

STRATEGIC EVENTS AND FESTIVALS FUND – ROUND 3 UPDATE

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to members in regard to Round 3 Strategic Events and Festivals (SEF) Fund for 2021/22, and seek agreement to defer a decision in regard to any formal grant award for SEF Round 3 to the May meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee. The reason for this is the current uncertainty in regard to if and when strategic events will now be able to go ahead in light of the current national lockdown and difficult and challenging on going position with regard to COVID-19 pandemic and especially in regard to mass gatherings.
- 1.2 The SEF third round of grant funding is to support strategic events and festivals that are to be held in 2021/22. The call for applications was issued on 22 October 2020 and closed on the 7 December and the applications, of which there are 10, were due to be consideration by Policy and Resources Committee at the February meeting.
- 1.3 As members will be aware SEF Round 2 events, planned to be held between June and December 2020, faced a set of extraordinary circumstances and challenges brought about by the coronavirus, COVID-19 pandemic and the need to social distance. Despite hopes that things would improve for events in 2021, in light of the current National lockdown and significantly higher numbers of COVID-19 cases this time around compared to March 2020, there is still significant uncertainty as to if and when events of a strategic nature, which would fall into the definition of mass gathering, may be able to take place in 2021.
- 1.4 At the time of writing, at least one of the event organisers who have applied to the SEF Round 3 have indicated that they may not be proceeding with their event in 2021. Members will be aware that none of the 9 strategic events planned for 2020 were able to go ahead. 8 were formally cancelled and Tíree Wave Classic organisers had rescheduled their 2020 event to March 2021 however it is looking very unlikely that this will be able to go ahead in light of the current situation although no formal decision has been made on this.

- 1.5 Strategic Events and Festivals Funding is conditional on events taking place and as such, in cases where an event has been cancelled there is no requirement to make payment of grant. When it became evident that SEF Round 2 events were very unlikely to go ahead members agreed to the partial release of grant to support the event organisation through this challenging time. Of the 9 cancelled 2020/21 events (1 has been rescheduled) only 3 event organisations have applied and secured grant towards eligible expenditure incurred. The organisations are Mull of Kintyre and Cowal Highland Gathering and Mull Rally.
- 1.6 At the time of putting out the call for SEF Round 3 applications in October 2020 we were obviously not facing a National Lockdown and things were looking slightly more positive however this position has changed very quickly and we are now facing a much more serious position than in March of last year. Given the uncertainty and unpredictability it would seem pragmatic to delay and review the position over the next two/three months rather than agree to award grants for strategic events and festivals that will not be able to go ahead as planned. This will allow both the council and the event organisations themselves to hopefully be clearer as to the feasibility and viability of these events taking place in 2021.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1.7 Members of the Policy and Resources Committee are asked to:
- a) Agree that in light of the current National Lockdown and the significant uncertainty over if and when strategic events and festivals, classed as mass gatherings, will be able to take place in 2021 that the decision in regard to awarding of SEF Round 3 grants is deferred and the position reconsidered at the May Policy and Resources Committee when hopefully the situation regarding holding of mass gathering in 2021 will be clearer.
 - b) Note that none of the 9 SEF Round 2 grant supported events planned for 2020 have gone ahead in light of COVID-19 and the restriction preventing mass gathering being held. 8 have been formally cancelled and whilst Tiree Wave Classic have rescheduled their 2020 event to March 2021, it is now very unlikely this will go ahead.
 - c) Note that following agreement by members to the partial release of the SEF Round 2 grant (up to 75% of the SEF grant) to support the legitimate and eligible expenditure incurred in relation to cancelled events, only 3 of the event organisations have drawn down grant in regard to expenditure incurred in relation to 2020 cancelled events. Grant payments have been made to Mull of Kintyre Music Festival, Cowal Highland Gathering and Mull Rally.

STRATEGIC EVENTS AND FESTIVALS FUND – ROUND 3 UPDATE

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to ask provide an update to members in regard to Round 3 Strategic Events and Festivals (SEF) Fund for 2021/22, and seek agreement to defer a decision in regard to any formal grant award for SEF Round 3 to the May meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee in light of the current lockdown and difficult and challenging on going position that the events sector is still facing with regard to COVID-19 pandemic. The report also provides a short update in regard to SEF Round 2 events and associated grants.
- 2.2 At the Business Continuity Committee meeting on 11 June 2020, members agreed that a grant pot of £90,000 be made available for SEF over financial year 2021/22. The call for applications was issued on 22 October 2020 and closed on the 7 December and the applications, of which there are 10, were due to be consideration by Policy and Resources Committee at the February meeting.
- 2.3 At the time of putting out the call for SEF Round 3 applications in October 2020 we were obviously not facing a National Lockdown and things were looking slight more positive however this position has changed very quickly and we are now facing a much more serious position than in March of last year. Given the uncertainty and unpredictability it would seem pragmatic to delay and review the position over the next two/three months rather than agree to award grants for strategic events and festivals that will not be able to go ahead as planned. This will allow both the council and the event organisations themselves to hopefully be clearer as to the feasibility and viability of these events taking place in 2021.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Members of the Policy and Resources Committee are asked to:
- a) Agree that in light of the current National Lockdown and the significant

uncertainty over if and when strategic events and festivals, classed as mass gatherings, will be able to take place in 2021 that the decision in regard to awarding of SEF Round 3 grants is deferred and the position reconsidered at the May Policy and Resources Committee when hopefully the situation regarding holding of mass gathering in 2021 will be clearer.

