

BLUE SAIL ▶

VISITORS PLACES DESTINATIONS

## REVIEW OF THE REMIT FOR TOURISM EVENTS

FINAL REPORT FOR CAUSEWAY COAST AND GLENS BOROUGH COUNCIL

FEBRUARY 2021

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# 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Blue Sail were appointed by Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council to undertake an independent review and make recommendations for how the Council supports tourism events. By tourism events the Council means those events which will have a significant economic impact by attracting visits, bednights and spend, and supporting the image and profile of the area as a tourism destination.

Our review of Council managed and other events indicates that the current programme is largely attracting local audiences with many events being focused on town and community celebrations rather than high-quality, distinctive events which will attract tourist visitors.

In addition, the tourism events team within the Council is over-stretched with responsibility for supporting and delivering of all types of events, including responsibility for programming and all aspects of operational management. This means there is limited capacity to properly support and develop high-impact tourism events.

Our conclusion is that a more ambitious, creative programme comprising a small number of very high-quality, distinctive events, promoted more effectively is required to achieve significant tourism impact. This would be in addition to a varied programme of local events which are focused on local audiences. To achieve this will require a different approach by the Council and a clearer remit for the tourism events team which should be based on enabling others within and outside the Council rather than directly delivering events. This means the tourism events team will focus on managing partnerships, building capacity and skills to support the local events sector, identifying appropriate one-off events to bid for, commissioning and developing events to optimise the benefits to the Borough.

While our recommendation is that the Council and its tourism events team move away from delivering events to enabling others, we recognise that there is a history of direct delivery by the Council. If the Council decides to continue to deliver some events, we strongly recommend the role of the tourism events team is to focus on a small number of high-impact events rather than the many small local events which currently overstretch the team's capacity.

Our recommendations fall into two types – strategic approach, and roles and responsibilities. Here are the primary recommendations:

## **Strategic Approach:**

- ▶ Events should be categorised by 3 types, and will include both council-run, council-funded and independent events:
  - Major – large scale international events taking place every 3/5 years e.g. Golf Championships
  - Signature – high-quality, distinctive events which deliver a strong sense of place and can attract tourist visitors, 4/5 each year

- Local Events – small or medium scale events focused on towns, villages or communities of interest celebrating local traditions, seasonal festivities etc. attracting local audiences.
- ▶ Major and Signature are ‘tourism events’ so will be the priority for the Events Unit. Likely Signature Events will include:
  - Developing Auld Lammas, strengthening its heritage and distinctiveness
  - Stendhal Festival
  - Atlantic Sessions
  - A new ‘Causeway Food & Drink’ festival bringing together a number of smaller niche events and developing a new ambitious region-wide programme
- ▶ Local events will be supported by the Council’s town teams, community and cultural services, arts services as appropriate and generally delivered by local organisations
- ▶ Funding for events by the Council should be consolidated into one budget heading and allocated (by our reckoning this amounted to £663K in 2020/21 with an additional £140K likely to be allocated in 2021/22 for a Tourism Events Recovery Fund). Bidding and support for Major Events will be on a case by case basis and the annual allocation to other events will be:
  - Signature Events – 80%
  - Local Events – 15%
  - Special Initiatives – 5%
- ▶ A transparent, simplified system of application and approval of funding should be established for each category of event

Sporting events which have a limited tourism impact but meet other Council objectives, including NW200, STAT Sports Supercup and Foyle Cup will be reviewed separately to consider appropriate support from the Council. The aim should be to ensure profile for the Council, and provision of appropriate opportunities across its wider corporate strategies of health, community engagement and participatory opportunities for young people.

#### **Roles & Responsibilities:**

- ▶ As a general principle the Council will take an approach of enabling others by advising, signposting and supporting rather than direct delivery in order to build capacity, encourage innovation and creativity and release potential
- ▶ The role of the new re-focused Events Unit will move away from programming and direct delivery to:
  - A new strategic role to lead, develop and advise on Major and Signature events
  - An operational role to manage funding and investment for Major and Signature events and advise other Council colleagues and external event organisers on logistical and operational issues

- Capacity-building for developing and strengthening the skills, knowledge and networks of organisations, communities and businesses to enable the Causeway Coast and Glens events sector to grow
- ▶ The responsibilities of other departments in the council with a significant interest in events will be clarified and included in departmental business plans
- ▶ If the Council decides to continue directly delivering events this should be restricted to Signature Events
- ▶ A Strategic Steering Group for Events involving senior officers and councillors will ensure better short and long-term planning, integration and oversight

The key steps required to implement the new approach over the 10-year horizon of the strategy is included in section 6. It will take time to move towards this new way of working, the implementation of which should be phased:

- ▶ Reset: 2021 – putting in place new mechanisms, approaches, producing development plans for Signature Events, and developing skills and capabilities
- ▶ Revive: 2022-23 – new events portfolio in place, continuing implementation of new approach and developing skills and capabilities
- ▶ Restage: 2024-2031 – establish, develop and refresh the events portfolio

## 2 THIS REPORT

In May 2020, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council issued a tender for the appointment of services to undertake an external and independent review of its tourism events remit. The purpose of the review was to ensure the delivery of a framework and strategic approach for the development and future management of the Tourism Events remit (2021-2031). This commission followed on from a report considered by Council in 2019 and agreement that an external, objective review should be undertaken to advise Council.

Areas for review included the existing provision of events in the area, how they are resourced, managed and evaluated with a view to develop a framework for the strategic approach of tourism events for the next ten years.

Blue Sail were appointed to undertake the commission.

Our work has included consulting with key Council staff, partners and stakeholders, reviewing and assessing the current events programme and reviewing the tourism offer. From this we identified and assessed the opportunities and how the Council should organise its investment in events.

