

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

5TH MARCH 2009

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

**REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT – LEAD CABINET MEMBER COUNCILLOR R. COOK
ARTS, CULTURE AND LEISURE – LEAD CABINET MEMBER COUNCILLOR MRS. WOMPHEY**

CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL AND STOCKTON INTERNATIONAL RIVERSIDE FESTIVAL REVIEW 2008

1. Summary

This report presents the outcomes and outputs for the Christmas Festival and Markets 2008, and Stockton International Riverside Festival (SIRF) 2008 to inform future investment and programming.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Note the feedback received on the Christmas Festival & Market 2008 and SIRF 2008
2. Agree the outline proposals for taking forward the 2009 Christmas Festival & Market

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

To report back on two major festivals so that future investment and programming can be targeted towards achieving more appeal amongst residents of the Borough and visitors alike, and in doing so help to support existing businesses in Stockton Town Centre.

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (**paragraph 8**) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (**paragraphs 10 and 11 of the code of conduct**).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held -

- in a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;
- in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (**paragraph 12 of the Code**).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.

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SUMMARY

This report presents the outcomes and outputs for the Christmas Festival and Markets 2008, and Stockton International Riverside Festival (SIRF) 2008 to inform future investment and programming.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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- Note the feedback received on the Christmas Festival & Market 2008 and SIRF 2008
- Agree the outline proposals for taking forward the 2009 Christmas Festival & Market

DETAIL

Background

1. Stockton Borough Council has demonstrated that investment in large scale events can change people's perceptions of an area, attract visitors and shoppers and foster community pride. SIRF and Billingham International Folklore Festival (BIFF) have both been hugely successful over the years and 2008 witnessed the first Christmas Festival and Market, which adopted many of the principles of SIRF to provide a new large scale celebratory winter event for the town, as well as an enhanced shopping experience for visitors.
2. The programme of festivals is to be expanded further in 2009. A spring festival based on the Tees Regatta and the Infinity Bridge opening is planned for May, summer festivals including SRIF 2009, a River Festival in August and BIFF are proposed, whilst ideas for festivals based around other religions, such as Diwali or Eid, are being considered as part of the festival programme. The winter festival of Stockton Sparkles including the Christmas and Market 2009 conclude this programme.
3. To supplement this programme of festivals further events will be planned throughout the year with many of these also being focussed on improving footfall and spend across the Borough's town centres.

Christmas Festival and Market

Context

4. In April 2008, Cabinet approved an outline proposal to develop a themed 4-day Christmas Festival & Market of regional significance to be held in Stockton over a 3 year period. This would build upon the Stockton Sparkles Christmas Festival started in 2006, as well as enhancing and supporting the retail offer in Stockton Town Centre during Christmas as well as complementing the retail offer in Stockton during the Christmas period.
5. A high quality, well managed and publicised Christmas market will grow to become a regionally significant event and would play a key role in ensuring the vitality, viability and attractiveness of Stockton town centre during this crucial period. This will assist in helping to change perceptions of Stockton and reinforce its forte as the home of great markets, where there was always something going on, making it 'a place to visit, not just a place to shop'. Retailers, hospitality providers and other associated town centre businesses would benefit from the additional footfall and spend generated.

Description of Events

6. A brief description of activity which formed part of the Stockton Christmas Festival & Market for 2008 follows. Site builds were co-ordinated by the Council's Events Team and consultant, in co-ordination with external partners, contractors and many other service areas within the authority.

Stockton Market

7. Thirty-eight Market Traders stood for the first 3 days of the Festival in a location north of the Town Hall. Some traders had relocated from their pitches south of the Town Hall filling in for the regular traders who were unable to commit for the 3 days. Normal rents were charged for the Saturday, with Thursday and Friday rents set at half for each day. Further traders took up the opportunity to trade in front of the Castlegate Centre on the Saturday.

Crafters Market

8. Twenty eight decorated log cabins were purchased and set up in the Parish Gardens for the event, selling craft items, festive gifts and refreshments. This site had two star shades which were used as eating areas, up-lighted with heating and flooring, as well as for performance space for some street theatre and a church service. The site was lit with a central canopy of lights that lit the Parish Church, the surrounding trees and the entrance from the High Street. Crafters were also located in The Shambles, along with a Santa's Grotto; a display on Stockton's market heritage; and children's face painting.

