

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Forest Heath
District Council

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| Title of Report: | Review of Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre – Final Report | |
| Report No: | OAS/FH/18/031 | |
| Report to and date: | Overview and Scrutiny Committee | 8 November 2018 |
| | Shadow Executive (Cabinet) | 27 November 2018 |
| Portfolio holders: | <p>Councillor Lance Stanbury Portfolio Holder for Planning and Growth (FHDC) Tel: 07970 947704 Email: lance.stanbury@forest-heath.gov.uk</p> <p>Councillor Susan Glossop Portfolio Holder for Planning and Growth (SEBC) Tel: 01284 728377 Email: susan.glossop@stedsbc.gov.uk</p> | |
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| Purpose of report: | This report summarises the review of the Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre and presents a draft action plan for taking forward the recommendations from the Christmas Fayre Joint Task and Finish Group. | |

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| Recommendation: | <p>Overview and Scrutiny Committee:</p> <p>The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is invited to <u>recommend</u> the Christmas Fayre Review Report and the supporting Three Year Action Plan (Appendix F) to the Shadow Executive (Cabinet) for approval.</p> |
| <p>Key Decision:</p> <p><i>(Check the appropriate box and delete all those that do not apply.)</i></p> | <p><i>Is this a Key Decision and, if so, under which definition?</i></p> <p>Yes, it is a Key Decision - <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No, it is not a Key Decision - <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>(a) A key decision means an executive decision which, pending any further guidance from the Secretary of State, is likely to:</p> <p>(i) Be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area in the Borough/District.</p> |
| Consultation: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Section 3 explains the full engagement programme undertaken to support the review. This included a wide consultation programme including interested stakeholders; visitors to the 2017 fayre; residents groups; town and parish councils; stallholders; and Council support services. |
| Alternative option(s): | <p>Paragraph 5.4 of the report sets out the six possible options considered by the review and explains the determining consideration in each case. The five alternative options were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Continue with the Christmas Fayre in the current format; Decide not to hold a Christmas Fayre; Decide to run the fayre as a commercial event either in-house or by a commercial partner; Reduce the scale of the event significantly; and Extend the duration of the fayre over a longer number of days. |
| Implications: | |

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| <i>Are there any financial implications? If yes, please give details</i> | | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to provide the Christmas Fayre for the next three years. • The Christmas Fayre should be managed as a cost-neutral event by the Council. • Request for a one-off allocation of £20,000 to be used to support the proposed changes recommended in the report. | |
| <i>Are there any staffing implications? If yes, please give details</i> | | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed changes have implications for the operating staff who will need to change the way the fayre is planned; set up; and managed. In addition, the proposed changes will increase the workload of staff who make the detailed arrangements for bookings and infrastructure and ensure the fayre is safe. | |
| <i>Are there any ICT implications? If yes, please give details</i> | | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • | |
| <i>Are there any legal and/or policy implications? If yes, please give details</i> | | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • | |
| <i>Are there any equality implications? If yes, please give details</i> | | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • | |
| Risk/opportunity assessment: | | <i>(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)</i> | |
| Risk area | Inherent level of risk (before controls) | Controls | Residual risk (after controls) |
| | Low/Medium / High* | | Low/Medium/ High* |
| The security costs/requirements increase beyond the budgeted amount | Medium | Early dialogue with the Police and security agencies to ensure security costs are factored in at an early stage and proposed changes to funding requests are flagged prior to expenditure commitments. | Low |
| The proposed changes to the Fayre result in less income than budgeted | Medium | Careful planning of the new stalls and new costs to ensure that income comes in on target | Low |
| he proposed changes prove unpopular with visitors, stakeholders and stallholders | Medium | A focus group be established to test the proposals with the interested parties and suggested amendments are considered/delivered | Low |

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| The proposed changes cause operational issues with added time and costs | Medium | Test proposed changes thoroughly with operational staff and make necessary amendments ahead of the fayre. | Low |
| Ward(s) affected: | | All West Suffolk wards | |
| Background papers: <i>(all background papers are to be published on the website and a link included)</i> | | <p>18 April 2018 Overview and Scrutiny Committee report Review of Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre – Scoping Report OAS/SE/18/013</p> <p>19 April 2018 Overview and Scrutiny Committee report Review of Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre – Scoping Report OAS/FH/18/012</p> <p>2015 review of the Christmas Fayre: Cabinet report OAS/SE/15/016</p> <p>Recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee CAB/SE/15/077</p> | |
| Documents attached: | | <p>Appendix A – Christmas Fayre key details document</p> <p>Appendix B – 2015 Christmas Fayre Review Action Plan and progress table</p> <p>Appendix C - Christmas Fayre Engagement/surveys summary document</p> <p>Appendix D – Information from Christmas Fayres held in other places and schedule of Christmas events in West Suffolk</p> <p>Appendix E – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats document</p> <p>Appendix F – Proposed Three Year Action Plan</p> | |