This report sets out a new strategic approach for events to guide the support and resourcing the Council provides. Our brief was to focus on tourism events and our recommended approach will ensure that resources are concentrated on those events which can significantly enhance the tourism offer of the borough. However, there are many types of events currently receiving support, which meet other Council priorities, and so our recommendations address how events generally should be classified and supported. Our aim is to simplify the Council's approach to events with straightforward categories and criteria for funding and support, and clear roles and responsibilities for the events team and other departments involved with events.

This review is taking place during the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions are having a devastating effect on events. While the situation is unpredictable it is unlikely that 2021 will see events being staged either at all or certainly not in the same format as before with the consequence that many event organisers will not survive, and many events will disappear.

The Council has already decided to suspend the Tourism Events Funding Programme for 2021 and has agreed a Recovery Fund. In the midst of ongoing uncertainty, it is our recommendation that the Council takes the decision at this time for 2021 to cancel council-managed events up to and including August with a situational review in March for events scheduled to take place from September onwards. The Council may wish to consider virtual programmes for some of its events but our recommendation is that these should be limited as they will not generate the economic impact that is the fundamental rationale for the tourism events programme.

The Council should consider negotiating support for individual grant-funded events where they have ongoing costs or liabilities and can demonstrate future viability.

This is undoubtedly a serious decision, but it does give the opportunity to view 2021 as a transition year to put in place this new strategy and approach. It gives the opportunity to make a new start without the legacy burden, break dependency and adopt new ways of doing things. It allows space and time to work with partners and stakeholders to develop a new, ambitious and innovative programme of events for 2022/23 which will see a fundamental transition in the Council's role from deliverer to enabler.

### 3 THE VISION

The new approach we are recommending is based on the premise that tourism events will bring economic benefits to the area through visitor spend, increased income for businesses, jobs, and support for the infrastructure of goods and services enjoyed by local people.

The aim is to inspire and sustain tourism events which can deliver against the following strategic objectives:

- ▶ Attract visits, bednights and spend from Northern Ireland's domestic and international target markets/segments through high-quality, distinctive programming
- ▶ Enhance image, profile and reputation of Causeway Coast and Glens as Northern Ireland's premier rural and coastal tourist destination
- ▶ Showcase and deliver an authentic sense of place based on the heritage, culture and landscape of Causeway Coast and Glens
- ▶ Are a catalyst for creativity, innovation and distinctiveness
- ▶ Are supported and promoted by partners & stakeholders within and outside the Council

If successful, the approach we are recommending will mean that Causeway Coast and Glens will be home to a small number of tourism events, which are recognised internationally and standing with the best that Ireland and Britain have to offer.

The development and promotion of a programme of outstanding, distinctive events will widen the perception of the area and its tourism offer giving visitors more reasons to come, stay longer and spend more.

These events will establish Causeway Coast and Glens' reputation as a great place to stage events, supporting bids for one-off major events, encouraging all types of event organisers to develop new programmes, and supporting new businesses, jobs and skills.

#### LESSONS FROM ELSEWHERE

A good case study of what success looks like is Galway. It has a population just over half of Causeway Coast and Glens and yet through its imaginative programme of events and festivals focusing on its strengths and assets, it has boosted its image generally and built a reputation as a tourism destination.

Galway has taken its areas of strength like its native Galway oysters and developed them into events and festivals that now position it as a great tourism destination. Galway Oyster Festival is now an internationally recognised event which, by using the destination name as an anchor point within the title, clearly communicates the link between the event and the destination.



Like Galway, Causeway Coast and Glens has many strengths that could be used as a basis on which to build an event that is both uniquely of the place and which, through a simple title beginning 'Causeway...', can build a link between both theme and destination.

Causeway Coast and Glens can then use such events to build its position as a tourism destination by ensuring they are clearly promoted, online and offline, as part of the destination's overall offer.

**Galway** is continually voted one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Republic of Ireland and after Dublin, attracts the second highest number of overseas visitors, with 1.673m spending €589m each year. It also attracts just over 1 million visitors each year from within Ireland, spending a further €247m.

Galway is renowned for its vibrant lifestyle and for hosting numerous festivals such as Galway Arts Festival, Galway Races, Galway Food Festival and Galway International Oyster Festival which according to Tourism Ireland has been called "one of the greatest events on earth". Galway has positioned itself as the Festival Capital of Ireland and during the summer, is known as a party town due to a concentrated period of numerous festivals taking place.

In 2018 it was named the European Region of Gastronomy due to its abundance of artisan producers, natural ingredients, farmers' markets and award-winning restaurants. In 2020, Galway is the European Capital of Culture (alongside Rijeka, Croatia), hosting a re-imagined programme in light of Covid-19 focusing on themes related to its ancient landscape and cultural diversity.

The region's events are promoted clearly on Galway's primary tourism website, Galwaytourism.ie which lists seven 'key events' on the homepage with links to each independent event website. There is also a separate GalwayFestivals.com website focusing solely on pointing to information about each key event.

## 4 THE STRATEGIC APPROACH

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The key comments from our consultation and review are summarised in the table here.

Positives	Negatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ The Events Team has a good reputation and is well respected</li> <li>▶ The delivery and operational aspects of events is well done</li> <li>▶ The area has successfully hosted international major events such as The Open Championship and Giro d'Italia</li> <li>▶ There are a small number of distinctive events which have potential for growth</li> <li>▶ The relationship with Tourism Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland (marketing and events teams) is good and improving</li> <li>▶ The area has an outstanding landscape, with an iconic name in 'Causeway'</li> <li>▶ Food &amp; drink and music are particularly strong themes with tourism appeal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ The events programme is mainly small-scale and locally focused</li> <li>▶ The marketing &amp; PR of events in terms of targeting, content and timing could be improved</li> <li>▶ There is a lack of an integrated approach and collaboration within council with the Events Team isolated and overstretched</li> <li>▶ Much of the current support results from the legacy of council unification and the perceived need to be 'fair to all'</li> <li>▶ There is a lack of collaboration with business and commercial sectors</li> <li>▶ The approach to events is cautious, risk averse &amp; lacking confidence</li> <li>▶ Managing health and safety around events is an ongoing challenge</li> <li>▶ There is a lack of professional events production and specialist infrastructure businesses locally</li> </ul>

While the positives do provide a platform on which to build, the negatives are significant and result in a lack of clarity, focus, vision, innovation and ambition around events which is inhibiting their impact and potential.

