

**Economic & Commercial Development
Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

Events Review

2013/14



Committee Membership:

Councillor Ash	Councillor Barned (Chairman)
Councillor Cox	Councillor Cuming
Councillor Hogg	Councillor Naghi
Councillor Newton	Councillor Mrs Paterson (Vice-chairman)
Councillor Mrs Stockell	

Background

The UK events sector currently contributes around £36.1 billion a year to the economy and, according to the Business Visits and Events Partnership¹ (BVEP), is forecast to grow to £48.4 billion by 2020. It also employs more than 550,000 people.



Events are diverse by definition. They range from conferences, exhibitions, incentive programmes, meetings and global summits to festivals, product launches, sporting spectacles and corporate hospitality. They contribute significantly to tourism, creative enterprise, trade and export development, as well as to the exchange of information and knowledge, and community cohesion.

Maidstone Council supports several events in the borough including the River Festival, the Mela and events held

in Jubilee Square among others and also works with private individual and companies to help them put on events for Maidstone's residents such as the Radio One Big Weekend and the Social Festival. However; the value of these events in terms of attracting people to the borough and the extent to which residents value these events was unknown.

Review of Current Arrangements

At the start of the year the Cabinet Member for Economic & Commercial Development informed the Committee that he was looking to put in place an events calendar covering a 2 year period as he recognises there is an abundance of events taking place in Maidstone but co-ordinated approach to this is required. This was to be taken forward with the new Head of Commercial and Economic Development.

When the Committee embarked upon the review, they discovered that the Council did not have or use an impact assessment tool to assess the impact or value of events to the borough, neither was there any requirement for partners or private individuals putting on events to undertake any assessment of the outcomes of their events. Ultimately this meant that the Committee were unable to quantify what value previous events have been to the borough and in turn if attendance and satisfaction with particular events such as the Mela or River festival is increasing or declining.

The Head of Commercial and Economic Development was a new post created in 2013. The Officer was not in post until December 2013 but the Committee invited the officer to their meeting to hear their vision for the borough and highlighted to her their concerns about a lack of an event impact

¹ BVEP is an umbrella organisation representing leading trade and professional organisations, government agencies and other significant influencers in the business visits and events sector.

assessment tool. At this point the Committee were informed that the Head of Commercial & Economic Development intended to introduce an Economic Impact Assessment tool to assess the value of events that could be used year on year.

This tool includes an Economic Impact Calculator, a Social Return on Investment (SROI) Calculator and a Gross Value Added (GVA) Calculator.

This particular tool, available nationally, is a standard approach used by other local authorities with the advantages that it is free, widely used across the UK and is also used by funders and policy makers. However; there was some concern expressed by a witness that this tool would only work for large events due to the amount of people that would need to be surveyed to produce a statically robust assessment. The Maidstone Area Arts Partnership are in the process of developing a similar tool for the assessment of smaller events.

Unfortunately as this tool could not be applied retrospectively to previous events it was agreed that the remainder of the review should focus on looking at the support the council could give others in putting on events across the borough.

Although the Event Impact Assessment tool will allow the Council to understand the how an event had contributed to the borough's economy and how it was received by visitors and residents it was found that there is no formal mechanism for reporting how an event has gone, to discuss lessons learnt and address any incidents that may have occurred. This was felt to be vital in understanding how we can improve and provide advice to others going forward, therefore it was recommended that all major events should have some form of debrief in addition to the assessment tool to capture feedback from those involved in running the event.



1. That the Committee supports the compiling of an Events Calendar by the Cabinet member for Economic & Commercial Development.
2. That once in place, the Economic Impact Assessment online tool should be used for all regular events that happen in the borough that receive funding or support from the Council.
3. That once in place, the Economic Impact Assessment tool should be publicised to event promoters and those who have held events in the borough over the past three years.
4. That a debriefing should happen with the relevant Head of Service following each Council funded or supported event to capture feedback and understand what lessons can be learnt.
5. That the Council works with Maidstone Area Arts Partnership, and other partners, to create an Economic Impact Assessment tool for smaller events; including a matrix to determine which tool should be used for each event.

Event Support



It was considered that although Maidstone Borough Council did hold some events the majority of events held in the borough were runs by private companies/individuals. Therefore it was important that guidance in relation to holding events was clear and easy to use.

The Safety Advisory Group (SAG) deals with issues surrounding the planning and organising of major public events held in the borough. The group consists of council representatives and partners such as the police. The group deals with events where 1,000 or more people are expected to attend. Comments from witnesses show that the SAG is valued by event organisers, who agreed that utilising the expertise of SAG helps to address any safety concerns was important to ensuring a well-managed and safe event.

There are guidance documents and forms prepared by the Safety Advisory Group to help event organisers with the planning, organisation and delivery of safe events which are available on the Council's website. This guidance however is spread across 17 different documents none of which includes a checklist. Due to the various requirements around holding events members considered that a checklist would be useful to event organisers and in particular first-time event organisers who may need some extra assistance.

