

Review of Festivals – autumn 07 monitoring

In March 2007 the Adult, Leisure and Culture Select Committee produced its report reviewing the Borough's two international festivals BIFF (Billingham International Folklore Festival) and SIRF (Stockton International Riverside Festival). The report concluded that Stockton Borough can rightfully be pleased to be at the forefront of street festival entertainment in the region and as much capital that can be made of this fact should be raised.

The report made a number of recommendations and, collectively, significant progress has been made to achieve improvements in the organisation of the events, partnership working and the experience for local people to participate in and enjoy the events.

BIFF and Arts Development mutual working arrangements

The Council's Arts Development Manager and BIFF management team have developed a close working relationship over the last two years, helping BIFF deal with the changes in technical and legislative requirements for such an event and maximising promotion and profile raising opportunities for the festival.

- The Technical, Health & Safety and Support Services Group, bringing together emergency services, health & safety, licensing, insurance, highways & transport, events and cultural services, has proved to be a valuable addition to the management and delivery of the festival and is now firmly established as part of the planning and organisation of future festivals.
- Discussions about linked and complementary programming between BIFF and SIRF resulted in two BIFF groups being involved in SIRF Community Carnival this year for the first time. The groups from South Korea and Italy clearly enjoyed their involvement in the Carnival and their performances were very popular with visitors. BIFF gained additional publicity through broad media coverage of the event. BIFF and Arts Development are extremely enthusiastic to build on this success and are exploring ideas to bring BIFF and Carnival groups together to celebrate and share common interests and differences through involvement in both BIFF and SIRF in 2008.

Travel and public transport information

The SIRF website has developed over the last three years to become a most important promotion and marketing tool for the festival, providing valuable information for local residents and artists and visitors from outside the area. This year, for the first time, the SIRF website offered downloadable information on public transport, including bus and train timetables and maps showing public car parks in the town centre. Further work is planned to develop the website to improve information offered, including details of road closures and diversions during SIRF events.

Cultural Diversity

In November 2006, Stockton Council's Arts Development Team produced Stockton Carnival Arts Strategy 2007 – 2009. One of its key objectives is to broaden the range of individuals and groups involved in SIRF Community Carnival to reflect the cultural diversity within the communities of Stockton Borough. The appointment of a Carnival and Street Arts Development Officer in March this year enabled significant progress to be made to achieve this objective.

- The carnival involved 1011 people of all ages
- 14 local cultural diversity groups participated, 13 of them new groups, out of a total of 37 groups
- 6 local ethnic minority groups participated compared to 1 last year:
 - African Women's Voice
 - Barundian Dancers
 - African Sport Embassy
 - Amabutho African arts
 - Tees Valley World Drummers
 - Worldbeaters

Information and access for people with disabilities

This year the SIRF Management Group reviewed its publicity materials in order to include information for people with disabilities. For the first time the SIRF website included maps showing dropped kerbs for easy wheelchair movement, disabled toilets and disabled carparking. The very nature of the Festival being outdoors with performances in public places makes most of the shows accessible for all people. However, information about any shows thought to be inaccessible or necessitating warning, such as strobe lighting, would be included in the Festival brochure and on the website. For future festivals, a representative from the recently established Disability Advisory Group will be invited to programme, marketing and technical and safety meetings.