The evidence suggests that there are currently too many small, local events being shoe-horned into 'a tourism event' because that is where the funding lies. In addition, several 'tired' legacy events are being kept alive because it is difficult to take decisions to cease funding. This means that there are insufficient resources available to properly support and grow the 'right' kind of tourism events to make an impact and is leading to disaffection with the current set-up.

## TAKING A NEW APPROACH

In essence what is needed are fewer, better events, promoted more effectively - and more enabling and less 'doing' by a new refocused Events Unit. To achieve this will require a new schedule of definitions which very clearly identify those events which are able to deliver wider tourism and economic impact, and those whose priority is social benefit.

The new approach will also require looking afresh at the current programme to identify those with the ambition and aspiration for growth and able to step up to more stringent demands. It will also involve looking for opportunities for new events or events delivered in different ways.

Finally, the new approach has implications for the investment the Council makes in events through funding and staff time. Crucially the events team will no longer be involved in the programming and operational delivery of events, but will enable others within and outside the Council, through providing leadership, advising, commissioning and managing the Council's investment in events. This means the Events Unit will have a twin focus on strategic development and operational facilitation. (This is covered in the next section).

A different funding mechanism will be required to deliver the strategic objectives (see section 6). Clear roles and accountabilities will be required across the Council for departments with a role in events.

## LEARNING FROM ELSEWHERE

In developing our thinking we have researched what other comparable places are doing and were impressed by the approach taken by Dumfries and Galloway in South West Scotland. The local authority has implemented a transparent strategy and funding process designed to support, grow and promote its best events.

As shown in Dumfries & Galloway, facilitating the collaboration between agencies, communities and event organisations rather than being active in the delivery, can lead to high quality, attractive events.

Having one funding stream which is dedicated to supporting start-up and local events is likely to encourage ambition and aspiration within the community and leading to the development of new event concepts that have significant growth potential.

**Dumfries and Galloway** implemented a new Major Festivals and Events Strategy in 2018 aligned with the Regional Tourism Strategy, EventScotland's Strategy, the Council's Plan and the Regional Economic Strategy. It takes an holistic approach that invites agencies, communities and events organisations to join forces to take forward great events, and to position Dumfries and Galloway as a leading destination for high quality rural festivals and events that continuously attract new visitors to the region.

The Strategy has two well defined objectives, with related action plans:

- Act as a catalyst for investment in events
- Promote collaboration, cooperation and shared knowledge in the major events sector

The Strategy's investment programme has three separate funding streams, two of which are competitive:

- The Signature Events Fund
- The Major Events Strategic Fund
- The Regional Events Growth Fund

The Signature Events Fund and Major Events Strategic Fund are designed to sustain the existing major events portfolio and develop new events. The Regional Events Growth Fund supports the region's start up and local events base where ambition and aspiration can be demonstrated.

**NEW DEFINITIONS**

The new approach identifies three categories:

1. Major Events – one-off, high-profile, international big impact itinerant events secured through a bidding process which are likely to take place every 3/5 years.
2. Signature Events – high-quality, annual/biannual or one-off bid-for events which showcase the area and deliver a strong sense of place experience capable of attracting national and international visits and enhancing destination profile. Deliver experiences which align with the ‘Embrace a Giant Spirit’ brand that TNI has developed for Northern Ireland. One of the events should meet the criteria of TNI’s ‘Hallmark Event’ category. 4/5 each year.



3. Local Events – small or medium scale events focused on towns, villages or communities of interest celebrating local traditions, and seasonal events such as Halloween and Christmas lights switch-ons etc. primarily attracting local audiences.

Categories 1 and 2 are tourism events, capable of delivering the principles set out above and capable of motivating visits. Category 3 will more typically animate the place for those visitors already here rather than be a primary reason for travel.

Criteria for the scope and scale of each category of event is shown in the table below.

Event Category	Criteria
Major Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Global profile for the area</li> <li>▶ Deliver legacy impact which supports tourism</li> <li>▶ Delivered through national and international partnerships with TNI and rights holders</li> </ul>
Signature Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Fit with <i>Embrace a Giant Spirit</i> NI brand</li> <li>▶ Demonstrate a high level of quality and ambition in their planning and programming</li> <li>▶ Financing should encompass multiple income streams</li> <li>▶ Capable of achieving international media profile that enhance image and profile of the borough</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Attract out of state visitors with audience target of 50K+ for free events and 10K+for ticketed</li> <li>▶ Create an economic impact of at least £100K p.a. and have a minimum ROI of 5:1 on Council investment</li> </ul>
Local Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Must demonstrate participation, involvement, sense of identity and contribute to social well-being of a community</li> <li>▶ Have a clearly identified target audience and a strategy to attract/engage them</li> <li>▶ Organisers must be legally constituted and for larger grants provide evidence of management capacity and expertise</li> <li>▶ Must demonstrate commitment to promoting social cohesion, social inclusion, equality of opportunity and good community relations</li> </ul>

Events have a natural lifecycle. They generally take at least 3 years to establish, and then after 5 or so years benefit from a major review and possible refresh. For some events, which are of a particular time and moment, it may be appropriate to run only for a few years and then cease altogether. This new approach should build in regular, objective reviews of all categories of events.

