

(Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting of the sub-committee scheduled to be held on 25 February 2016.)

Economic Prosperity Sub-Committee

9 February 2016

Present: Councillor Janet Hunter (Chair)
Councillors J Cassidy, S L Cox, P Mason, D McMeekan,
T Mulvenna and A Percy.

EP22/02/16 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Madden and J Pickard.

EP23/02/16 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

EP24/02/16 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no Declarations of Interest or Dispensations reported.

EP25/02/16 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 November 2015 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

EP26/02/16 Winter Festival (Previous Minute EP21/11/15)

At its previous meeting the sub-committee had began an exercise to examine the impact of the Council's Winter Festival on the economies of the borough's town centres, in particular the Christmas markets. At the meeting it had been noted that the aims of Festival were to:-

- a) attract visitors to the borough;
- b) create media coverage;
- c) have a positive economic impact;
- d) provide great, safe festive experiences;
- e) provide happy memories; and
- f) contribute to the Council's broader policy objective that North Tyneside be a great place to live, work and visit.

Members of the sub-committee had been invited to attend the Wallsend Christmas Market, Tynemouth Christmas Festival, St Nicholas Festival, Whitley Bay and North Shields Victorian Christmas Market to observe and experience the markets, speak to those involved and assess the success of the markets in terms of supporting the town centre economies.

Peter Warne, the Council's Tourism and Events Development Manager, attended the meeting to present an evaluation of the Festival. It had taken place between 1 November 2015 and 17 January 2016 and had involved a range of events organised or supported by the Council and its partners. Bad weather had disrupted delivery of the Festival and this had led to a decrease in the number of recorded visitors from 41,895 in 2014 to 40,550 in 2015 and a reduction in the overall costs incurred which had totalled £17,000 compared to the forecast budget of £27,265.

In terms of marketing and promotion 10,000 copies of the Festival's official programme had been distributed across the borough and the programme had also been published on the Council's website where it had been viewed 1727 times. The Festival had also featured in the Council's Our North Tyneside magazine and on visitnorthtyneside.com which had been viewed 3990 times during November and December. The Festival had also been promoted through press releases and through social media.

Unfortunately the St Nicholas Festival in Whitley Bay had been cancelled as it had coincided with Storm Desmond. The high winds and heavy rain meant that stalls could not be erected safely, the lantern parade with local schoolchildren could not take place and visitor numbers had been expected to be extremely low. Due to close working with event suppliers costs had been minimised to £1,072. The Council had still supported the Chamber of Trade in operating a small market on the concourse of Whitley Bay Metro Station, featuring 26 stalls. Over 250 people had attended and a survey undertaken by the Chamber revealed that all stallholders would return as it had real potential.

The Wallsend Christmas Market had also been affected by bad weather but the 18 traders at the event reported steady business and the majority indicated they would return. The Forum Shopping Centre had expressed an interest in organising its own indoor market in 2016. The Christmas lights switch-on had been very well attended and had been covered live by Tyne Tees television news. The final cost had been £2,643.

The Tynemouth Christmas Festival had featured film screenings, small fairground rides and street entertainers. Heavy persistent rain throughout the weekend had affected attendance. The event had been organised in partnership with Tynemouth Business Forum who said that they had received good feedback and the event had been a start to build upon for next year. The cost had totalled £4,734. Members of the sub-committee who had attended the event hoped that in future businesses in Tynemouth would contribute more in terms of Christmas window displays. It was also acknowledged that the event lacked a central focal point. As it would be expensive and potentially disruptive to businesses to close Front Street, Tynemouth Station was the obvious location. However it would be difficult to change the style and character of the weekly station market to adopt a Christmas theme.

The 17th North Shields Victorian Christmas Market had had a significant impact. The Beacon Centre had reported a 50% increase in footfall on the Saturday (30,000 visitors) and a 180% increase on the Sunday (21,000 visitors). The Customer First Centre reported that it had 3,727 visitors on the Saturday and 3,076 on Sunday. Charities, including the Fishermans Mission, collected over £2,000 in donations. The market had featured in The News Guardian and The Chronicle newspapers. A stallholder survey revealed that the vast majority were satisfied with the event and many had already submitted applications for stalls in 2016. The cost of the market had been around £27,000 with income totalling around £28,000 including subsidies from sponsors and the Council (around £5000).

David Bavaird, Chair of the North Shields Chamber of Trade, attended the meeting to comment on the effectiveness of the market from the perspective of the Chamber. David

felt that the market should not be viewed as a one off weekend event but it had a longer term and multi-layered effect in terms of people, place, the economy and partnerships. In terms of people, the festival engendered a sense of community and wellbeing. In attending the market, people realised and valued what North Shields had to offer and would return at a later date. Fourteen schools had been involved in performing at the market and local charities had raised over £2,000. As for place, the market was North Shields' opportunity to showcase itself. Tyne & Wear Metro reported a 50% increase in passenger numbers to North Shields indicating that visitors to the market were from outside the town. Importantly the market was a safe and tidy event. The market benefited the economy of North Shields, demonstrated by the recorded increases in footfall. The market was organised through a partnership between the Council, the Chamber of Trade and various businesses who all contributed to the costs of the event. The Chamber considered the market to be such an important showcase for North Shields it committed 30% of its income to the event. David Bavaird acknowledged the financial challenges facing the Council but urged it to continue to support the market in 2016.

As Chair of the Council, Councillor Gary Bell had attended the market as host to other civic dignitaries from around the region who had been keen to visit due to its positive reputation. Councillor Bell commented on whether there were opportunities to further develop the market by increasing the number of stalls and by promoting the heritage and attractions of North Shields at the market.

In response Pete Warne acknowledged that there was space on the closed roads adjoining Northumberland Square to increase the number of stalls and this option would be considered in planning the 2016 event. David Bavaird agreed that the market provided a platform to promote other places to go in North Shields such as Northumberland Park and the Old Low Light and he outlined details of a heritage trail about to be launched which could be promoted at future markets. Members suggested that improved signposting at the markets may encourage increased footfall at other nearby attractions.

Councillor Eddie Darke, Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Tourism was also present at the meeting. Councillor Darke shared his experience of the Festival and discussed with the sub-committee how it might be developed in the future.

The sub-committee considered how North Tyneside and the Christmas markets were promoted to visitors to the region and the extent to which hotels in the borough supported the markets by offering package deals to visitors from outside the region.

In conclusion Pete Warne commented that despite the adverse weather conditions the town centre Christmas activities had proven to be popular with the public, traders were keen to build upon the success of existing initiatives and the significant increase in footfall attracted by these events had brought major economic benefit to local businesses. The marketing and promotion of the events had afforded the Council significant reputational profile and they strengthened partnership working with both the business and wider community. In view of the evidence presented to it, the sub-committee expressed its support for the continuation of the Festival and the further development of the Christmas markets. Members also wished to thank and congratulate all Council staff and partners involved in their delivery.

The Chair thanked David Bavaird, Pete Warne, Councillor Bell and Councillor Darke for attending the meeting and for their contributions to the evaluation of the Festival.