Key issues and reasons for recommendation

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report details the process and consideration taken by the Joint Task and Finish Group set up to review the Christmas Fayre event held annually in Bury St Edmunds. The second section of the report sets out the background to both the event itself and the origins/make up/scope of the Joint Task and Finish Group and the review it undertook.
- 1.2 The third section of the report details the engagement process and refers to **Appendix C** that contains the responses received. From the feedback received a list of common issues and challenges was created and detailed in this section.
- 1.3 The Evidence Base considered by the Joint Task and Finish Group is set out in Section 4 that also refers to more detail contained within **Appendix D**. This information was used to challenge current practices and identify opportunities for our fayre.
- 1.4 The fifth section of the report sets out the options considered by the Joint Task and Finish Group. It then takes each of the areas included in the scope of the review in turn and details the finding and recommendations to be taken forward. This section also refers to the action plan (**Appendix F**) which provides a succinct list of each of the proposed actions with an explanation of who is responsible for each action and by when.
- 1.5 The final section of the report is the conclusion that aims to draw together the main elements of the review and also to provide some reflection from the Joint Task and Finish Group on the process.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre has been running since 2003. St Edmundsbury Borough Council organises the event and commits staff and resources to running it. It is currently run as a not-for-profit community event and attracts over 130,000 visitors to Bury St Edmunds over a four-day period. As such, it was reported by the National Association of British Markets Authorities in 2015 to be in the top dozen Christmas Markets in the UK in terms of its size and economic contribution. **Appendix A** 'Key Details' provides more information about the fayre and how it is run.
- 2.2 A formal review of the Fayre was last carried out in 2015 by a Task and Finish Group consisting of 6 members of St Edmundsbury Overview and Scrutiny Committee, who met in August and October 2015 and then reported to Cabinet in December 2015. The review concluded, "St Edmundsbury Council should commit to the Christmas Fayre for the remainder of the current administration" (i.e. May 2019) and made a number of recommendations that have been, or are being implemented. **Appendix B** includes the 2015 – 2019 Operational Plan and shows progress against the recommendations.

2.3 On 18 and 19 of April 2018 both the St Edmundsbury and the Forest Heath Overview and Scrutiny Committees resolved to establish a Joint West Suffolk Task and Finish Group to complete a review of the Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre for the following reasons:

- i) The current commitment to continue with the Fayre only runs until April 2019, so decisions are needed as to what should take place in winter 2019;
- ii) Planning for the Christmas Fayre starts in the preceding year. As such, a decision will need to be made in 2018 for the 2019 Fayre;
- iii) If the event goes as planned, the 2019 Christmas Fayre will be the first to be run by the new West Suffolk Council as opposed to St Edmundsbury Borough Council. For this reason, current members from across West Suffolk need to be involved in the decisions about the future of the Fayre; and
- iv) The new anti-terrorist requirements for large-scale events were not in place in 2015 when the previous review was carried out. These requirements have financial and other implications and it would be helpful to consider these alongside a wider review of the Fayre.

2.4 The Joint Task and Finish Group included ten Members from both Overview and Scrutiny Committees along with support from officers, including the Service Manager for Economic Development, Markets Development Officer, Service Manager (Health and Safety) and a Policy Business Partner. The following Members were appointed to contribute to the Christmas Fayre Task and Finish Group:

- Cllr Bloodworth, Market Ward
- Cllr Patrick Chung, Southgate Ward, Bury St Edmunds
- Cllr Paula Fox, Haverhill South
- Cllr Susan Glossop, Risby Ward (became Portfolio Holder for Planning and Growth on 17 September 2018)
- Cllr Diane Hind, Northgate Ward, Bury St Edmunds
- Cllr Paul Hopfensperger*, St Olaves Ward, Bury St Edmunds
- Cllr Christine Mason, Brandon East
- Cllr Robert Nobbs, St Marys Ward
- Cllr David Palmer, Brandon West
- Cllr Frank Warby, Moreton Hall

* Cllr Hopfensperger resigned from the Task and Finish Group at its second meeting on the 1 August 2018 and Cllr Chung became a permanent member of the group.