Sporting events which have a limited tourism impact but meet other Council objectives, such as NW200, STAT Sports Supercup and Foyle Cup will be reviewed separately to consider appropriate support from the Council, ensuring profile for the Council, and provision of appropriate opportunities across its wider corporate strategies of health, community engagement and participatory opportunities for young people.

**DIRECT DELIVERY OF EVENTS**

As this report clearly sets out, we recommend that the Council’s strategic focus needs to develop and grow events that have strong tourism and economic impacts, and the best way to do this is through taking a more strategic, enabling role which develops the capacity of others to deliver and grows the wider events sector.

We recognise, however, that there is a history of direct delivery of events by the Council and some expectation that this should continue. So while we do not recommend ongoing operational delivery of events by the Events Unit, if the Council decides to continue this role, then this should be directed at a small number of Signature events which will achieve economic and tourism impacts, rather than local events which they are currently required to deliver.

Responsibility for event delivery will require specific project management resource to ensure that delivery does not detract from strategic event development. Within the Events Unit, designated event project managers would undertake the key practical tasks required to deliver

Signature events. This would include programming, vendor and supplier acquisition, infrastructure planning, intra-council liaison, and preparation of event and safety management plans.

Where possible this operational delivery for certain Signature events delivery should be supported with capacity building functions and creating new partnership arrangements for out-sourcing delivery. We have outlined as an example, a potential route for Auld Lammas Fair below.

We recognise that from time to time there will be one-off large-scale civic projects that do not fit into the event categories, such as Northern Ireland 100th Anniversary in 2021 or Festival UK/Queen’s Platinum Jubilee in 2022. The Events Unit will take responsibility for the planning and implementation for the Council, but a separate budget will be required over and above the annual Events Unit budget to cover the additional project costs and resource to deliver such projects. Operational delivery of such events could either be done through direct delivery by the Events Unit or out-sourcing or a mix of the two.

**NEW OPPORTUNITIES**

Our review of the borough’s current events programme has concluded that only Stendhal Festival fits within the new definition of Signature Events. Some have potential but there is work to be done to develop their vision, ambition and programming. The current programme has in any case been severely affected this year and many may not emerge beyond the restrictions of the pandemic at all, or in the same format.

The appraisal in the table below should therefore be viewed as indicative of where the opportunities lie rather than a definitive programme. It gives examples of actual current events and thematic opportunities where the Causeway Coast and Glens has strengths.

Event Category	Events with Potential	Potential New Themes
Major Events	▶ Golf Championships	
Signature Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Stendhal Festival</li> <li>▶ Auld Lammas Fair</li> <li>▶ Atlantic Sessions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Food &amp; Drink building on Bushmills brand and food produce, Bushmills Salmon &amp; Whiskey Festival, and Causeway Taste Festival</li> <li>▶ Music</li> <li>▶ Landscape and Coast</li> <li>▶ Light Installations</li> <li>▶ Outdoor Adventure Sports</li> <li>▶ Game of Thrones</li> </ul>

Local Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Heart of the Glens</li> <li>▶ Pirates of Portrush</li> <li>▶ Red Sail</li> </ul>	
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Auld Lammas Fair is a long-standing festival with strong local attachment. It has the potential to be a Signature Event if there is a greater emphasis on a programme which plays up its distinctive and ancient heritage associations. We recommend a 3 year-development plan is produced for Auld Lammas covering programming, governance and management, and future delivery. The plan should be developed by a working group led by the Events Unit and working with town team, arts teams and local interests. A number of ideas have already been identified by the events team which can be built on.

Note that individual festivals need not necessarily be stand-alone. It could make sense to bring another together and market under an umbrella brand or for certain events/festivals to co-operate with others to enhance or extend the offer such as for instance Bushmills Salmon and Whiskey and Rathlin Sound Maritime festivals book-ending a new Signature food & drink event. Similar to the approach to Auld Lammas Fair we recommend a working group is established bringing together all interests to develop a new festival which we think could fit TNI’s criteria for a Hallmark Event which would attract national funding and exposure.

To illustrate how the Events Unit would work in the future an example based on Auld Lammas Fair is shown in the box on the right.

**Auld Lammas Fair** – an illustration of Events Unit development support:

- Advise on Governance and set-up of new charity/NPDO organisation.
- Provide support for the management committee of volunteer directors/trustees.
- Provide shadow work experience opportunities to benefit from team’s professional expertise and knowledge in event planning and delivery elements.
- Create specific ‘How to’ training, mentoring and capacity building initiatives that address specific skills and resource needs by the organisation.
- Provide advice on funding applications and opportunities and self-generated income streams. Give information and contacts for event services and suppliers, both locally and nationally as required.
- Advise on operational requirements to ensure event is fully compliant re. insurance risk and health & safety policies.
- Ensure that robust Event Management plans are in place and provide liaison across the Council, PSNI and SAG.
- Support research into new programming elements and input into marketing plan.

## LEARNING FROM ELSEWHERE

A good example of a successful thematic umbrella festival focusing on unique strengths of an area is Pembrokeshire Fish Week Festival in Wales. The Fish Week Festival demonstrates that an event can grow substantially into a major event or festival by widening its initial remit and joining together existing smaller themes and events.

It is a clear example of how Causeway Coast could join together other existing themes and events to develop a Hallmark event that in itself is larger than the sum of its parts and that can become an events-driven marketing promotion for the destination as a whole.

**Pembrokeshire Fish Week Festival** is organised by Pembrokeshire County Council. Since it was founded in 1999 it has grown into a biennial, 9-day festival at the end of June that aims to promote the local fish and wider food sectors, and to encourage off-season tourism.

