

STRATEGIC EVENTS AND FESTIVALS FUND – ROUND 8 2026/2027

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on Round 8 (2026/27) of the Council's Strategic Events and Festivals Fund (SEF). The report provides details of the applications submitted and the applications recommended to receive funding. The report also seeks Members' agreement to allocate a minimum of £90,000 funding to allow for a SEF Round 9 in 2027/28.
- 1.2 At the 20th February 2025 Council budget meeting, the Council agreed funding of £90,000 for SEF Round 8, to be augmented by any underspend in Round 6 (2024/2025). An additional £14,500 of funding has been identified from the 2025/2026 Crown Estates allocation, subject to endorsement by the Council's Policy and Resources Committee. As there was no underspend in Round 6, the total budget available for allocation is **£104,500**.
- 1.3 SEF Round 8 opened on 6th October 2025 and closed on 17th November 2025. A total of 26 applications were received and amounted to a total eligible request of **£154,338**. Following assessment and scoring against agreed criteria, 10 applications are recommended for a funding award and are listed in **Table 1** at **Appendix 1**. Three applications are ineligible, and 13 applications are not being recommended to receive funding.
- 1.4 It is recognised that all events and festivals are important, however as the SEF fund is oversubscribed, only applicants that represent viable events, best meet all the criteria, and have a clear need for SEF funding have been recommended for an award. All events and festivals not in receipt of an award will be signposted to information and resources to help them to identify alternative funding.
- 1.5 The fund aims 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. The economic impact of the applications received in SEF Round 8 is approximately £15.6 million.
- 1.6 It is recommended that Members of the Policy and Resources Committee:

- I. Agree to the award of eligible SEF Round 8 grants amounting to **£104,500** as detailed in **Table 1**.
- II. Agree that any SEF Round 8 grant offer be formally issued upon confirmation from the event organisation that the event is confirmed as going ahead, match funding is in place, and the event still meets the SEF Round 8 criteria.
- III. Agree to continue delegation of powers to the Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth to allow any subsequent amendment to existing grant requests due to changes to the event/event budget. If there was a reduction in the final event costs that would result in delivery of a profit of more than £10,000 (all of which must be reinvested to future events) to the organisation and that this was sustained over a 3-year period, the final retention (10%) would not be paid out on the third year of the grant.
- IV. Agree to a delegation of powers to the Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth in consultation with the Leader and Depute Leaders, to allow resources to be reallocated to other events should a funded project no longer require funding.
- V. Agree to recommend to Council that as part of the budget in February 2026, that they agree a minimum of £90,000 base funding for Strategic Events and Festivals in order that the application process can commence for Round 9 (2027/28).
- VI. Agree and recommend to Council that any underspend from SEF Round 7 (2025/26) is earmarked and used to augment a future SEF round.

STRATEGIC EVENTS AND FESTIVALS FUND – ROUND 8 2026/27

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on Round 8 of the Council's Strategic Events and Festivals Fund (SEF). The report provides details of the applications submitted, and the applications recommended to receive grant funding.
- 2.2 In recognition of the importance of the events sector to the economy of Argyll and Bute, the SEF Fund was agreed by Council and first taken forward as a competitive fund in 2019/20. A critical element of the application requirement is that the event or festival be held in Argyll and Bute and be of a **strategic nature**, i.e. having the capacity to attract people from out with the area with a focus on national and international visitors, and generate significant economic benefits for the local community. To illustrate this, the economic impact in the area from the funded events and festivals in SEF Round 6 (2024/25) was approximately £9 million.
- 2.3 The total value of grant funding requested from the applications received significantly exceeds the budget available. The budget available for SEF Round 8 (2026/27) is £104,500 and a total of 26 applications were received, amounting to a total eligible request of **£154,338**. Out of these 26 applications, 10 are recommended for funding and can be viewed in **Table 1**.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that Members of the Policy and Resources Committee:
- I. Agree to the award of eligible SEF Round 8 grants amounting to **£104,500** as detailed in **Table 1**.
 - II. Agree that any SEF Round 8 grant offer be formally issued upon confirmation from the event organisation that the event is confirmed as going ahead, match funding is in place, and the event still meets the SEF Round 8 criteria.
 - III. Agree to continue delegation of powers to the Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth to allow any subsequent

amendment to existing grant requests due to changes to the event/event budget. If there was a reduction in the final event costs that would result in delivery of a profit of more than £10,000 (all of which must be reinvested to future events) to the organisation and that this was sustained over a 3-year period, the final retention (10%) would not be paid out on the third year of the grant.

- IV. Agree to a delegation of powers to the Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth in consultation with the Leader and Depute Leaders, to allow resources to be reallocated to other events should a funded project no longer require funding.
- V. Agree to recommend to Council that as part of the budget in February 2026, that they agree a minimum of £90,000 base funding for Strategic Events and Festivals in order that the application process can commence for Round 9 (2027/28).
- VI. Agree and recommend to Council that any underspend from SEF Round 7 (2025/26) is earmarked and used to augment a future SEF round.

