

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

16 JANUARY 2025

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

DRAFT CABINET DECISION

Cabinet Member for Health, Leisure and Culture – Cllr Nelson

2024 EVENT SUMMARY AND 2025 MEMORIAL LIGHTING CALENDAR

SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of the Council's 2024 Events Programme, including commercial and community led events which have been delivered by third parties, including events on Council land. The report also provides details of the delivery of our biggest event, Stockton International Riverside Festival (SIRF) which received very positive feedback in the independent market research, with 92% rating the whole experience positively and 94% feel that SIRF is a good use of Council resources.

In addition, the report provides the suggested calendar for memorial lighting for 2025.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To note the success of events programme during 2024/25
2. To approve the memorial lighting calendar for 2025/26

DETAIL

1. The Borough's event programme continues to be popular with visitor numbers and satisfaction levels remaining high over the past year. There has been a good mix of small, medium and large-scale events delivered across the six towns, and some new small scale town centre events included Yard Sessions, Sustainable Environment Fair and Going for Gold.
2. The Council's resources continue to be deployed across the Borough to enable local event organisers to deliver their own community focussed events which, although supported, are delivered independently of the Council. Over 25 community and local events were delivered this year, many delivered on Council land and all receiving practical support from the Council, including specialist planning and safety advice, access to relevant Council services, and financial support for safety officers, road closures, signage and programming etc. This support is essential for our communities to enable them to manage their own events and celebrations in a safe manner.
3. Part of our large-scale event programme continues to be temporarily impacted due to the ongoing major redevelopment work on Stockton's riverside and high street locations. The suspension of these events which includes Stockton's Fireworks, Super Car Saturday and Stockton's Cycling Festival has been planned and communicated to Members and our

communities.

4. The Council's Events Service is currently working with the Town Team, contributing to the design of the new riverside spaces and planning for the continued use of the existing riverside spaces, and developing a new large-scale programme of events in preparation for the opening of the site.
5. Internally, there continues to be a joined-up approach across Council teams in the delivery of our events programme and we acknowledge the effort and support provided from service teams including Enforcement, Highways, Legal, Communications, Media, CFYA and Design Services. The effectiveness of this joint working and ability to respond to unexpected challenges has been very evident this year, particularly in relation to the impact of adverse weather and changes to programme and overall delivery.

SIRF

6. SIRF is a long-standing Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio Organisation (NPO), funded to present high quality work and support the street arts sector.
7. SIRF 24 is in the second year of a three-year funding agreement with ACE (2023 – 2026) and our festival continues to be highlighted nationally as an exemplar of the development of sustainability in street arts and its management as an example of best practice by an NPO.
8. SIRF has a strong reputation for showcasing international programmers, new commissions and we provide one of the largest and most diverse outdoor street arts festival in the UK. Whilst our ambition is to sustain this reputation and to continue to support artistic development and new work, the wider sector is facing a lack of investment leading to a shortage of ambitious large-scale outdoor street arts shows. This is particularly true of international work, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to find new and exciting shows of the calibre associated with our festival, with current resources.
9. There continues to be financial challenges associated with both inflationary pressures for technical suppliers for SIRF and rising costs for artists due to high demand and low availability. This remains a risk area for the SIRF, and which has meant a consolidated of our festival to a 3-day delivery in 2024.
10. We will continue to apply for additional funding from ACE which is outside of our 3-year NPO investment, as well as other funding streams including those managed by TVCA, who are one of our main Cultural Partners.

SIRF 2024 – Delivery & Sector Development

11. SIRF 2024 hosted an impressive 36 companies, including 7 international groups and over 120 individual performances across the 3 days. This included 10 new commissions and 4 International premiere shows.
12. Although access to our usual Riverside event space was not possible this year, our programme remained ambitious and we delivered some exceptional moments, with a strong artistic programme and community elements.
13. The response we received from artists and audiences was fantastic and it was clear that the appetite for residents to experience high quality arts remains strong. We have estimated footfall of 50,000 visitors across the 3 days and our independent market research have captured positive perceptions and high levels of satisfaction, including.

92% of attendees rating the festival overall as **good or very good** in 2024, compared with 86% in 2023 [95% in 2022], [94% in 2019] and [90% in 2018]

94% stated that the festival is a **good use of council resources** in 2024, compared with 90% in 2023 [94% in 2022], [94% in 2019] and [89% in 2018]

91% of attendees stated that the festival is **good for promoting Stockton** as a place to live, work or visit in 2024, compared with 90% in 2023 [95% in 2022], [93% in 2019] and [92% in 2018].

