

Southend-on-Sea City Council

Report of Executive Director (Adults & Communities)

To

Cabinet

On

1 July 2022

Report prepared by: Scott Dolling, Director of Culture and
Tourism

Agenda
Item No.

8

City Music Festival

Relevant Scrutiny Committee(s) - Place Scrutiny
Cabinet Member: Councillor Carole Mulroney
Part 1 (public agenda Item)

1. Purpose of Report

To seek approval and for the Council to partially underwrite Southend hosting a major music festival as part of its city year celebrations.

2. Recommendations

That Cabinet;

2.1 approves the supporting of a major festival with world class artists to lever in significant benefits to the Southend community;

2.2 note that commercial sponsorship has already been secured for the festival;

2.3 approve that the Council underwrites the cost base of the festival by £125,000 and if required will be funded by the Council's event budget;

2.4 note that the portfolio holder in conjunction with the Director of Culture and Tourism will agree the final arrangements and continue negotiations with partners on further sponsorship.

3. Background

3.1 Southend Council has supported the Town2City Partnership, formed by the late Sir David Amess, which comprises cross party Council membership and representation from our MP's along with leading members of the community.

3.2 The committee has been developing and delivering a series of activities and events to celebrate the inaugural city year. Through this process a major weekend festival to showcase outstanding cultural activity has been proposed for September including music and comedy from the local community through to

high profile international artists. This is due to take place on 2-4 September at one of Southend Airport's hangers.

3.3 The event would transform perceptions of Southend and as part of the city year celebrations, bring huge kudos and appeal for the short and longer-term city aspirations. It is a unique opportunity and is possible through the connections from locally based international artists working with industry colleagues. Connected marketing activity will add to a festival month in September where City Walls and Jazz are also being presented, connecting up marketing opportunities.

3.4 Production costs and the line-up have been assembled based on industry expertise from a team comprising local operators from the Leigh Folk Festival, and Village Green, alongside organisers of national festivals. The total infrastructure and production costs based on live quotes are forecast at £445k.

International and locally based acts have been provisionally reserved to provide high engagement levels for the event outside the City's boundary demonstrating Southend's ability to draw from its wider footprint including London and build on existing strengths. The festival will increase profile of Southend City both regionally and nationally and enhance place appeal, challenge perceptions, provide supply chain opportunities and cultural skills development.

3.5 Income will come from a variety of sources including ticket sales, sponsorship, catering concessions and external funding. A headline sponsor has already been secured.

3.6 Further media partners and high profile marketing activity is also being secured with negotiations to conclude over the coming weeks.

3.7 One major risk to events of this nature would be weather, however this project has been developed using an indoor venue at the Airport mitigating that risk. Other major events such as Reading and Leeds are sold out for weekend tickets this year indicating confidence in the festival market.

3.8 Southend Airport is a significant partner and recognises the wider opportunity and destination benefits. They have demonstrated commitment and will be providing the venue in converted hanger space without any site fees as a contribution towards the project along with operational and marketing support to help deliver the festival. Travel plans are also being developed in partnership with the airport using their onsite infrastructure and relationship with transport partners.

3.9 The Essex Chambers of Commerce have also been significant in securing sponsorship to help realise this project.

3.10 The weekend will form part of wider Southend festival of activity supporting hotels and the hospitality sector with benefits to the local supply chain and supporting strategic objectives of extending the season and encouraging longer staying visitors.

- 3.11 Infrastructure and staff for the festival will use as much local talent as possible to support the local economy and there will be opportunities to support skills development in the creative sector along with volunteering opportunities.
- 3.12 The pricing for the festival tickets has been based on making it accessible and in line with market conditions yet able to cover the costs of the event. There is no commercial promoter taking fees.

4. Other Options

The event programme could continue with lower profile activity but would not have the step change around Southend’s festival capability in this inaugural City year.

5. Reasons for Recommendations

The City year is a unique opportunity for Southend to present its capabilities on an increased level of profile. This venue and type of festival can create change in perceptions of place and support local skills infrastructure in event delivery and aligns with several long-term objectives. Feedback from residents on several occasions including 2050 and culture vision surveys has been to develop more major music festival activity. City year would be an ideal opportunity to implement this change. The potential of setting a precedent for bigger events and interest the festival community in Southend after this first year would be transformational.

6. Corporate Implications

- 6.1 Contribution to Southend 2050 outcomes across several themes.

P&J	<p>There is a tangible sense of pride in the place and local people are actively, and knowledgeably, talking up Southend.</p> <p>The variety and quality of our outstanding cultural and leisure offer has increased</p>
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O&P	<p>Southend is a place that is renowned for its creative industries, where new businesses thrive and where established employers and others invest for the long term.</p>
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A&I	<p>Even more Southenders agree that people from different backgrounds are valued and get on well together</p> <p>A range of initiatives help communities come together to enhance their neighbourhood and environment.</p>
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Developing major music events was a key finding during the Council's culture vision strategy consultation in 2020.

6.2 Financial Implications

The event costs are circa £445k, which have been developed through recent live quotes and on availability for delivery. The forecast in Appendix 1 outlines that there will be a broadly breakeven point after 40% of festival tickets are sold plus sponsorship and grant.

If the event sells, out it will return a significant return on investment which can support future events and enables this scale of festival to be maintained in future. Market conditions suggest that similar events and festivals are selling well in 2022.

A ticketing agent will be procured to manage sales income which would provide a dashboard of information on ticketing performance. Other procurements would be put in place to secure the necessary infrastructure, the prices and availability for which have been checked to provide the forecast.

Ticket income held in an escrow account with the procured provider would be paid 14 days after the event which is industry standard.

Up-front costs for items will be required with final payment to performing artists 30 days after the event. A financial forecast table is attached at Appendix 1

6.3 Legal Implications

N/A

6.4 People Implications

N/A

6.5 Property Implications

N/A

6.6 Consultation

Administration and opposition Councillors have been involved in the committee developing the overall programme and are supportive of this project. Feedback from culture surveys identified music festivals as a key driver to demonstrate the value of culture.

6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

The artists being considered are chosen for both world class quality and their diversity. The programme includes The Music Man Project which is an international music education service for children and adults with learning disabilities. The pricing has been developed to make the festival accessible to our communities and will be

promoted with this price accessibility in mind. The infrastructure for both staging and viewing will be designed for all abilities.

6.8 Risk Assessment

The event will be subject to industry standard expectations and will be invited to present to the relevant safety advisory group. Risk assessments and mitigation form part of the event management plan.

6.9 Value for Money

The project has been developed using direct links to some artists by Southend based performing artists bypassing usual agency fees, There is no commercial promoter involved, so the costs for the festival do not include any margin for a promoter. There will be a breakeven position with sales of 40% of available tickets. Additional external funding is being sought through the Arts Council along with income expected from concessions and ticket sales. A headline sponsor has already been secured and other sponsorship opportunities are being developed. Connected marketing activity to the City Year and Southend festival programme will make excellent value for money and reach multiple audiences for Southend.

6.10 Community Safety Implications

Security costs are built into the project costs, no additional resources are anticipated.

6.11 Environmental Impact

The event is taking place inside so would have reduced noise issues compared to open air venues. The indoor venue will be easier to maintain and manage for cleansing than an open-air space such as parks which were considered earlier in the project development process. Travel by rail and public transport will be promoted.

7. Background Papers

N/A

8. (Part 2 confidential) Appendix – Financial forecast