Farmers Market

9. The monthly Stockton Farmers Market was relocated the Farmers Market from the normal pitch on the High Street to Wellington Street. This market took place on the Thursday and was supplemented by a mobile kitchen used for demonstrations of cookery.

Circus

10. A Christmas themed circus also entertained the public with a total of 4500 people attending 9 free shows over the four day period, although tickets were still needed to control numbers. The circus was fully visible from Riverside Rd and was entered via the footbridge leading from Calverts Lane. Disabled access and car parking were available on Riverside Road Car Park. These arrangements could be pre arranged through the Tourist Information Centre.

Street Theatre

11. Street theatre took place throughout the event in and around the High Street area. The programme included free 'highlight' static shows such as a mechanical Polar Bear, Australian Fire Jugglers and aerial shows with walkabout entertainment. It included professional artists complemented by a small programme of community performances.

Victorian Fair

12. A four day Victorian fair also took place adjacent to the Shambles. Attractions included a Galloping Horses, mini Ferris wheel, Helter Skelter, Swing Boats, Coconut Shy, Hoopla, Pop Gun Range, Candy Floss and Popcorn and all staff dressed in Victorian costume. It is estimated that over 10,000 visits were made to this attraction by the public.

World Fair

13. The World Fair event concentrated predominantly on performances and taster workshops run by local community groups including African drumming, belly dancing, salsa, samba drumming and choral music. The event also comprised food and other products from some of the ethnic communities that live in and around Stockton.

Fireworks

14. Two pyrotechnic events took place over the four days. The first occurred at the end of the Australian Fire show on the first day, on the Castlegate Centre roof. The second and larger event, took place on the roof of Municipal Buildings at the end of the four day event.

Staged Entertainments

15. Tees Music Alliance put on 4 days of music and entertainment including 60 acts and 392 young people from around the Borough performing. The programme was split into two elements; a subsidised programme of activity in The Georgian Theatre which operated on a paying customer basis, with reduced ticket prices; and a free, outdoor programme branded as the '12 days of Christmas'. The programme ventured into World Music, Comedy and Cabaret – alongside some of the venue's more 'traditional' output of rock and pop music. A range of workshop based activities were also provided.

Stockton Sparkles

16. The already established Stockton Sparkles events ran each weekend leading up to and including Christmas Eve. This included events such as the Christmas Light switch-on; the Reindeer Parade; the Christmas Carnival Parade through the High Street; a Christmas Land Train; and a whole host of street theatre.

Familiarisation Visit

17. Fifteen coach and tour companies were invited to attend a 2 day familiarisation visit as part of the wider promotion of the Christmas Markets festival. The aim of this event was to encourage these companies to return with visitors to the Borough of Stockton. The guests were given a tour of various visitor attractions across the Borough as well as time to experience the Christmas Festival in the Town Centre. Presentations were also given to raise awareness of other events we have throughout the year.

Feedback from Visitors

18. The Council commissioned NWA Social & Market Research to undertake a survey of visitors to the Christmas Festival & Market to ascertain information and opinions relating to the Festival. The following summary highlights some of the key trends arising from over 200 responses received from the 600 visitors interviewed during the Festival.
- Over 92% of all respondents felt that the Events had a positive effect on the way they view Stockton Town Centre.
 - The vast majority (85%) of respondents described the Events as positive. Over half said that this was their first visit to the Stockton Christmas Events
 - Nearly one in ten respondents said that they attended with someone who lived outside of the Tees Valley with Saturday the most frequently attended day.
 - The level of satisfaction with the accessibility of events was positive and less than 8% of respondents who had someone in their party who suffered from a long term illness or disability, were dissatisfied with the access arrangements.
 - Over three quarters of all respondents visited the Crafters Market Fair at the Parish Gardens, this also proving to be the most liked attraction throughout the Festival.
 - Other activities most liked included the Christmas Circus and selected Street Entertainment.
 - The average spend per person attending the Festival was £28.60 including travel, refreshments, merchandise or other expenditure and any accommodation.

Feedback from Businesses

Crafters

19. Over 90% of the crafters in Parish Gardens said their impression of the event was excellent or very good, with every trader willing in principle to participate again next year.
20. Crafters were very pleased with the service provided by the Council in terms of the planning and the operation of the market. A few small suggestions for improvement were received ranging from the 9pm finish considered as being too late; the location of the market needed more publicity and signage around the town. More entertainment within Parish Gardens was another suggestion such as choirs, jazz band and a better variety of music.

