

FALKIRK COUNCIL

**Subject: BIG IN FALKIRK – SCOTLAND’S NATIONAL STREET
ARTS FESTIVAL**
Meeting: LEISURE, TOURISM & COMMUNITY COMMITTEE
Date: 24TH NOVEMBER 2009
Author: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report advises Members that the production contract for Big in Falkirk, Scotland’s National Street Arts Festival has come to a conclusion and recommends that the Council reviews its approach to outdoor event provision and that due to the current financial constraints the programme is reduced for the foreseeable future.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Big in Falkirk, Scotland’s National Street Arts Festival has taken place over the first weekend in May each year since 2000. It was initially developed in recognition of the millennium celebrations and was continued as part of the overall transformation programme to improve of the image and profile of the Falkirk area internally and externally. It also provides an opportunity for local residents, particularly young people, to experience a wide range of art forms as well as an opportunity to showcase their work.
- 2.2 The audience has grown from 75,000 in year one to over 100,000 attendances, 50% of whom come from outwith the area. The Festival has benefited from external support from European Funding through INSITU, Scottish Arts Council, Arts Council of England, The British Council and Event Scotland. As a commissioning Festival it has also benefited from partnerships with other festivals and artists on co-commissions.
- 2.3 It has also enjoyed excellent support from Media partners, BBC Radio 1, BBC Radio 2 and Real Radio and the Scottish Sun as well as significant local support from the Falkirk Herald and Central FM.
- 2.4 The event has grown in stature over the years and won a VisitScotland Thistle Award in recognition of its contribution to event tourism in Scotland.
- 2.5 The Council appointed UZ Ltd to develop and deliver Big in Falkirk. The most recent contract was procured through OJEU protocols for a period of 3 years from 2007 to 2009. This contract draws to a conclusion at the end of the year.

3. CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 Given the serious financial climate facing the Council it will be essential that Members and Officers take all appropriate steps to ensure that essential services are maintained and that all expenditure delivers a tangible benefit that accords with the Council's strategic priorities.
- 3.2 There is considerable evidence that demonstrates the importance and value of events in increasing community pride within an area; in attracting new visitors; as well as changing the external image and perception of an area. All of the research completed for Big in Falkirk shows that these objectives have been successfully achieved.
- 3.3 However, the event costs the Council almost £400,000 per year to stage and in spite of the enormous benefits and positive coverage it secures for the area it is difficult to present a robust case to Members to support its continuation in the current financial climate.
- 3.4 Event Scotland and the Scottish Arts Council have been involved in discussions on how to diversify the funding commitments and to reduce the burden on the Council. This has included securing support for the commissioning budgets from the Scottish Arts Council and Event Scotland increasing their financial support as well as helping to try to prepare the event to secure external sponsorship. This recognises the importance and value of the event to the national events calendar but still places a significant financial burden on the Council.
- 3.5 It is recognised that the Council stages a number of other community based events throughout the year and it may be that some of these could be developed in future to a more substantial scale if resources were available. Indeed new events could also be created subject to funding and resources including staffing being found.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The event budget for Big in Falkirk is £396,000. The budget pressures for 2010/2011 mean that this is no longer sustainable and though additional support is offered by national agencies it is not sufficient to produce a viable budget.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The contract with UZ Ltd will conclude at the end of the year. There are no other legal obligations

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 Big in Falkirk has been hugely successful over the 10 years of its existence. It has brought new and exciting arts forms and spectacles to the area. It has placed Falkirk among the best of street theatre festivals in Europe. However given the financial challenges facing the Council it is suggested that its priorities lie elsewhere and that unfortunately Big in Falkirk will not take place in 2010. It is proposed that the Council remain open to developing new events in future should funding become available.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 It is recommended that Members:

- **Note that the contract with UZ Ltd concludes at the end of 2009;**
- **Agrees that there will be no event in 2010; and**
- **Agree to consider alternative event options should funds become available.**

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Director

Date: 4th November 2009

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil