

**COWAL HIGHLAND GATHERING – REQUEST TO AMEND SERVICE
LEVEL AGREEMENT WITH ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL**

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report puts forward a request from Cowal Highland Gathering (CHG) to amend the Service Level Agreement (SLA) they have with the Council in order to maintain the current level of financial support in 2014 whilst removing the link between the level of support and the fee payable to the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association (RSPBA) for the “major” championship.
- 1.2 The CHG Board have indicated that the continued viability of the Highland Gathering and their ambition to further develop the event and broaden its appeal is dependent on maintaining financial support through the SLA at its current level.
- 1.3 The very significant economic impact and social importance to Argyll and Bute of the CHG is highlighted in this report.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That members agree to maintain the level of financial and in-kind support for 2014 at the level currently set out in the SLA.
- 2.2 That the wording of the SLA is amended to remove reference to the fee for a “major” championship.
- 2.3 That CHG are asked to ensure equitable access for all Argyll & Bute competitors in all events prior to an SLA for 2015 onwards being agreed.

3.0 DETAIL

- 3.1 In 2013 the RSPBA announced their decision to remove the “major” status from the Cowal Pipe Band Championship (the world’s oldest pipe band championship) and move the “major” to a new competition in Ireland. The RSPBA has agreed that the date and name of the Cowal Championship be protected and they will work with CHG to ensure the Cowal Championship remains a large scale competition thus encouraging bands to attend.
- 3.2 This decision has presented the CHG with an opportunity to enhance the Cowal Gathering for general visitors, competitors and for the bands who decide to attend and compete. The Board

believe that introducing new elements to the Gathering will broaden its appeal to the general public and will help attract new visitors who may not have attended the event in its previous format. The event should be more relevant to modern Scotland but will retain, at all times, the historical and cultural elements of the Gathering and will promote the local area.

3.3 As stated above, the CHG wish to maintain the core competitive and cultural elements but also introduce more of a festival type of feel to the Gathering. This will be achieved by providing entertainment such as:

- The Clan Mountain Bike Stunt Team.
- Building a temporary mountain bike route in the stadium.
- Providing a digital hub which will offer people the chance to try some of the top games on the latest platform.
- Family sport opportunities.
- Kids tent with magicians, clowns, puppets and hopefully a big name children's TV attraction.
- Arts workshops delivered by HeART of Argyll.
- Ceilidh tent and traditional folk music, including "open mic" sessions, in the main bar tent.
- "Best of Argyll" area with high quality local producers promoting and selling local food and drink.

3.4 Argyll and Bute Council is due to award CHG £68,205 in 2014/15 as part of the SLA. This award will no longer be used to pay RSPBA for a "major" championship but will instead be used to pay for the Cowal Pipe Band Championship, entertainment attractions and marketing.

3.5 A detailed breakdown of the SLA spend is listed below:

RSPBA associated costs = £40,000

Entertainment costs:

Ceilidh = £11,565

Street entertainment = £2,950

Homecoming events = £3,550

Children's events = £2,455

Performance acts = £4,275

Misc entertainment = £1,055

Marketing = £2,355

3.6 For the 2014 event CHG have secured a major media partner in the Daily Record (readership of over 250,000 people across Scotland). This will help in promoting the Gathering nationally and attracting more visitors to the event. In addition more leaflets will be distributed than in previous years and to a wider geographical area (in recent years 82,000 leaflets were distributed throughout the central belt).

- 3.7 CHG continues to the largest annual event to take place in Argyll and Bute and provides a crucial economic and social boost to the local, and wider, Argyll area.
- 3.8 The 2013 CHG generated £1.9 million for the Scottish economy with just over £1 million of that directly benefiting the Argyll and Bute area (calculation based on an accepted equation used by Event Scotland).
- 3.9 The economic impact review of the 2013 event shows that the return on investment to Argyll and Bute is £16 for every £1 of Council support.
- 3.10 Other benefits to Argyll and Bute include:
- Raising the profile of the area as a visitor attraction, including to overseas visitors with Scottish and/or local connections.
 - CHG is a major social enterprise with a turnover in excess of £250,000 pa and an employer of full-time, part-time and seasonal staff.
 - Contributing to the community strength of Cowal by drawing together a large team of local volunteers who are dedicated to putting on an event that reflects great credit on their area. Around 500 days per year of volunteering are given by the community to the Gathering.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 That members note the economic impact and social benefits the CHG brings to Argyll and Bute, and the Cowal area in particular.
- 4.2 In acknowledging the above, members agree to maintain the level of financial and in-kind support to CHG for 2014 at the level currently set out in the SLA and that the wording of the SLA is amended to remove reference to the fee for a “major” championship. This will help support and sustain the CHG in its new format.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy: In line with the aims of the SOA and Economic Development Action Plan
- 5.2 Financial: All proposed spend contained within current mainstream revenue budget.
- 5.3 Legal: None
- 5.4 HR: None
- 5.5 Equalities: In line with all current requirements.
- 5.6 Risk: Low level

5.7 Customer Service: Maintain high level of customer satisfaction by service provider.

Cleland Sneddon

Executive Director of Community Services

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