- ▶ Christmas Village
- ▶ There are also a number of smaller scale community or community of interest festivals and events taking place across the City, in Duthie And Hazlehead Parks and communities such as Torre. ACC provides advice and guidance, and runs several grant schemes including the Common Good and Community Festive Funds which eligible organisations can apply to for project funding.

Sports Events

Apart from the Aberdeen Highland Games delivered by ACC City Events, the principal sporting events are promoted through Aberdeen University's Sports Village, and ACC's Sport Aberdeen. National events include Commonwealth Water Polo Championships, and Europe U21 Netball Tournament. Host in 2020 LEN European Swimming & Diving Junior Championships.

Community focused event include; Transition Extreme music & skateboard festivals; Aberdeen Baker Hughes 10k, Golden Games and commercial events such as Colour Rad.

Disclaimer: All information and analysis supplied by Blue Sail Consulting Ltd and our sub-contractors is delivered in good faith and represents our professional judgement based on the information obtained from the client and elsewhere. The achievement of recommendations, forecasts and valuations depend on factors beyond our control. Any projections, financial or otherwise, in this report are only intended to illustrate particular points of argument and do not constitute forecasts of actual performance