Wellington Square

21. From the retailers who supplied evidence of takings, almost 10% of businesses had an average increase in takings over the four day festival. The footfall figures provided by the shopping centre also indicate an increase of 7% compared to the previous week. 48 % of businesses felt the festival was good; 40 % of businesses felt the festival was average; and only 12% of businesses were of the view that the festival was disappointing.

Castlegate Centre

22. Similarly, all Castlegate Shopping Centre retailers who responded thought the festival was positive, being festive, of good appearance and atmosphere, and an excellent opportunity to be built upon to bring more visitors to Stockton. From the stores who supplied footfall and expenditure figures, on average footfall for the retailers was up 11% and expenditure was up 13% in relation to the previous week. This indicates a significant rise in visitors to the centre of 58,000 and shows that the festival directly contributed to the rise of trade within the centre. Some of the Castlegate Centre retailers were of the opinion that more entertainment and activity was required south of the Town Hall to further improve footfall and vibrancy.

Other Town Centre Businesses

23. Of those town centre businesses which do not fall within Castlegate or Wellington Square Shopping Centres, 38% of businesses said the fair was very good or good with 25% finding the fair disappointing, leaving 37% with no opinion. From those responses received a 15% average increase in footfall was experienced, with over 9% average increases in spend encountered by these businesses.

Market Traders

24. Only 5 of those market traders who responded on the success of the Christmas Market Festival replied positively scoring the festival highly, with 30 responding negatively and 5 responses were of the opinion that the festival had made no difference to their business.
- 17.5 % said that Stockton Council should abandon the festival all together.
 - 30 % expressed disappointment at being moved from their normal pitches.
 - 20 % wanted the log cabins from the Parish Gardens integrated in with the normal market
 - 30 % said the event needed to have stronger marketing and better advertising.
25. The traders at the farmers market were also surveyed for the day they traded, with many reporting that businesses had not gone as well as previous months which they felt was due to pitching in a new location and not enough advertising to let customers know they had moved into Wellington Street.

Retail Forum

26. Feedback has also been received from Stockton's Retail Forum regarding the Christmas Market Festival and its impact on business in the town centre. Retailers at the last Forum meeting concluded that the festival had a positive impact on footfall although not many businesses stayed open late during the Festival. It was felt that the impact upon trade was dependent upon how close the business was in relation to the High Street and Parish Gardens. The closer to the events a business was, the greater the impact upon spend.

Familiarisation Visit (Coach Operators)

27. Of the Coach and Tour companies represented at this event, 100% said they would bring their groups back to Stockton as a result of the even and 99% said they were happy to be contacted about similar events in the Borough. The group had the opportunity to comment on the specific attractions that were visited during the tour. Although there was no negative feedback, some organisations commented that particular attractions may not be suitable for their clientele.
28. Overall, the feedback from every company was positive, with Arc and Teesside Princess River Cruiser getting a 100% positive result and enquiries for future bookings. It should be noted that there has already been one direct booking as a result of his event although this has now been withdrawn because size of the party cannot be accommodated at this location.

The Way Forward

29. The Christmas Festival's primary aim was to stimulate trade by bringing in shoppers into the town centre. Early results of the first festival show record takings in many of our retail outlets. One leading Castlegate Centre store reported a 72% increase in visitors during the Christmas Festival week and a 54% increase in takings during this time, while Wellington Square reported a 24% increase in people shopping during December 2008 in comparison to December 2007.

Festival Timings & Programming

30. The timing of the Festival is crucial to its success in maximising the additional number of visitors and 'spend' within the Town Centre during the Christmas period. It has been suggested that in consultation with local businesses that 2009's Festival should be held during the last week running up to Christmas when High Street shops are often open late until 8:00pm (Friday 18th December to Thursday 24th December).