2.5 The following table sets out the scope of the Joint Task and Finish Group's approach.

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| Principle and ownership | Consider whether West Suffolk Council should continue to support a four day Christmas Fayre in Bury St Edmunds from 2019 that is run on a not- |
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| | for-profit basis and organised directly by the Council. |
| Vision | Review current vision (“The Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre is a fun, festive and inclusive event for all ages. The event is designed to attract visitors and have a positive effect on local people and businesses. The Fayre is provided by St Edmundsbury Borough Council”.) |
| Timing and length | Review dates (currently last weekend in November) and timings and length of event and consider alternative options. |
| Format and venues | Review current elements of the Fayre (stalls and entertainment and funfair) and the 10 venues used |
| Type of stalls | Review current split of stalls (i.e. approx. one third of each of household goods; foods; and personal goods) |
| Links to wider economy (retail and tourism) | Review the impact on local businesses, both positive and negative. |
| Transport and accessibility | Review the current transport and accessibility arrangements, including parking; coaches; park and ride; disabled access. |
| Finance | Review the current financial position of the Fayre (including security costs) and other potential options. Consider the overall cost of the Fayre, including opportunity costs and the indirect benefits. |
| Staffing and volunteers | Review current casual staffing arrangements (employed by SEBC) and volunteers |
| Safety and security | Review the anti-terror measures put in place for the 2017 Fayre and note the separate review of health and safety of the 2017 Fayre. |
| Examples from other places | Consider examples of best practice from other places around the UK and overseas |
| Communications and marketing | Review the current arrangements for communication and marketing about the Fayre, and consider alternatives. |
| Management and Resources | Review the management arrangements in previous years and outline the benefits and costs of alternatives |

2.6 The Task and Finish Group met four times over the summer of 2018:

- 14 June
- 1 August
- 11 September
- 5 October.

2.7 The Task and Finish Group also agreed to consider the progress made with regard to implementing the actions agreed in 2015 in the form of a 3-year operational plan for the Christmas Fayre. As mentioned above, **Appendix B** includes the 2015-2019 Operation Plan and the progress made to date.

3.0 Engagement

- 3.1 A wide range of engagement opportunities have been undertaken to enable the Task and Finish Group to become as informed as possible with regard to the varying stakeholders for the fayre. The following groups have provided information in response to a number of questions.
- OurBuryStEdmunds (Business Improvement District)
 - Town centre businesses
 - Businesses that provide services to the Fayre
 - Bury St Edmunds and Beyond (Destination Management Organisation)
 - Arc management
 - Town centre residents associations (collective meeting)
 - Town Centre Masterplan Advisory Group
 - Emergency services
 - Town and parish councils in West Suffolk
 - Stallholders
 - Local schools
- 3.2 In addition to the groups above, the Task and Finish Group took account of the feedback from residents and visitors given through the online Christmas Fayre Visitors Survey in 2017 and 2016. In recognition of the fact that a number of Council services are involved to a greater or lesser degree in the delivery of the Christmas Fayre – an officer group was convened to provide feedback into the review. **Appendix C** includes summary details of the feedback received by the various groups.
- 3.3 A series of standard questions were crafted in order to ensure continuity in the response and to make sure all of the elements of the review were covered. These questions were:
1. Should the fayre be a showcase for West Suffolk, encouraging people to return after the event?
 2. Can the town continue to accommodate the increasing visitor numbers?
 3. Should the stalls have a local bias?
 4. Is the quality of product being sold on the stalls important?
 5. Should the Christmas Fayre be more festive, perhaps through a theme?
 6. Should the format of the fayre be the same every year?
 7. When should the fayre be held, and does a four day event give the right balance between enjoyment of the fayre and the impact on local residents/infrastructure?
 8. How important is the size of the fayre?
- 3.4 The Task and Finish Group considered the wide range of information fed back from the consultation process and concluded that the following issues and challenges exist:
- The Fayre is too big.
 - There is not enough Christmas Spirit

- Same every year
- Resource intensive
- Expensive for small stallholders
- Not enough seating/dwelling opportunities
- Not all local businesses benefit
- No robust data to prove benefit during and after the Fayre
- Food safety standards
- Quality of some stalls

3.5 Many of the concerns raised have led to the recommendations that are contained in the action plan at **Appendix F**.

4.0 Evidence Base

4.1 In addition to the feedback from stakeholders, members of the Task and Finish Group considered information gathered from other towns who also run similar Christmas fayres or markets and published reports from the National Association of British market Authorities (NABMA). This exercise enabled members to look at the opportunity to learn lessons from other towns and to look for best practice. The organisers of these events in Bath, Lincoln, Salisbury, Stratford Upon Avon and Winchester were contacted help us verify and build on the research. These conversations resulted in the following headlines:

1. Consider developing a long-term plan with the BIDs or other partners for Christmas events delivery as a whole.
2. Incorporate the Cathedral more into the event so it can be showcased to visitors.
3. Ensure there are stalls or events attracting visitors to all major parts of the town/city.
4. Investing in and setting up wooden chalet stalls are costly but make a big difference to the appearance of the fayre.
5. Consider running the fayre over an extended period of time if at all possible initial set-up costs are high but daily costs are low so more cost-efficient to run over a longer period of time (more income from stall-holders for the same set-up costs).