96% of people stated that coming to the event has a **positive effect on their health** and wellbeing in 2024, compare with 91% in 2023, [92% in 2022].

Direct spend per head is reported as £34.16 compared to £39.27 compared in 2023 and the **total direct economic impact** is **£949,626** compared to £991,360 to in 2023.

14. We continue our partnership with XTRAX, who deliver SIRF's international showcase which supports and promotes our festival across the Sector. For 2024 we broadened the showcase offer to also work with Outdoor Arts UK (OAUk) and Without Walls to delivery 2 days of discussions, conversations and panel sessions. The showcase also provides opportunities for programmers and artists to pitch new ideas and connect and focus on a specific area of development as well as quality time to network and forge partnerships.
15. SIRF is a unique festival to platform work as it remains a 'buyers festival' this includes international programmers booking UK artists to perform in Europe as well as UK companies extending their bookings across the UK. In 2024 there was a significant increase in delegates stating they are interested in booking shows seen at SIRF to 78% in 2024 from 50% in 2023. This highlights that SIRF remains an influential and significant festival nationally and internationally.

Participation & Engagement

16. Participation and engagement work is a key theme for SIRF and there are many opportunities for residents, children and community groups to engage in high quality arts experiences.
17. This year SIRF has worked with 13 Tees Valley artists who have been integral to the planning and delivery of the main SIRF Programme and, a further 10 local artists have supported our communities, delivering an impressive 600 workshops creating costumes, music and choreography.
18. The Community Carnival remains one of our highlights of the festival and is very popular with our SIRF audience and this year was no exception with over 6,000 visitors lined along high street to watch the parade. Participants numbers increased from 764 participants in 2023 to 864 participants, with 28 groups taking part from local schools and community groups. We also supported 4 new diverse groups to our Carnival including, **Vision 25**, social care provider for young people with learning difficulties age 19 plus; **Systemic**, Sing Your Song True Equality Matters Inclusive Choir, which is led by Ellie Lowther who is a trans awareness activist; **Autism Matters** and **TS18** dance group, ran with Corner House Youth Projects for young people ages 8-18.
19. We have also supported 3 care leavers at SIRF 2024, who worked as part of our Visitor Experience Team. Their journey was true industry experience from applying for a job, being recruited, attending briefings and being paid as a valuable member of our visitor experience team. We have received positive feedback, and we expect to repeat this opportunity in 2025

"Just wanted to say a massive thank you for the opportunity for our YP at SIRF this weekend. What a fantastic experience for them and a huge learning opportunity going

forward. What a lovely team you all were!" (Helen McGrother, Progression Advisor Virtual School)

Accessible & Sustainable SIRF

20. The major events presented by Stockton Council are designed to be accessible to all our communities and as such we continue to develop 'Accessible SIRF', which is a constantly evolving elements of our programme and planning to ensure a safe and equitable space for high quality arts experiences can be accessed by all.
21. SIRF has a well-developed and robust programme for access that is now fully integrated and embedded in our delivery. This includes British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation, Touch Tours, Relaxed Performances, fully interpreted access festival guide film and Audio Description films and resources.
22. We have also made changes to site design for physical access following audience feedback which has proved positive with **95%** of audiences rating the ease of access around the site was very good, in comparison with 90% in 2023.
23. SIRF continues to be part of a national pilot for an artist designed Audio Description Tool, *The Difference Engine* and our festival is involved in the evaluation process, which we look to add to future delivery when the new technology is finalised and in place.
24. New for SIRF 2024 is the inclusion of an accessibility audit as part of our market research processes. The purpose of this audit is to establish a baseline of how we currently serve our audiences who identify themselves as living with a disability, and what adjustments can be made in terms ensuring the best experience possible. Our current SIRF audience statistics show that 14% of our audiences identify as disabled and 13% identify as neurodivergent. At the point of writing this report we are analysing findings and undertaking a focus group.
25. In terms of our sustainable festival plan, we collected 500kg of waste in our 'festival recycling' bins, which is an increase of 80kg from 2023. Whilst this is an improvement, we are looking at ways which we can more actively promote and encourage SIRF audiences to recycle more waste generated at the festival. As previously reported, we ensure that all our generators for our shows are HVO powered (Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil the Renewable Diesel Alternative) and this year we tested a solar powered generator for the production compound. Our Environmental Levy for our traders continues to be effective and is something that other festivals are now adopting across the Outdoor Arts Sector as good practice.
26. We are excited to be working with 'A Greener Future' who have delivered an environmental self-assessment to help identify further areas of improvement for future delivery. We expect a full report in Spring 25.