There are a number of legal duties in regards to health and safety that are the responsibility of an Event Organiser. An event organiser has a duty to plan, manage and monitor the event to make sure that workers and the visiting public are not exposed to health and safety risks. Plans should be in place to respond effectively to health and safety incidents and other emergencies that might occur at an event. This emergency plan needs to be in proportion to the level of risk presented by event activities and the potential extent and severity of the incident. Event Organisers must have insurance for their business as well as insurance that covers each event, therefore it is easy to end up with too little or too much cover or where there are several groups or partners involved confusion about who is covered and for what. There was concern that the liability for an event could rest on one person's shoulders, a daunting experience, with that individuals personal assets at risk should an incident occur.



There is currently no forum for Event Organisers in Maidstone. Several witnesses said that they would value the opportunity to speak to others involved in Events in the area to shared experiences, best practice and possibly resources. Such a group could also ensure that events are not duplicated, improve co-ordination so that competing events are held on different days and allow alignment between event themes. This could be achieved without formal meetings through the use of technology.



6. That the event documents should be reviewed with the aim of creating an Events Pack for anyone wishing to hold an event which includes a checklist.
7. That where MBC provide funding for an event, it should take on the role of Event Organiser (and the legalities set out above involved in this) and delegates the event management to a responsibly persons.
8. That an Event forum is set up to facilitate better sharing on information between the relevant event organisations/partners.

Communication & Publicity

Some years ago there was a database of culture and leisure based organisation that was administered by the Council. This database meant that communications could be sent on mass to relevant organisations and that event promoters could see what organisations may have a stake or interest in a particular event and make contact accordingly. This database no longer exists but one witness felt that this was a useful tool that the council should look to resurrect.



As part of the review the Committee heard how links were being developed between the Hazlitt and the Museum, with plans to use the Museum collection to promote the service in other places around the borough. The Committee thought this was an excellent idea but considered that this could be extended to other organisations and collection holders in the borough to promote their attraction. For example there could be

a carriage at Kent Life to signpost people into the town, or if there is a particular event on, for example hop picking there could be a display of agricultural tool in the town centre to spark interest. It was concluded that even when there is no collection to display that there should be more signposting in high traffic areas in the town centre to events happening elsewhere in the borough for example signposting in Jubilee Square when there are events happening in Mote Park. This could be done in a variety of ways such as banners or use of the electronic notice boards.



There was conflicting evidence about whether or not Maidstone residents know what events happen in the borough. The committee heard that the majority of people that are members of Kent Life live within 30 minutes' drive time of the attraction, that for the river festival boats come from around the world and the data from Cambridge model showing that approximately 66,000 overseas visitors stayed overnight in Maidstone in 2011. The Committee felt that more could be done to promote Maidstone Attractions and Events to Maidstone residents and would like every household to receive a copy of the new events calendar (recommendation 1) once compiled.

9. That consideration is given to resurrecting the database of leisure and cultural based organisations, including the possibility of sharing the maintenance and administration of this database with another agency.
10. That the possibility of sending out an Events Pamphlet with the Annual Council Tax bill be investigated for 2015 and beyond.
11. That the feasibility of using items from Maidstone attractions (such as art or museum collection items) be investigated to promote and signpost visitors to other attractions and events in the borough. For example having a piece from Kent Life displayed at the Hazlitt.
12. That a mechanism for signposting people in the Town Centre to events happening elsewhere in the borough be introduced, as well as exploring opportunities for cross marketing of events.

Opportunities

As part of the review the Committee, when discussing what help and support is available for Event Organisers, came up with a commercial idea that may have the potential to generate income for the Council. At present the appetite for the suggestions outlined below are unknown but the Committee agreed that these ideas should be investigated further.



One witness informed the Committee that it would be useful to have a centralised list of items that could be used at events such as fencing, toilets, marquees and other associated event equipment. While this certainly would be useful in its own right it led to the Committee to consider the event equipment the Council currently holds and whether MBC were making best use of its equipment. It was suggested that equipment that wasn't being used

for a Council event could be made available to hire for other events in the borough. The Committee decided this should be explored further as it could be a commercial opportunity for MBC.

13. That the council should compile a list of all the event equipment it holds and publish this list accordingly, and encourage other event organisers/providers to do the same.
14. That arrangements for hiring event equipment, when it is not in use, to partners and other event providers in the borough be investigated.

Thank you

The Panel considered evidence from a variety of stakeholders and would like to thank the following individuals and organisations who have personally contributed to this review:

Ken Scott, Maidstone Area Arts Partnership
Natalie Price, Park Wood Leisure
Emily Hirons, Kent Life
Natalie Kirk, Kent Life
Alan Reading, Maidstone Tourism Association

Cllr Malcolm Greer
Dawn Hudd
Laura Dickson
Jennifer Hunt

Thanks to the MBC Communications Team and Geoff Partner for the photographs used in this report.

The Committee would also like to thank the council officers and members of the public who took the time to contact the Committee and offer their opinions in relation to Events. All of the correspondences received were considered and added a valuable dimension to this review.