Events

31. Based largely upon the feedback received it is recommended that resources need to be concentrated upon the continuation and enhancement of the most attractive and successful events of the 2008 Festival, namely the Crafters Christmas Market, the circus, street theatre and live music.
32. Despite the great success of 2008's Crafters Market, it is proposed that improvements be made by the introduction of more street theatre, carol singing and brass bands so as to add further to the vibrancy of this event. Most respondents wanted to continue to have a spread of walkabout entertainment throughout the day and include the addition of a number of 'highlight', possibly commissioned, performances in future years.
33. Similarly it is proposed that those less attractive and less successful events such as the farmers market, charities fair and world fair be discontinued from the festival. For example, the world fair did not attract great numbers of visitors and was not Christmas themed. This could potentially be held to coincide in October with Diwali (Hindu Festival of Lights) to showcase dancers and singers as part of a community carnival parade. Whilst the concept of a World Fair is a good one in terms of providing an event which reflects the diversity of our local community and increases people's awareness of other cultures, it would perhaps work better as a larger-scale stand-alone event.
34. The provision of a continental market is viewed as being a major attraction for Stockton and it is proposed that a reputable operator be secured soon before they all become fully booked. A high profile continental market operation would undoubtedly bolster footfall in the centre, either as part of the Festival or as part of the wider Stockton Sparkles programme.
35. With regards to Stockton Market, it is clear from feedback that participation in the festival over 3 days did not result in significant increases in trade, especially on the Thursday and Friday. Despite close liaison and consultation with traders to maximise benefits and opportunities for traders to remain in their normal pitches, it was inevitable that in order to accommodate some of the other events, some traders would be displaced resulting in some negative feedback. It is therefore proposed that the normal Wednesday and Saturday markets and to a lesser extent the Friday market be continued without disruption and that traders are not invited to commit to attending all days of the festival.

Locations

36. The overall location of successful events such as the Crafters in the Parish Gardens needs to take precedence and capacity built towards the High Street via Silver Street and around the Cultural Quarter to cater for the likely increases in demand for this area. The demand will increase partly due to the success of the Crafters this year and because the Shambles will not be available during 2009's Festival. Given the success of the Christmas Circus event, the site at the Riverside Car Park should be continued to be used in future years, with the bridge access leading from the circus into the focal point of 2009's festival.

37. It is also proposed that the Victorian Fair would be better suited near to Silver Street within Bishop Street Car Park with operators in appropriate Victorian costume adding to the atmosphere created in the Parish Gardens.
38. Suggestions that more entertainment and market activity south of the Town Hall was lacking, need further consideration. Clearly Stockton has a long High Street and the concentration of events in future years around the Cultural Quarter and Parish Gardens does little for enhancing footfall and business at the Castlegate area of the town centre. It is therefore proposed that any continental or other specialist market that can be attracted to Stockton, either as part of the Christmas Festival or the Stockton Sparkles event, be located in front of the Castlegate Centre. They would not displace Stockton market traders here and their presence will significantly enhance trade in one of the two shopping centres.

Marketing

39. Marketing of the festival and its events in future years will need to be more targeted and greater use made of the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) staff in view of the high number of enquiries received at the TIC in the days preceding and during the Christmas Festival 2008.
40. Improved advertising of events and their locations is proposed in 2009, whilst the newly launched websites, "Visit Stockton" and "Bite to Eat" will also assist in the promotion of various events using the Town Centre's restaurants.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

41. Funding of £550,000 has been earmarked in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) over three years for the Festival to cover both capital and revenue expenditure. The budget for the first year was front loaded to allow effective pump priming of the Christmas Festival, allowing increased funding for a substantial marketing campaign and investment in equipment which can be used in future years.

Christmas Festival Budget Year 1 2 & 3

Item	Year 1 Forecast	Year1 Actual	Year 2	Year 3
Total cost	314,800	347,387	135,450	99,750
Anticipated income – general, event	11,500	5,901	26,000	45,000

42. It is envisaged some of the £550,000 funding will also be rolled over from the initial 3 year period. With expenditure exceeding the budget for Year 1 and a need to ensure the financial sustainability of the Festival in future years, it is necessary to examine ways of bringing in additional income that significantly improves on the £5,901 raised in Year 1. A further charge must be levied at the Crafters and the Victorian Fair in particular, as well as consideration to the introduction of a fee to attend the Circus and other events. The intention has always been to make the event as self financing as possible, hence the need to introduce charging on an incremental basis.