Festival of Thrift

27. The Festival of Thrift took place for the second year in Billingham Town Centre and John Whitehead Park on Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 September 2024.
28. Festival of Thrift is a nationally renowned festival which encourages and celebrates sustainable living. This festival is an important part of connecting our community with the Council's ambitious Environmental Sustainability and Carbon Reduction Strategy and ahead of the planned two-day event in September, the festival team have delivered an extensive community programme of related activities across our towns.
29. Visitor numbers across the weekend are estimated at 22,000. This is a significant improvement from 2023 which were reported as 6,000, however the 2023 festival only

opened for one day due to inclement weather. Visitor satisfaction has also increased with **81%** of visitors rating their overall experience of festival as very good or good compared to **72%** in 2023.

30. The audience profile shows that most visitors reside in the UK at 91% with only 1% residing outside the UK. Half of all visitors, continue to be local people from Billingham or Stockton, with 2024 figures the same as 2023 at 48%. Visitor numbers from elsewhere in the Tees Valley is 29% which is the same as 2023 and there is a slight increase in visitors from elsewhere in the Northeast from 15% in 2023 to 17% in 2024. A small minority are then from the rest of the UK at 5%.
31. An evaluation report is expected in the new year which will include more detailed information on delivery, travel, visitor satisfaction and economic impact. Ahead of the report, early indications in relation to travel and sustainability, include:

Most visitors travelled to the festival by **car** at 63%, whilst this is an increase compared with 55% in 2023, the 2023 figures only included one-day whereas 2024 figures are for both days.

Walking continues to be popular at 36% compared to 26% in 2023, [5.5% in 2022], with a significant amount of local people walking to the festival reported as 21%.

Public transport to the festival shows 8% of visitors used **bus services** compared to 7.5% in 2023 [2.5% in 2022], followed by **park & ride** 3% and **train** 3% which is a slight drop compared to 4% in 2023. Despite encouragement via partnership with Sustrans, cycling as a mode of transport to the festival remains low (1%).

Stockton Sparkles

32. Stockton Sparkles is the remaining large-scale event in the 2024 calendar. The event runs for a period of weeks in the lead up to Christmas, and as usual commenced with a spectacular light switch-on event late November, which achieved impressive audience numbers of over 5,000.
33. Our Christmas Market remained over-subscribed for the third year, and it is positive to note that we saw an increase in new trader applications. The Christmas Market programme included 23 traders on Stockton High Street, a choir programme with 7 schools and community choirs throughout the day and, professional musicians and Street Theatre performers. In addition, the Victorian Fair and popular Lantern Parade were all scheduled for the Christmas Market weekend.
34. Unfortunately, these planned Christmas activities were cancelled on the Saturday and Sunday due to high winds/storms, with only the Friday programme being delivered. Whilst footfall was strong on the day the event opened, the loss of two days will impact trader and the Council's economic targets.
35. 'Santa on Wheels' returns for the fourth consecutive year. This event remains extremely popular with families and communities across the Borough. It is a four-day event, and the Santa Bus route includes all wards.

Other Events in 2024

36. As previously mentioned, we continue to support a large range of well-established community and local events, including Thornaby Show, Billingham Carnival and Garden Show, EID Festival, Yarm Fair, Tees Regatta, Siren's Fest and for later in the year, Christmas focus celebrations and Light Switch On's across the Borough.

37. The Council has also delivered and supported several national and memorial events, including Armed Forces Day, 6 Remembrance Sunday events across various Towns and we also celebrated the 80th Anniversary of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy, which included a series of Beacon Lighting ceremonies in Stockton, Thornaby, Billingham and Long Newton as part of the national celebrations.
38. The Council's Events Team provides technical support and advice for the numerous communities and externally led events, which includes help with production of event safety plans, risk assessments, road closures and food safety. Further training and support from local and community event deliverers will be available for the 2025 event season.
39. Moving into 2025, the Council is committed to retaining its leadership role and further developing Stockton's reputation as a creative and dynamic events Borough. We recognised that a creative arts and events programme has many benefits to both the community and economy, and can attract high levels of satisfaction, improve well-being, increase 'direct' spend in the area and generally promote the Borough as a great place for residents, businesses and visitors alike.