- b) Note that none of the 9 SEF Round 2 grant supported events planned for 2020 have gone ahead in light of COVID-19 and the restriction preventing mass gathering being held. Whilst Tiree Wave Classic have rescheduled their 2020 event to march 2021, it is now very unlikely this will go ahead.
- c) Note that following agreement by members to the partial release of the SEF Round 2 grant (up to 75% of the SEF grant) to support the legitimate and eligible expenditure incurred in relation to cancelled events, only 3 of the event organisations have drawn down grant in regard to expenditure incurred in relation to 2020 cancelled events. Grant payments have been made to Mull of Kintyre Music Festival, Cowal Highland Gathering and Mull Rally.

4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 The overarching aim of the Strategic Events and Festivals Fund is to support event organisers to enhance and grow their events with the result that more visitors are attracted to Argyll and Bute, providing substantial economic benefit to the respective areas. The fund will provide critical support in the economic recovery of the area.
- 4.2 At the time of agreeing to holding an SEF Round 3 it was hoped that there would be a greater likelihood that mass gatherings may be able to be held in 2021/22 and it would be a more positive outlook for events. Unfortunately that is currently not looking to be the case although it is appreciated that things may change over the coming months in light of the availability of the vaccine. However it is difficult to predict the position especially given the seriousness of the current situation and that we are currently in a National lockdown.
- 4.3 The strategic events that have applied for SEF Round 3 funding are currently scheduled to be held between June and December 2021. However some of these may need to reconsider in light of the current situation. Deferring the decision until May will allow there to be much greater clarity both for the event organisations themselves and the council as to if and when strategic events can go ahead in 2021. The position will be predicated on when mass gatherings will be safe to be held.
- 4.4 It is fully appreciated that events of this scale are facing an unprecedented set of extraordinary and challenging circumstances brought about as a result of the coronavirus, COVID-19 pandemic and that this is putting excessive strain on the financial stability of many of the organisation and provides a precarious outlook for Argyll and Bute events in 2021.
- 4.5 Events Scotland suspended their National and beacon funded programmes but are providing support to event organisations through Scotland's Events Recovery Fund (SERF). This has been established in conjunction with

Scottish Government to help Scotland's events sector plan and deliver events through to the end of 2021, and to provide support as the industry responds and adapts to the effects of COVID-19. The fund, which was launched prior to the National Lockdown and the increase in COVID 19 cases, is part of the tourism and events recovery plan and aims to help restart the events sector as restrictions are eased, and address additional costs which may be incurred as a result of new hygiene and health and safety requirements, allowing communities and the public to regain confidence in hosting and attending events. However in light of the current situation it is clear that there are still significant challenges facing larger scale events and no certainty over when people will be able to meet on mass to attend events.

4.6 At the time of writing, at least one of the event organisers who have applied to the SEF Round 3 have indicated that they may not be proceeding with their event in 2021. Members will be aware that none of the 9 strategic events planned for 2020 were able to go ahead. Tiree Wave Classic organisers had rescheduled their 2020 event to March 2021 however it is looking very unlikely that this will be able to go ahead in light of the current situation although no formal decision has been made on this.

4.7 The loss of any event from the area is likely to have a significant impact on the local economy, especially those events which are longstanding. There is no doubt that the cancellation of 8 of the 9 SEF Round 2 (2020) events will have had an economic impact on the area and potentially on the viability of the event organisations although it is hoped that both Council and SG funding support will have helped to minimise the impact in some way. The importance of the SEF funding is fully recognised in assisting in the recovery of the sector however given the serious situation that we are currently facing and the unpredictability and uncertainty as to if and when events involving large numbers of people will be able to go ahead, it would seem prudent to delay the decision to allow a full understanding of the position with regard to being able to hold SEF in 2021.

4.8 In the meantime we will continue to liaise with the event organisations who have applied to the SEF Round 3 fund especially as some events may need to reschedule and some may even decide to cancel.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 Unfortunately the impact of the coronavirus, COVID-19 pandemic is still unknown and the status of strategic events and festivals will continue to change. The loss of any event from the local economy will be significant, and as such in an effort to support the economic recovery it is important that funding support is available to support strategic events when they are in a position to go ahead. However in light of the current situation and the fact that we are in a national lockdown and given that it is unclear how long this position will continue, it would seem to be prudent to defer the decision in regard to the award of SEF Round 3

grants until May. This will hopefully allow much greater clarity both for the event organisations themselves and the council as to if and when strategic events can go ahead in 2021. The position will be predicated on when mass gatherings will be safe to be held.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy – The Council’s Economic Strategy and Recovery Plan supports the value of events and festivals for their positive impact on the economy.
- 6.2 Financial – £90,000 in grant has been made available for a third round of Strategic Events and Festivals Funding for 2021/22.
- 6.3 Legal – Award letters and grant contracts would be issued as and when a decision is made.
- 6.4 HR – Resourced from existing staff
- 6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty:
 - 6.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics - None
 - 6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty – The Fund seeks to support the economic growth of areas
 - 6.5.3 Islands – The Fund seeks to support island economies by encouraging increased levels of visitors
- 6.6 Risk – The full effects of the impact that the coronavirus, COVID-19 pandemic will have is at this stage unclear, although it is anticipated that the impact will be severe and as we have already seen the cancellation of 8 of the 9 SEF Round 2 events due to take place in 2020.
- 6.7 Customer Service - None

Kirsty Flanagan, Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth

14th January 2021

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APPENDICES

None