PFW is perceived by many stakeholders as being more than just a food festival, uniquely promoting Pembrokeshire's identity, culture and distinctive sense of place.

As a "fringe" style umbrella festival, PFW is essentially an events-driven marketing promotion. It enjoys a high profile attracting significant national recognition and engenders wide participation and pride across the county. It attracts visitors to Pembrokeshire; encourages expenditure in the region; helps to develop and promote the destination; creates and reinforces a sense of place; offsets seasonality and encourages participation in a broad range of activities.

In 2019, the PFW programme consisted of over 250 events and activities, put on by over 350 businesses and voluntary organisations across Pembrokeshire. Dining and eating out is by far the dominant element of the programme. Local restaurants, cafes and pubs can easily and simply participate in PFW by adding seafood dishes to their menus.

Independent evaluation demonstrated the financial advantage of being part of PFW, with 57% of businesses achieving increased turnover during the week.



## 5 ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Our review advocates a shift in Council resource towards events that can help the borough achieve bigger and better economic impacts. As things currently stand a large proportion of Council time and resource is spent by the events team supporting the administration and delivery of numerous small-scale local and community events, including programming, procurement, and operational planning and delivery which is extremely time intensive for the events team in particular. Instead, the approach we recommend prioritises a small number of high-impact tourism events, while providing light touch advice and guidance to local and community event organisers.

In our view the Events Unit should focus on providing high-quality professional leadership for the sector, enabling and facilitating ambition and growth, working across the Causeway Coast & Glens region with festival and event organisers and through other departments of the Council.

Its priority will be on managing partnerships, building capacity, identifying appropriate one-off events to bid for, commissioning and developing events to optimise the benefits to the Borough.

Its role will include managing the allocation of council funding according to clear criteria and priorities. This new role will not include direct delivery and organisation of events but rather enabling others - within and outside the Council - to develop and deliver high quality, well-managed events of whichever scale and type.

The Events Unit has two distinct roles – one strategic, and the other operational.

The Strategic Role involves:

- ▶ Enabling and supporting the development and production of Major and Signature events
- ▶ Providing leadership to the borough's events sector and building and fostering capacity across the sector

The Operational Role involves:

- ▶ Managing funding and investment
- ▶ Advising Council colleagues and event organisers on logistical and operational issues.

If the Council decides to continue direct delivery of events for certain Signature events this will require a further role which will involve:

- ▶ Operational project management

► Event management documentation preparation

Beyond the Events Unit other departments in the Council have a significant interest in events. The table below summarises the primary responsibilities which should be included in departmental business plans.

A Strategic Steering Group for Events involving senior officers and councillors will ensure better planning, integration and oversight. This Group will be responsible for assessing, reviewing and establishing the status of Signature events, identifying when refresh is required or when they have reached the end of their life-cycle.

There is more detail on roles and responsibilities within the Council in Appendix 1.

Department/Service	Responsible for
<b>Leisure &amp; Development</b>	
Destination Management	Marketing of Major and Signature events integrating with destination/tourism marketing at borough and national level
Health, Well-being & Sport	Ensure Council's objectives are part of support negotiations for sporting events
Community & Cultural Services	Support for local and community events Lead grant funding for local events
Prosperity & Place (Town Management Teams)	Enabling and supporting the delivery of local and town events Supporting Community & Culture on funding decisions for local events
<b>Performance</b>	
Corporate PR & Communications	Work with destination team and events unit on marketing planning Ensure Council's profile in support for sporting event
Corporate Health and Safety	Work with to ensure reasonable and compatible event insurance guidelines and risk assessments
<b>Environmental Services</b>	
Environmental Health (Licensing, Emergency Planning / SAG, Food and Consumer Health & Safety)	Chairing Safety Advisory Group Event licences, Road closures, Public realm permissions and fee charges, Street cleansing

## 6 INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Council gives significant funding to events so it is important that there are clear processes and mechanisms for an investment strategy which will ensure the delivery of the new approach and prioritise those events which will make most impact.

Aggregating 2019/20 budgets we have identified £663K being spent on events. This comes from Tourism and Recreation Large Events Fund, Tourism Events Growth Fund, CCGBC Funded & Managed Events, Community Festivals Fund (50% funded by Department for Communities) and the Christmas Festive Fund. An additional £140K is likely to be allocated in 2021/22 for a Tourism Events Recovery Fund.

We propose that this funding is allocated by proportion of the total budget available:

- ▶ Signature Events - 80%
- ▶ Local Events - 15% of Budget

Investment in Major Events would be determined in addition to this funding through separate agreement within the Council according to the business case for a specific event. This could also include funding for additional event staff resource.

To incentivise cooperation and collaboration among events organisations across the region, to share good practice, support CPD activities, health and safety knowledge, and joint purchasing etc. the Council will retain 5% of the budget annually to support specific priority strategic initiatives and projects. This could be rolled over between financial years with Council approval.

The investment process would work as shown in the table here.

Event Category	Levels of Funding	Application Process
Major Events	Business case developed for each event – multi-partner funding	Decisions by Council Committee
Signature Events	£25K-£100K 3- year commitments 1- year for testing/piloting including new events with potential	Commissioning and negotiation managed by Events Unit Competitive funding process managed by Events Unit Decisions by Strategic Steering Group
Local Events	3 levels for 1-year funding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• &lt;£1K</li> <li>• £1K-£3K</li> <li>• £3k-£10K</li> </ul>	Competitive funding process managed and determined jointly by Community Services, Cultural Services, and Prosperity & Place Management Team

Any Signature Event seeking funding must demonstrate how the event will deliver against the following:

- ▶ Does it promote a positive image for the area?
- ▶ Does it demonstrate both high quality and a high level of ambition?
- ▶ Does it deliver the destination brand values of Causeway Coast and Glens and the *Embrace a Giant Spirit* NI brand?
- ▶ Will it attract visitors and generate spend from Northern Ireland's priority market segments?
- ▶ Does it provide opportunities for local artists, programmers, businesses and suppliers?
- ▶ Can it provide capacity building opportunities for sector development?
- ▶ Does it have a sustainable business model and management that can deliver?
- ▶ Will the event sign-up to the evaluation criteria and conditions?

## 7 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

This section sets out the key steps required to implement the new approach over the 10-year horizon of the strategy.

- ▶ **Reset: 2021** – putting in place new mechanisms, approaches, producing development plans for Signature Events and developing knowledge, skills and capabilities
- ▶ **Revive: 2022** – new events portfolio in place, continuing implementation of new approach and developing skills and capabilities
- ▶ **Restage: 2023-2031** – establish, develop and refresh the events portfolio

### RESET: 2021

#### Structure

- Establish Strategic Steering Group
- Steering Group designates Signature events
- Set up consultative working group with elected members for input to plans (second quarter 2021)
- Establish working groups for Auld Lammas and new 'Causeway Food & Drink' Festival reporting to Strategic Steering Group
- Undertake skills analysis of current team against revised roles and recruit where appropriate for new Events Unit structure
- Establish new Events Unit with skills and capacity to deliver the new approach
- Agree working relationships between Events Unit and other departments; include responsibilities in all departmental business plans
- Establish Event Marketing Working Group

#### Processes

- Advise stakeholders in current event programme of the new strategic approach and its implications
- Strategic Steering Group to scope ideas
- Events Unit to establish viability and feasibility of Signature Events portfolio working with organisers/organising committees to support development of ideas, concepts and programming for 2022
- Working Groups for Auld Lammas and new Food & Drink festival produce 3-year development plans, agreeing concept for Food & Drink festival with TNI as one of their Hallmark Events
- Scope online event application and management software system

**Funding**

- Assess Council's current events funding commitments dispersed across departmental budgets and consolidate into a single budget pot
- Community Services to develop Local & Community Festivals & Events funding scheme
- Commence funding negotiations for 2022 with potential Signature Events

**Capacity Building**

- Provide advice on setting up new event delivery vehicles for Local Events being externalised from Council control in 2022 and advise on new grant arrangements
- Develop and deliver 'event workshops' for town teams, Community and Cultural Services, and potential external event organisers for Local Events to develop skills and capability

**REVIVE: 2022-23****Event Programme**

- Support and facilitate delivery of first iteration of new Signature Events
- Commence annual sport partnership agreements
- Plan and deliver tailored marketing of Signature Events via the Event Marketing Working Group

**Processes**

- Implement online event application and management software system
- Events Unit provides operational advice and signposting to events organisers
- Events Unit take on administrative management of SAG
- Strategic Steering Group to review delivery of departmental responsibilities

**Funding**

- Implement the online application funding process
- Events Unit manages funding negotiations and decisions for Signature Events
- Community Services manage funding applications for Local Events

**Capacity Building**

- Events Unit to develop a programme of strategic advice, mentoring, and support to local event organisers aimed at increasing event sustainability and capability e.g. advice sessions for event organisers to talk through event operational plans
- Plan and stage first Annual Events Conference

**RESTAGE: 2024-2031****Event Programme**

- Signature Events come to maturity – portfolio reviewed and refreshed every 3/5 years by Strategic Steering Group
- Two or three Major Events take place

**Processes**

- Annual evaluation of tourism events portfolio with major review at end of 3-year funding agreements
- Strategic Steering Group undertake annual review of departmental responsibilities and delivery against business plans

**Funding**

- Funding mechanisms reviewed annually
- Events Unit manages funding negotiations and decisions for Signature Events
- Community and Cultural Services support funding applications for Local Events

**Capacity Building**

- Events Unit provides tailored mentoring and advice which improves the quality and programming of events
- Annual Conference matures to support networking and ideas generation

## 8 APPENDIX 1: ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

### ROLE OF THE EVENTS UNIT

The principle underlying the operation of the Events Unit is to create a single approach to festivals and events in the region and provide a co-ordinated response to helping them achieve their potential. However, the Events Unit also has expertise in managing events which will be useful for the Council. Our recommendation is that this expertise should be used not to deliver or programme events but to support others in doing so.

The Events Unit should remain within the Tourism and Recreation Service Area of the Leisure and Development Department but will have an advisory, signposting and liaison role with other departments across the Council.

#### Strategic Role

The Council recognises the importance of a vibrant, flourishing independent events sector within the region. To achieve this 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 based on one Hallmark Event and 4/5 Signature Events.

For major one-off sporting and cultural events, which meet clear criteria, the Events Unit would work with local, national and international external organisations and agencies to identify and bid.

We recommend establishing a Strategic Steering Group serviced by the Events Unit, chaired by the Director of Leisure & Development and including senior council staff, one or two councillors, event organisers and business representation. This group would meet quarterly to set strategic direction, address barriers or blockages, consider ideas for new and enhanced events/programmes, ensure key anniversaries, upcoming themes, dates, etc are capitalised on.

This Group will also undertake regular reviews of the Signature events programme identifying when refreshes are needed and when events are coming to the end of their lifecycle so support does not continue beyond the ability of an event to make an impact.

The Strategic Steering Group will set up working groups as appropriate, for example to develop concepts and plans for specific Signature Events. We also recommend that this Group has delegated responsibility for approving applications for funding for Signature Events.

This group would also be responsible for the planning of an Annual Events Conference. This would be a borough-wide event organised by the Events Unit involving a range of stakeholders to share and exchange ideas, potentially creating new projects and complementary workstreams. This will facilitate dialogue about what Causeway Coast and Glens wants from



events and how it can deliver outstanding and distinctive programming. Those attending could include independent promoters, creative / festival producers and venues as well as TNI and other tourism interests, i.e. the network of interests that the Events Unit will be responsible for building and maintaining. The TNI events team will be a particularly important partner for the Events Unit.