4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 At the 20th February 2025 Council budget meeting, the Council agreed funding of £90,000 for SEF Round 8, to be augmented by any underspend in Round 6 (2024/2025). An additional £14,500 of funding has been identified from the 2025/2026 Crown Estates allocation, subject to endorsement by the Council's Policy and Resources Committee. As there was no underspend in Round 6, the total budget available for allocation is £104,500.
- 4.2 The overarching aim of the SEF 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. It is recognised that the strategic events and festivals sector is still facing challenging circumstances brought about as a result of changes in individuals' habits and the cost-of-living crisis. This has put a strain on the financial stability of many of the organisations, however the outlook is improving, and the Council's SEF fund continues to be of strategic importance to the events industry in Argyll and Bute. The fund provides critical support to events which support the local economy and will hopefully allow continued growth in the local sector reducing the risk of organisations and events ceasing to operate.
- 4.3 SEF Round 8 opened on 6th October 2025 and closed on 17th November 2025. A total of 26 applications were received, however three did not meet the eligibility criteria of SEF, leaving a total eligible request of £154,338. The budget available for Round 8 is £104,500 and therefore the fund is oversubscribed by £49,838. Of the 23 eligible applications, 10 applications are recommended for funding and can be viewed at Appendix 1. These demonstrate a variety of events and festivals from across the area that deliver

a wide range of event types, from sport to music and highland games. The combined forecast economic impact of the events recommended for funding is approximately £10.8 million, which represents a significant return on investment via the SEF.

- 4.4 The importance of all the events to the applicants and communities is recognised, however the fund has been oversubscribed, and not all applications can be supported. Officers performed a detailed assessment based on the information submitted and assessed eligibility, the viability of the events, how well the events fit the SEF criteria and could demonstrate a clear need for SEF funding, as well as the necessary financial and due diligence checks.
- 4.5 This has enabled an increased number of the highest scoring events and festivals to be awarded a grant. It should be noted that many of the applications are good quality, however several applications would benefit from more thought and time being taken to ensure that they are as robust as possible, especially given how competitive the fund now is.
- 4.6 The loss of any event to the area is likely to have a significant impact on the local economy, especially those events which are long standing. The impact of SEF Round 8 funding and future SEF round funding is recognised in assisting the sustainability of the events and the event organisations, many of whom are third sector organisations. The Council previously agreed to earmark underspend to augment future rounds up to Round 8 (2026/27), however the Council still requires to agree to allocate a baseline budget to allow a SEF Round 9 (2026/27). Members are therefore asked to consider and agree to a minimum of £90,000 for Round 9, allowing there to be certainty for the events industry that there will be future funding beyond 2026/2027.
- 4.7 EventScotland continue to support events through industry support funds and fully recognises the fragility of the sector. Council officers are in regular discussion with EventScotland to ensure that funding awarded is complimentary and does not duplicate Council funding.
- 4.8 In addition, officers continue to liaise with event organisers who have applied to previous rounds to provide information and support where appropriate.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The Round 8 SEF application and assessment process has been completed as per the guidance. A budget of £104,500 is available under Round 8, and a total of 26 applications were received with a total eligible request of £154,338. The Strategic Events and Festivals Fund aims to support events and festivals which are of strategic importance to Argyll and Bute, which will provide a meaningful economic impact of approximately £10.8 million and attract a wide range of visitors from outside the area. As such, there are 10 applications (see Table 1) recommended to receive funding. The total grant request in Table 1 is £104,500.

5.2 Whilst the events sector is fragile due to rising costs and challenges associated with the cost-of-living crisis, it is hoped that it will continue to build resilience and sustainability. There is no doubt that the continued support to the sector via future SEF funding will play a key part.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy - The Council's Economic Strategy supports the value of events and festivals for their positive impact on the economy and supporting the hospitality and tourism sectors.
- 6.2 Financial - SEF Round 8 2026/27 budget is £104,500. Eligible applications totaling £154,338 were received.
- 6.3 Legal - Award letters and grant contracts will be issued as and when a decision is made, and confirmation has been received that the event will go ahead.
- 6.4 HR - Resourced from existing staff.
- 6.5 Customer Service – None.
- 6.6 Risk – Events not supported may be at risk of not continuing. All events not recommended for funding will be signposted to information and resources to help identify other funding opportunities.
- 6.7 Climate Change - As part of the application process events must submit an Environmental Management Policy and this is part of the scoring process.
- 6.8 Fairer Scotland Duty – None.
- 6.9 Equalities - protected characteristics – None.
- 6.10 Consumer Duty – None.
- 6.11 Island Communities – The Fund seeks to support island economies by supporting increased levels of visitors.
- 6.12 Children's Rights and Wellbeing – None.

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

Councillor Math Campbell-Sturgess, Policy Lead for Business Development

8th December 2025

For further information contact:

Fergus Murray, Head of Service for Development and Economic Growth
Tel: 01546 604293

Kirsty Durrant, Economic Regeneration Officer, Transformational Projects and
Regeneration, Tel: 01436 657635

Appendix 1 - SEF Round 8 Recommended Grant Applications

APPENDIX 1 - SEF ROUND 8 RECOMMENDED GRANT APPLICATIONS

Table 1 – SEF Round 8 Recommended Grant Applications		
Event	Funding Request	Recommended Funding Award
£2,500 - £5,000 Fund		
Argyllshire Gathering Highland Games and Piping Competition	15,000	15,000
Helensburgh Christmas Lights Switch On and Festival of Light	5,000	5,000
Inveraray Highland Games	5,000	5,000
Live at the Loch	5,000	5,000
Oban Winter Festival	5,000	5,000
Sound of Gigha	2,500	2,500
Subtotal	<u>37,500</u>	<u>37,500</u>
£5,001 - £15,000 Fund		
Mull of Kintyre Music and Arts Festival	12,000	12,000
Mull Rally 2026	15,000	15,000
Tiree Wave Classic 2026	10,000	10,000
Subtotal	<u>37,000</u>	<u>37,000</u>
£15,001 and Over Fund		
Cowal Highland Gathering	30,000	30,000
Subtotal	<u>30,000</u>	<u>30,000</u>
Total SEF Round 8	<u>104,500</u>	<u>104,500</u>