SIRF 2008

Context

43. 2008 was the 21st SIRF and was widely regarded to be one of the finest ever. Alongside the main SIRF programme, the Community Carnival and Riverside Fringe continued to grow and develop, offering visitors a diverse, inclusive and exciting Festival experience.
44. The annual SIRF Visitor Survey, conducted by Norma Wilburn Associates (NWA), captured 1,232 names, postcodes, and contact information. Following the Festival, a cross-section of 448 people was selected and completed a detailed, structured telephone or online survey. We now have this more detailed data for five consecutive years, captured in the same way, allowing more robust trend analysis. All statistics quoted in this report are taken from the NWA survey unless otherwise stated:
- Overall satisfaction at 96.2%, with the highest ever proportion (45%) in the very good, giving SIRF 08 the top 'very good' rating
 - 87.9% of visitors said the Festival has a positive effect on Stockton's image with only 0.9% saying it had a negative effect.
 - 1,086 participants in the Community Carnival, an increase of 7% on last year
 - 41 groups participated, 17 new groups and 13 diverse groups, every ward was represented
 - Fringe footfall was an estimated 60,000, an increase of 20%.
 - SIRF and Fringe combined presented more than 240 performances,
 - Flying Dragon Circus - successful collaboration with Beijing Chaoyang
 - Mean spend per capita £41.70
 - 2 BIFF groups took part in the Carnival

Description of Events

45. The SIRF main programme took place on different areas of the town centre; Trinity Green, Stockton High Street, Parish Gardens and Church Road.

Main Programme

46. Two large scale shows were presented on Trinity Green; Flying Dragon Circus, and World Famous & Terrafolk presenting 'Full Circle'. This was the most popular part of the Festival with 57.4% of visitors saying it was their most liked event.
47. Flying Dragon Circus was commissioned for SIRF as a result of our 6 year partnership project with Beijing Chaoyang Intercultural Association. This was the first time in several years that the Festival charged for an event with tickets £12.50 full price, £5.00 concession and £25.00 family ticket - 2 adults and 2 children go free. This didn't deter visitors as average audiences were 350 for each of the 8 performances, approximately 80% of capacity.
48. The High Street is where people naturally congregate and the festival presented a critical mass of small and medium scale shows over the five days as well as the Finale. The range and diversity of shows was outstanding, including, acrobatics, circus, theatre, dance, humour and improvisation.
49. Parish Gardens continues to be a prime location for SIRF with its ability to create a completely different ambience within 100 metres of the High Street. The Festival catered for different audiences with a daytime family friendly programme and a show for adult audiences at night, demonstrating the versatility and value of Parish Gardens for outdoor entertainment

50. Church Road and the spaces in front of Municipal Buildings and SPLASH proved to be excellent sites for medium to large scale work. Three shows were programmed in this area. The only problem that arose was the density of audience which spilled onto the road, requiring careful stewarding and traffic calming. In future years we should consider short-term road closures to allow the safe use of the full site.
51. One of the shows on Church Road, *The Urban Playground* by UK company, *Prodigal Theatre*, was a fantastic energetic show fusing Parkour with contemporary dance and break dancing. This show was very popular with young people and the company invited audience members to participate in a short Parkour workshop following each show. It was great to see young people enthusiastically trying out the techniques.
 - *Originating in France, Parkour is the art of moving from one point to another as efficiently and quickly as possible, using the abilities of the human body to overcome obstacles, which can be anything in the surrounding environment.*
52. The finale took place on the High Street to a capacity audience and was a spectacular combination of large mobile structures, silver costumed creatures on stilts carrying fire baskets, music, pyrotechnics, and all the action taking place amongst the audience and culminating with a wonderful hot air balloon overhead.
53. The show delighted the majority of our audience but several visitors contacted us to express their concerns about the safety of audiences very close to the performers. We thoroughly investigated all concerns and responded to people in writing.

Commissioning and premieres

54. SIRF continued its unique role as a commissioning Festival, collaborating with other festivals, organisations and companies on five commissions and playing a key role in the founding of the Without Walls consortium to support the development, promotion and presentation of new and emerging British street theatre companies. Commissioning new work is inherently risky and expensive, you don't know exactly what you are going to get and how much it will cost to stage. However, SIRF attracts significant funds and profile because of its commissioning role, and Stockton audiences get to see work first and often work which is not presented anywhere else in the UK. The other significant hidden benefit of commissioning is the attendance at SIRF of other event promoters from the UK, Europe and North America, who come here to see the best emerging work. The frequent presence of these key decisions makers helps us attract other performances at a good price or where they are turning down invitations to other events in order to come to Stockton.

