

Title of Report:	Impact of COVID 19 on the delivery of Council's Christmas Events Programme.
Committee Report Submitted To:	Leisure and Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	20th October 2020
For Decision or For Information	For Decision

Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)	
Strategic Theme	Promote our tourist offer locally and internationally
Outcome	Improve prosperity To provide a balanced portfolio for major events across the Borough and facilitate partnership with other event promoters
Lead Officer	Head of Tourism and Recreation

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	£15,000
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES within 2020/21 budget
Capital/Revenue	Revenue
Code	
Staffing Costs	

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	TBC	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	TBC	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	TBC	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	TBC	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	n/a	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	n/a	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present a revised approach and seek Elected Members approval for the delivery of Council's managed Christmas festivities programme, in light of COVID 19.

2.0 Background

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council has within its Tourism and Recreation remit a policy to deliver quality events across the area, inspiring visitors to stay and spend within the local economy.

The majority of Council managed events planned for 2020 have been cancelled. This is a direct result of Public Health Agency (PHA) guidance in relation to COVID 19, and in particular as a result of a government ban on events and 'mass gatherings'. The events affected were Ballymoney Spring Fair, Easter Seasonal Programme, Rhythm of the Bann, NW200 Race Week Festival, Rathlin Sound Maritime Festival, Salmon and Whiskey Festival, Seasonal Summer Street Theatre Programme, Summer Fireworks, Summer Entertainment and Auld Lammas Fair.

At the August Leisure and Development meeting, a further decision was taken to deliver the Tourism and Recreation Events Halloween Programme across ten days in a restricted venue and virtual format with a 'Myths and Legends' theme across the Borough,.

The Council Christmas Event Programme includes the delivery of switch on ceremonies across nine towns. These events have traditionally included a schedule of music and entertainment (including local musicians and performers) which is programmed around the arrival of Santa and the Mayor / Deputy Mayor and their subsequent Christmas speeches from the stage. This is followed by the light switch on ceremony and the opportunity for children to visit Santa in his grotto, with the distribution of sweets and selection boxes.

3.0 Latest Government Advice / Guidance

COVID 19 related regulations and guidance has been subject to several changes. As of 22 September 2020 further restrictions have been introduced for all households in Northern Ireland. The Council is waiting for definitive guidance on cultural, entertainment and recreational gatherings and as it stands advice states that the event organiser is responsible for carrying out necessary risk assessments and take all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of the coronavirus. Other than this Council has no further government guidance on events and mass gatherings. In the absence of this guidance it is difficult to ascertain what makes risk assessments robust enough.

4.0 Christmas 2020

In August 2020 Council adopted a revised approach for the delivery of Halloween events across the Borough. A similar approach is required for Christmas festivities. It is possible that further measures will be put in place that will lead to further restrictions for the organisation and delivery of events, and this will have an impact on what Council can deliver at Christmas.

The Tourism Events team has been in regular contact with other Local Authorities and assessed the approaches being taken to Christmas. Benchmarking across Northern

Ireland and the UK has identified that mass gathering switch on events will for the most part not be delivered in 2020.

Council must also consider the corporate risk implications of delivering such events in the midst of a pandemic (including the health implications and other liabilities).

5.0 Approach for delivery

The Tourism Events Team have been investigating a revised approach for delivery, taking into account the current situation. In the lead up to Christmas dressing, branding and animation of the Town Centres is important to assist in promoting the retail experience. In previous years some Christmas events attracted crowds greater than 8000 people.

Whilst Government guidance currently states that ‘the 15 limit for both **indoor** and outdoor gathering does not apply, where *‘that gathering has a **recognised person** responsible for organising or operating the gathering, and it is organised or operated for cultural, entertainment, recreational, outdoor sports, social, community, educational, work, legal, religious or political purposes’*. The Council can act as that **‘recognised person’** and therefore we can invite crowds of people to our events in excess of 15 people. At the time of writing this report no further guidance has been issued pertaining to event organisers. The Tourism Events team, working on the advice they have received to date for the Public Health Authority / Department for Communities and our Environmental Health department, is keen to reduce the potential for any situations that may put the public at risk.

6.0 Christmas Delivery Options

Members are asked to consider the following options with regard to Christmas festivities:

Option 1: Cancel delivery of Council managed Christmas festivities.

This option will mitigate for ongoing and potential future Government guidelines and restrictions. It will also represent a £50k saving in the Tourism and Recreation budget. It does not however assist with the Council’s efforts to support the local tourism and hospitality sectors by the promotion and delivery of events and hence assist the local economy.

Option 2: Deliver revised format for Christmas.

This proposal would entail running a ten day programme of Christmas events in a restricted venue and virtual form. Proposals include the following:

- Online message from The Mayor and Santa (pre-recorded and delivered online) with lights in four main towns to turn on during one pre-agreed evening with 5 smaller towns being turned on during a second pre-agreed evening. The Events Team will promote the ‘switch ons’, but will encourage people not to congregate at switch on times in various towns (in line with Covid-19 restrictions). Council will post an online video (pre-recorded) of the lights being turned on in each town to mitigate against this.
- Online Christmas ‘storytelling sessions’ with Santa with local storytellers.
- Online Christmas Arts and Craft Workshops (Museums / Arts).

- Christmas Food Trail (Town Centre Management / Trade Engagement Teams).
- Pop-up animation in town centres e.g. Walkabout Characters (Events / Town Centre Management Teams).

This approach at an estimated cost of £15k will allow the Council to continue its event programme albeit revised and reduced.

7.0 Recommendations

Elected Members are asked to give consideration to the options presented within the body of the report:

- Option 1: That for 2020 the Council Christmas celebrations are withdrawn.
- Option 2: Deliver revised format for Christmas as detailed in this report.