Memorial lighting calendar

40. The use of coloured lights in Stockton Town centre and on selected buildings and structures continues to provide the Council with an opportunity to acknowledge and support a range of good causes and important anniversaries. This memorial lighting programme is very popular and generates significant social media activity. The 2024 memorial lighting calendar has been delivered.
41. This report invites Cabinet to agree the programme for 2025, as listed in **Appendix A**. The list incorporates campaigns that might encompass a range of individually narrow issues/interests. The dates nominated in each case are those which are believed to be the subject of a meaningful campaign by others, such that when the lights are switched on the public may have some understanding of the significance of the event/colour.
42. Where a campaign lasts for a period of days or weeks, the normal procedure will be to mark the start of that campaign by turning our lights on for the first day/night. However, where a campaign promoter wishes to use an alternative day within the period to align with specific activity designed to raise the profile of the campaign, we may change the date on which we turn our lights on to fit with the organisers' promotions. The calendar listed at Appendix A therefore includes suggested dates for each event and may be subject to minor changes.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

43. The events programme is diverse and designed to reflect the interests of different communities. Every effort is made to make our events physically and financially accessible, they are presented in public spaces and are almost always free to watch or participate in.
44. Many of our events are specifically designed, in whole or in part, to raise awareness of the needs or characteristics of specific groups, including those with protected characteristics.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

45. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

46. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

RISK ASSESSMENT

47. All events presented by the Council or approved for Council land are subject to a full risk assessment and proportionate safety plans and, where appropriate are reviewed by Stockton's Independent Safety Advisory Group.

COUNCIL PLAN POLICY PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES

48. The events programme and memorial lighting contributes to several Council Plan priorities, including a great place to live, work and visit, healthy and resilient communities and an inclusive economy. Our events support the Council's ambition in creating a Frairer Stockton on Tees and reducing Equality and, Improving Population Health Outcomes.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

49. Many opportunities to participate in or enjoy our events are targeted at our looked after children. There were no ticketed events in 2024.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

50. There is frequent consultation with Councillors over events before, during and after the events are staged. There has been no consultation with Councillors in relation to this report as its primary function is to report on the outcome of events already staged.

51. There has been consultation with the Cabinet portfolio holder for Health, Culture & Leisure in the development of the draft memorial lighting calendar.

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Education related? No

Background Papers

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

Property

APPENDIX A

MEMORIAL LIGHTING SCHEME 2025/26

DATE	EVENT	LIGHTING COLOUR	CAMPAIGNS
Monday 27 January	Holocaust Memorial Day	Purple	National
Saturday 1 February	LGBT+ History Month	Multi	Catch All
Tuesday 4 February	World Cancer Day	Orange	Catch All
Sunday 9 March	National Day of Reflection	Yellow	National
Saturday 8 March	International Women's Day	White/Purple/Green	National
Saturday 22 March	Earth Hour (8.30pm-9.30pm)	Switched off	National
Wednesday 2 April	Autism Acceptance Day	Gold	Autism Friendly Town Centre
Friday 11 April	World Parkinsons Day 2025	Blue	Open Request
Wednesday 23 April	St George's Day	Red/White	Saint Day
Thursday 8 May	VE Day 80 th Anniversary	Red/White/Blue	Open Request
Monday 19 May	National Dementia Action Week	Purple	National & SBC Campaign
Monday 2 June	National Volunteering Week	Red/Purple	National
Monday 9 June	National Carers Week	Blue	National
Saturday 28 June	Armed Forces Day	Red/White/Blue	National
Friday 15 August	VJ Day 80 th Anniversary	Red/White/Blue	Open Request
Thursday 4 September	World Sexual Health Awareness Day	Orange/Blue	Catch All
Monday 15 September	Battle of Britain Day 85 th Anniversary	Red/White/Blue	Open Request
Monday 22 September	Fairtrade Fortnight	Blue Green	National
Wednesday 1 October	Stoptober (Stop Smoking Campaign)	Red	National
Thursday 9 October	Baby Loss Awareness Week	Pink/Blue	Catch All
Friday 10 October	World Mental Health Day	Purple	Catch All
Friday 17 October	Show Racism the Red Card	Red	National & SBC Campaign
TBC	National Care Leavers Week	Blue	National & SBC Campaign
Tuesday 11 November	Remembrance Day	Red	National
Friday 14 November	World Diabetes Day	Blue	National
Tuesday 25 November	International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women	Orange	Catch All

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