Community Carnival

55. 2008's Community Carnival was SIRF's largest to date – 1086 participants and 41 groups, including 17 new groups and 13 diverse groups.
56. The theme 'Germination - Stockton Sows the Seeds of Innovation' represents our first year as partners in *Imagination Our Nation*, a five year project where partners from across the country work to a shared vision in the run up to 2012 Cultural Olympiad. This partnership has enabled us to network with other carnivals and festivals leading to a group from Coventry Carnival coming to perform at our event. We plan to build on these exchanges in the future.
57. This year we delivered year two of our training programme for artists and community leaders to equip them with skills and techniques required for carnival production. We also provided a programme of professional development for dance and music. This resulted in the development of Carnival Crew Tees Valley (CCTV), a group of young dancers and drummers created specifically to perform at Stockton Carnival and events throughout the region and the UK. Their style of music and performance reflects the unique style of Stockton Carnival and they also performed at local events including Middlesbrough Mela,

Darlington Carnival, Hartlepool Maritime Festival as well as nationally at Coventry Olympic Handover celebration and Thames Festival. We will continue to develop this group as they are now an integral part of Carnival end event activity throughout the year

Stockton Riverside Fringe Festival

58. The Fringe has grown dramatically this year and successfully shifted perceptions that its main role is to promote local bands. The mix of headline bands, acoustic stage and comedy tent were excellent in bringing in both young and old. The events during the day were well attended by families with young children and the night time events by a wide range of ages. Once again, the Fringe was located on the Riverside with additional events programmed in the Georgian Theatre
59. This year the Fringe undertook its own market research by interviewing 238 audience members over three days on Riverside. Key findings were: Attendance figures were high; the site was filled to capacity on Saturday night (10,000 audience) and very near on both the other nights (8,500 on Friday and 9,500 on Sunday) and over the whole weekend attracted in excess of 60,000 people to the site. The Tees Valley area brought in 94.9% of the audience whilst the neighbouring counties (County Durham and North Yorkshire) brought in 1.8% - this suggests that the Fringe mainly attracts local people and mirrors last year's evaluation results. The majority of comments about the music programming were positive and 92.5% of audience members when asked rated the programming either 'Excellent' or 'Good'.

ARC

60. For the first time in many years ARC participated in SIRF by hosting one of the Festival shows, *Super Night Shot by Gob Squad*, and running the Festival Club. ARC was delighted with the response to the Club and wishes to develop it further for future years.

Marketing and publicity

61. Our four year contract with Rocket Science came to an end in 2007 and we went out to tender to appoint new Marketing and Design Consultants for 2008 – 2010. We appointed Blue River Design, a Newcastle based company with a good reputation and vast experience of working with arts and cultural organisations and with an impressive portfolio of clients such as the Baltic, Arts Council England and Theatre Royal, Newcastle. The company promised a fresh approach for SIRF; higher quality design, creating an interactive website, regular newsletters and increasing the profile of the festival across the region, particularly on Tyneside and Northumberland.
62. Blue River were a big disappointment; They missed numerous deadlines, failed to deliver an interactive website and failed to produce and implement a marketing strategy for the festival. The company did improve the design and quality of printed publicity but produced it in the same format as in previous years, failing to come up with fresh approaches to promoting and marketing the festival. For these reasons Blue River's contract was terminated following this year's event.
63. The Visitor Experience Team was set up in 2006 to offer an improved experience to Festival visitors, town centre businesses and artists performing at the event. Team members were distinctive in their orange T-shirts and caps with the slogan **stop me and ask me about SIRF**. The Team was supported by the Council's Tourism Department and has been extremely successful and an asset to the Festival. There is tremendous scope to develop the role of the Team to enhance and diversify the visitor experience leading up to and during the Festival, including implementing the Disability Access Action Plan, improving directional signage, visual information and generally making the centre of the town and riverside look more festive.

Technical and safety management

64. On the whole, SIRF 2008 was well planned and executed. As in previous years, the various internal and external partners collaborated to create an experience for the visitor that was unified and coherent. The health and safety, security and stewarding worked well and, once again, the Council's Health and Safety Manager and Emergency Planning Officer described the health and safety information and risk assessments provided by the companies as excellent.
65. The most significant problem for SIRF this year was the unexpected departure of the Technical and Safety Manager due to ill health 6 weeks before the Festival began. Our contractor, Event International, replaced the one role with two, Production Manager and Safety Officer, which proved to be a successful combination. They found that very little had been confirmed or was in place for the technical and stage management and spent the next few weeks on "catch up". The area that we were determined to achieve and once again failed to provide adequate plans on time was to the Markets Forum confirming the detail layout for the High Street and displacement of market stalls during SIRF.
66. The Festival is always trying to ensure that everyone can enjoy the event including people who are not able to stand for long periods, small children and wheelchair users. This year we had no fixed seating on the High Street but provided chairs which could be moved to different positions for different shows and designated areas for wheelchair users. This made extra work for the stage management staff and was hugely appreciated by visitors.

