

Meeting: Economic Prosperity Sub-Committee

Date: 9 February 2016

Title: Winter Festival

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Service: Environment Housing & Leisure

Wards affected: All

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to feedback on the effectiveness of the Winter Festival, in particular the Christmas markets, in terms of supporting the town centre economies, following the recommendations of the Economic Prosperity Sub Committee of 11 November 2015.

2. Recommendations

The sub-committee is asked to note details of the events as indicated and offer suggestions for the development of such initiatives in the future.

3. Details

The North Tyneside Winter Festival took place between 1 November 2015 and 17 January 2016.

The festival consisted of events organised or supported by North Tyneside Council and third-party partner events. All were featured in 10,000 copies of the official programme that was also read 1727 times online, through an electronic version on www.visitnorthtyneside.com.

There was an extensive feature in Our North Tyneside magazine and the 'What's On' page on www.visitnorthtyneside.com received 3990 visitors in November and December.

For the first time, the weather, notably Storm Desmond, directly caused the cancellation of some events and affected others.

This report focuses on the events previously identified as the ones to present information on at the end of the festival.

3.1 St Nicholas Festival, Whitley Bay

The St Nicholas Festival was a victim of the bad weather and was cancelled. High winds and heavy rain meant that we could not safely operate the event and erect stalls. The lantern parade with local schoolchildren could not take place either. The poor conditions also meant that visitor numbers would be extremely low.

However, we still managed to support the Chamber of Trade in operating a small market on the concourse of Whitley Bay Metro Station.

Over 250 people attended the event that featured 26 stalls. A survey by June Tolson from the Chamber revealed that all stallholders would return should the event be repeated in the future, noting that it had real potential despite the weather.

Due to our close working relationship with event suppliers, we were able to save on the cost of the event once we knew that cancellation was unavoidable.

The final cost was £1072.40.

Media coverage included the News Guardian story 'Children light the way in popular festival' and the Evening Chronicle story 'Events cancelled as storm Desmond sweeps in'.

3.2 Wallsend Christmas Market and Christmas Lights Switch-on

The Christmas lights switch-on was very well attended with several hundred people watching the event. The market was affected by the weather but traders reported steady business on the whole. The owners of the Forum Shopping Centre have expressed a wish to explore organising their own market this year in the indoor market area.

The weekend featured participation from Beacon Hill, Burnside, Richardson Dees and Hadrian Park schools. They were joined by the YMCA, Churchill Community College, Linskill Centre, Sing Out Loud choir, Harmony Choir and young singers Megan Savage, Georgia Carpenter and Chloe Hill.

There were 18 traders at the event and the majority said they would return, understanding that the weather played its part with trading conditions.

The switch-on was covered live by ITV Tyne Tees television news and was a very positive piece for Wallsend ahead of the Christmas shopping season. It was also a very special moment for 11 year old Taylor Thompson, who switched on the lights, and his family.

Other media coverage included the Chronicle story 'Its beginning to look a lot like Christmas.'

The final cost was £2643 after income from stall hire is taken into consideration.

3.3 Tynemouth Christmas Festival

This event featured Christmas film screenings at Kings School, Christmas window displays by local traders, small themed fairground rides, costumed street entertainers and Tynemouth Station Christmas Market.

Poor weather affected attendance across the weekend with heavy persistent rain being the main feature.

Despite that, 149 people watched the Christmas films and several hundred children took the opportunity to ride the fairground attractions.

Visitors felt that there could have been more Christmas window displays and that the market was not as festive as similar events. Both of those issues were beyond our control.

The event was organised in partnership with Tynemouth Business Forum who said that they had good feedback, a great start and something to expand on next year.

3.4 North Shields Victorian Christmas Market

This was the 17th North Shields Victorian Christmas Market.

The event has been subsidised in the past through the Town Centres Management budget. Responsibility for the event has now been passed to the Events Team.

The impact of the event is significant.

The Beacon Centre reported that they were 50% up on the previous Saturday and 180% up on the previous Sunday. That equates to footfall on Saturday of 30,000 and on Sunday of 21,000.

Footfall was up 89% overall on a usual weekend in North Shields.

Elsewhere, North Shields Customer First Centre welcomed 3727 visitors on the Saturday and 3076 on the Sunday.

The Fisherman's Mission collection in the Beacon Centre totalled £1100.

Christchurch reported that they had a busy weekend and a stallholder survey revealed that the vast majority were happy with the event. Dozens of applications for stalls at the 2016 market have already been submitted.

Media coverage includes the front page of the News Guardian along with a large feature inside and a large article in the Chronicle heralding how visitors in large numbers braved the weather to enjoy the event.

The Christmas Market costs around £27,000 to put on. Income is around £28,000 but that does rely on a degree of subsidy from sponsors and North Tyneside Council. The current subsidy from the Council is around £5000. The Events Team will be working hard to reduce the reliance of the event on subsidy and move it onto a more sustainable footing.

4. Conclusion

The Winter Festival events analysed provided a cross section of the bigger activities engaging town centre traders over the festive period. Clearly, in 2015, the weather was a major factor affecting footfall, in particular at the St. Nicholas Festival in Whitley Bay.

However, it is evident from both anecdotal and survey evidence that:-

- Town centre Christmas activities are popular with the public;
- Traders are keen to build upon the success of existing initiatives;

- The significant increase in footfall these events bring is a major economic benefit to local business

It should also be noted that the marketing and promotion of the events, through the Winter Festival programme, affords the Council significant reputational profile and strengthens partnership working with both the business and wider community.

4. Background Documents

The following background documents have been used in the compilation of this report and available from the author:

- Economic Prosperity Sub-Committee Minutes – 11 November 2016
- North Tyneside Council Winter Festival Brochure