### Operational Role

The Events Unit will oversee, co-ordinate and manage the Council's response to events. It will act as the initial and primary point of operational contact for events, signposting organisers to other departments and application processes as appropriate.

Currently expenditure on events is dispersed across several departmental budgets within the Council. We recommend that funding for Signature and Sporting events should be consolidated into a single events budget which will simplify the system, remove duplication and confusion and ensure allocation is according to clear criteria for each category of event, and event within that category.

For Signature events, the Events Unit would support and advise applicants and manage expectations. If the Council so decides, there could also be an operational delivery role for the Events Unit.

The current application and management system for event organisers could be streamlined. The implementation of an online application system would facilitate a speedier event management process, reducing the workload of the Events Unit and enabling the Events Unit to focus its expertise and commitment, providing guidance and facilitating more efficiently the sharing of information with stakeholders such as SAG members, as well as providing easy access to repeat applications in subsequent years. For example, event organisers could use the online system to provide documents, such as, event plan, site plan, event safety plan, risk assessments, for review by the Events Unit and then circulated to the SAG.

### EVENTS UNIT STAFFING

Here is our assessment of the staffing requirement for the Events Unit to deliver the new strategic approach and remit.

Strategic:

- ▶ Events Unit Manager – responsible for the Unit, setting strategic direction and overseeing major and Signature events, event commissioning, leads on Strategic Steering Group and Annual Conference
- ▶ Events Co-ordinator – leads collaboration among event organisers, manages interface between events and infrastructure within the Council, including marketing, advises on development, quality and ambition, funding guidance, and evaluation

#### Operational:

- ▶ Operations Manager - manages liaison across relevant departments of the Council, PSNI and SAG membership, advises events on operational issues
- ▶ Operations Officer - supports operational elements to ensure all events are fully compliant with CCGBC event management, risk profiling and assessment and health & safety planning, monitoring and policy
- ▶ Administrator – provides executive support to the Unit including administering SAG and event applications

If the Council decides on direct delivery of specific Signature Events, then the following staff will be required:

- ▶ Event Operations Project Managers x2 - provides practical input and operational event delivery to specific Signature events with express responsibilities for advising on vendor and supplier acquisition, infrastructure implementation, cross council liaison, preparation of event management plans, risk assessments, internal Council liaison, implementation of Council Health and Safety procedures; (NB should not include on-the-ground tasks during the running of events such as stewarding)

#### ROLE OF COUNCIL DEPARTMENTS

While the Events Unit will be the strategic lead for events in the Council, effective management of events will require good working relationships between the Events Unit and other council departments involved in authorising, licensing, or servicing events. This relationship – and the obligations it places on other departments - should be made explicit and signed-off by Directors/Heads of Service. This will include events being referenced in business plans and having named individuals in all relevant departments/sections, including Environmental Services, Health & Safety and Insurance, as well as the Community, Cultural and Town Teams.

Within Tourism and Recreation, there should be a Tourism Events Marketing Officer located within Destination Management with specific responsibility for promoting events in the context of destination marketing (including relationships and communications with the marketing teams in TNI and Tourism Ireland). If necessary, this should be a new post. For tourism events to be given the profile and exposure they require and to ensure their contribution to the overall profile of CC&G as a tourist destination, there is a need for them to be factored into the overarching destination marketing plan. It is therefore crucial that the Events Unit, Destination Management Team and Corporate PR Team work closely to agree approach, angles, themes and timelines to produce marketing content and collateral.

We recommend a small Events Marketing working group is formed between these three functions, owned and chaired by the Tourism Marketing representative and meeting once a month with; a long term remit of identifying overall positioning for the annual programme

ahead, identifying the role that TNI may play in its promotion, mapping key audiences, messages and potential content for each individual event and agree opportunities for engagement with the tourism sector which will be taken forward by Destination Management; and a short term remit of managing the timely delivery of each event's individual marketing and communications plan. The delivery of marketing activity could either be undertaken directly by the Destination Management Team or outsourced to a marketing agency. The Events Unit would take on the administrative management role for the Safety Advisory Group (SAG), made up of representatives from council teams and partner agencies and chaired as now by Environmental Services. In particular, relationships with the Police Service NI as well as other emergency services would be consolidated.

Event safety considerations are clearly important and under the new approach the responsibility for this will lie within Environmental Services, which should review capacity and skills to assess whether it can be met within existing staffing or whether additional staff will be required.

It should also be noted that services that the Council currently provides such as stewarding, and health and safety personnel attending events will no longer be supplied so events will need to address this directly in their event management plans, buying in services if necessary.

Grant funding for Local Events will sit in a separate budget managed by the Community Services Department which would operate the funding processes for these types of events, through the Funding Unit with decisions being taken in collaboration with Prosperity & Place Management Team. The Events Unit would provide expert advice to Community Services on funding applications.

The rigorous requirements for larger scale events are less relevant and can be onerous for the organisers of small-scale community events so we recommend that the Council reviews how this can be loosened within the constraints of licensing and health & safety. One option might be that all outdoor events receiving a grant e.g. above £3k funding could be required to engage an 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.

Applicants for funding will be required to demonstrate effective project planning and how they would deliver a quality event even at local level. Community organisers should be directed to the Causeway Coast & Glens Guide for the Planning and Organisation of Community Festivals & other Events.

To assist the transferral of Council managed events during 2021/22, the Events Unit would offer workshops and advice sessions for community event organisers who would have the opportunity to talk through their event, discuss their plans, questions and application with a member of the Events Unit expert team.