Disability Access Audit

67. This year SIRF participated in a pilot project to improve the accessibility of the festival to disabled and deaf audiences. We worked with disability arts campaigner and service provider, Attitude is Everything, as part of their Disability Access Audit partnership project with ISAN (Independent Street Arts Network) and part funded by Arts Council England.
68. The findings from the audit will be used to produce a Disability Access Action Plan to make further changes for 2009 - 2013, with Stockton International Riverside Festival aiming to create an all inclusive, accessible festival experience.

Finance and returns

69. The mean spend per capita at SIRF 08 was £41.70, with a significant estimated contribution to the local economy of between £1.5 and £2.8 million.
70. SIRF, Carnival and Fringe attracted over £330,000 in grants and sponsorship.
71. Although commercial sponsorship in 2008 was below previous levels, taken over the longer term, sponsorship and grant income has contributed between 40% and 50% of the cost of SIRF and the Fringe, effectively providing '£ for £' match to our core budget allocation.
72. The mean spend per capita averaged across the last three years is £42.14. We estimate a total of approximately 150,000 visits for SIRF and Fringe. Assuming declared spend represents the average family or group size (3) and dividing by the average number of visits (2), the Festival generates £1.05m per annum in the local economy, or £3 for each £1 from SBC.
73. As in previous years, the SIRF artistic and technical budgets were devolved to Event International. We have in place fee penalties for cost overruns by contractors and this has helped us achieve tight budgetary control on no significant overspend for more than six years, despite the unpredictable nature of large scale, bespoke and complex productions.
74. Event International experienced particular difficulties with transport, fuel and exchange rate fluctuations in 2008 and the programme has not been achieved within the agreed budget.

As a result of this, Culture and Leisure Services are currently reviewing the delivery of SIRF with a view to increasing the capacity of services to deliver more of the event internally. A further report will be produced outlining these plans. In addition, consideration is being given to a contribution to the 2008 cost overrun resulting from wider economic factors, to be funded from the Children Education and Social Care medium term financial plan.

75. The expected outturn for 2008/9 is as follows:

- Gross Spend £731,000
- Less Income £356,000
- Net Cost to the Council £375,000

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Liaison with various Council Services will take place at the earliest opportunity to identify and address the practical implications associated with all proposals for festivals and events across the Borough. The legal implications of the various proposals are likely to include temporary road and car park closures, changes to consent street trading permissions, and entertainment licences, as well as potential extensions to market day trading in Town Centres.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Specific items within this report are on the Council's corporate risk register and appropriate risk management strategies and contingencies are in place. The project is identified as low to medium risk. Highest risk score against all categories after action = 4.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

The promotion of diverse leisure opportunities and enhancement of local markets will contribute towards the creation of vibrant and successful Town Centres. Continued development and promotion of festivals and events will increase the profile of the Borough locally, regionally and nationally, as well as providing opportunities for families, children and young people from our communities to experience the arts.

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Full Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed.

Total impact score + 74.

No negative impact as a result of this decision.

As a result of the Christmas Market and Stockton Riverside Festivals no direct prejudice occurs against any of the 6 equality groups. All Stockton Council events are open to any age group and any gender. Full access is made to sites and venues for service users with a disability.

A recommendation is to explore opportunities for holding an event in October to celebrate the New Year festivities for the faiths of Hindu, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains. This gives an alternative to the Christmas festivities for residents of the Stockton Borough community.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

Findings on the Festivals have been presented to:

- Retail Forum
- Markets Forum

Further consultation on proposals for 2009 will be carried out with:

- All Councillors
- Local Residents Groups
- Central Area Partnership Board, the town centre arm of the Renaissance Partnership
- Area Transport Partnership
- Business / Markets / Retail Forums

Name of Contact Officer: James Glancey & Jan Doherty
Post Title: Business Development Officer / Arts Development Manager
Telephone No. 01642 526023
Email Address: james.glancey@stockton.gov.uk

Background Papers

Report to Cabinet – April 2008 Christmas Festival and Market Proposal

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors – All

Property - No direct implications