## 9 APPENDIX 2: MARKETING EVENTS

The economic impact from visitor spend that Major and Signature events have depends on how effectively they are promoted. With the new approach responsibility for marketing has been given to the Destination Management Team who have the marketing skills and ability to ensure that event marketing is integrated with destination marketing.

### Marketing Planning

- ▶ The successful promotion and delivery of tourism events should be viewed as a way to help achieve the wider objectives of the Destination Management team with event marketing activity integrated into an overarching content calendar for the marketing of the destination.
- ▶ Current names of events do not currently refer back to the destination. To convey a stronger sense of place, support the destination and put Causeway Coast and Glens front of mind, consider adding 'Causeway' to the beginning of each Signature event title e.g. 'Causeway Atlantic Sessions'
- ▶ More thought needs to be given to who the target audiences are for each of the Signature events and how they can be best be reached. Starting with the visitor allows a picture to be built around the types of content they are likely to react to and engage with, the channels that will best reach them and the timings for content release that will have the most impact.
- ▶ Each Signature event will require its own content marketing plan to map those identified channels and content types. These plans are likely to be highly digitised in approach.

### Internal Working Relationships

- ▶ Marketing plans for each event should be created collaboratively by the Destination Management Team, Events Unit and Corporate PR with individual actions assigned and deadlines set to ensure shared ownership.
- ▶ There is a need for information to be shared in a timely fashion so that each member has the information required at the right time to hit the identified target markets at the right time but also to ensure a fit with other workloads. Timings should be discussed as part of the marketing planning process.
- ▶ A decision should be taken together on what activity, if any, should be outsourced.

### Web Presence

Currently there are three websites promoting the events in the borough – the council's corporate website, the council's tourism website and TNI's website. There is an opportunity to consolidate this, removing duplicated information and duplicated effort. The tourism website [www.visitcausewaycoastandglens.com](http://www.visitcausewaycoastandglens.com) is much more visitor friendly than the corporate website and would work well as the central hub for hosting 'what's on' information in the borough. The promotion of events could then be removed from the council's corporate website completely. It's not unusual for residents to use the council's tourism website to find

out what's going in the Borough, care just needs to be taken to ensure language is appealing to both visitors and residents. Events should continue to be promoted on TNI's website.

### Social Media

- ▶ Events are currently being promoted via social media accounts run by the events team which are separate to the main 'visit' tourism accounts. This structure is presumably based on the council's internal functions as opposed to a logical visitor journey. A combined 'Visit' account would work better and mirror the new collaborative planning approach.
- ▶ Partners could be used more to help distribute content. Currently there is an over-reliance on owned channels with relatively small followings when other accounts exist who could be encouraged to distribute event content and thus reach a much wider and varied audience e.g. @thisiscauseway (22.5k followers on Instagram).
- ▶ Non-owned hashtags could also be used to achieve a higher content reach. Currently the use of hashtags from the events account appears to be limited to #causewayglensevents but tags like #thisiscauseway and #causewaycoastalroute are considerably more popular and could be used to extend reach.
- ▶ There is not much evidence of partnering/showcasing the people involved within events e.g. arts organisations, food and drink etc which could form nice content in the downtime between events and is likely to have a wider reach (and a local and tourist appeal). Content only seems to be pushed out around the time of an event rather than building up momentum and telling stories about the programme throughout the year. This can result in an over-crowding of content and have detrimental impact on engagement rates and the overall number of followers. Consider extending the promotional period of an event considerably.

### WORKING WITH TOURISM NORTHERN ISLAND (TNI) AND TOURISM IRELAND (TI)

A good working relationship with TNI and TI is key to raising the profile of Causeway Coast and Glens as a successful events destination:

- ▶ Involve them in the planning process by running concepts past them both for new events and for developments to existing events
- ▶ Know their key dates (e.g. Meet the Buyer) and weave them into your planning process so that you can provide information and content for them to use in advance.
- ▶ Evidence new strategic planning by showing them:
  - the USPs for each event based on target audience segments and authenticity of place – highlight the differentiation between each
  - the overall objectives for each new event
  - the collaboration with local businesses
  - that thought has been given to pricing structures
- ▶ Share newly created content with them regularly and connect digitally with them – social media, e-newsletters etc.

## 10 APPENDIX 3: LIST OF CONSULTEES

### CAUSEWAY COAST & GLENS BOROUGH COUNCIL:

Leisure & Development Committee Members

David Jackson, Chief Executive

Richard Baker, Director of Leisure and Development

Aidan McPeake, Director of Environmental Services

Paul Beattie, Head of Service, Prosperity and Place

Julie Welsh, Head of Service, Community & Culture

Bryan Edgar, Head of Service, Health & Built Environment

Peter Kerr, Corporate Health & Safety and Insurance Services Manager

Kerrie McGonigle, Destination Manager

Julienne Elliot, Town and Village Manager

Patricia O'Brien, Funding Unit Manager

Shaun Kennedy, Ballycastle Town & Village Manager

Events Team

### EXTERNAL:

Aine Kearney, Director of Business Support & Events, Tourism Northern Ireland (TNI)

Sheena Dickson, Markets & Product Experiences Development Officer, TNI

Ciaran Doherty, Stakeholder Liaison Manager, Tourism Ireland

Sharon Scott, Taste Causeway

Ross Parkhill, Festival Director, Stendhal Festival

Paul Kerrigan & Shauna McFall, Ballycastle Community Development Group

Gerard McAuley, Professional Event Solutions

Wilma Erskine, Former Secretary Manager, Royal Portrush Golf Club

David Evans, Causeway Connections

Mervyn White, Race Director, North West 200

John McNally, Event Producer, Pirates Off Portrush

Shauna Mitchell, Heart of the Glens Festival

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