It should be noted that the option to extend the length of the fayre is only viable if it is located on already pedestrianised streets or off street areas such as shopping centres, parks and cathedral grounds.

6. Work closely with local producers and traders and businesses located within the vicinity of the fayre and develop supportive initiatives to encourage them to be more involved.
7. Whilst one-way systems for foot traffic seems like a good solution to reducing overcrowding it can be unpopular with shoppers. Simpler techniques can be used such as clearer signage and maps and extending the fayre to allow stalls to be more spaced out.

- 4.2 In addition to the evidence gathered from other towns across the country, the Task and Finish Group considered information about the other festive events that are organised across West Suffolk during the Christmas period.
- 4.3 **Appendix D** sets out in more detail the information gathered from the other towns explained in paragraph 4.1 above and also includes the research gathered from other Christmas events held across West Suffolk.

5. Christmas Fayre Review – findings and recommendations

- 5.1 The Christmas Fayre review covered a wide range of considerations that were grouped under the thirteen themes included in the review scope. The group was provided with a substantial amount of information to enable it to carry out its review.
- 5.2 The Joint Task and Finish Group consisted of members with varying degrees of understanding about the fayre and to this end a 'Key Details' document was produced to help provide all members of the group with a similar level of understanding. The key details document is included at **Appendix A** and includes facts about how many people attend the fayre; how many stallholders there are; duration of the fayre; organisation responsibility; details of the entertainment; types of stalls; safety and security; finances; staffing and resources; communications and marketing; and a summary of the examples of fayres from other towns. This information provided a good understanding of how the 2017 fayre was organised.
- 5.3 In order to assist with the task ahead of the review group, a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) document was produced. This document is available at **Appendix E**. A number of the key points, in particular the opportunities, set out in the SWOT were also raised as points of interest by stakeholders and members of the Task and Finish Group themselves. For example, more festive decoration; changes to the layout of the fayre; incentivising artisan stalls or stalls providing healthy eating options.
- 5.4 At the early meetings of the Task and Finish Group, a number of key options were considered. There was no assumption that they would be recommending the Christmas Fayre should continue and the group was entirely open to any outcome from the consultation feedback and evidence base. The options considered by the group were:
- (a) Continue with the Christmas Fayre in the current format;
 - (b) Decide not to hold a Christmas Fayre after the 2018 event;
 - (c) Decide to run the Fayre as a commercial event, either in-house or by a commercial partner;
 - (d) Reduce the scale of the event significantly;
 - (e) Extend the duration of the fayre over a longer number of days; and
 - (f) Make changes to the procedures, stalls and layouts within the boundaries of the existing fayre.
- 5.5 The Task and Finish Group concluded that the options to not make changes or not to hold the Fayre again were two extremes that were not palatable. The costs of reducing the scale of the fayre dramatically went against the

aspiration for the fayre to be contained within budget (because the set-up costs remain the same and the income from stallholders' is the main source of revenue). Option (c) was also discounted as a community based event was preferred and there is a lack of alternative delivery bodies available to deliver this not for profit event (more detailed discussion on this point is available at para's 5.38 and 5.39). The disruption from extending the number of days the fayre is held over was also seen to be a concern (and explained in more detail at paragraphs 5.14 and 5.15). Therefore, option (f) "Make changes to the procedures, stalls and layouts within the boundaries of the existing fayre" was the preferred outcome. The following paragraphs detail the proposed changes.

5.6 The recommendations in this report are based on findings from the online visitor's survey; discussions with the stakeholders (as described in **Appendix C**); background evidence (set out in **Appendix D**) and discussions with operational officers. All of the recommendations agreed by the Task and Finish Group are brought together into a 3-year action plan that is attached at **Appendix F**.

5.7 The following paragraphs take each area of the review in turn and explain the considerations and recommendations from the Task and Finish Group.

Principle and ownership

5.8 The Task and Finish Group considered all of the evidence and questioned whether the fayre should be held at all. Whilst it was recognised that it remains to be difficult to evidence the precise economic impact of the fayre, the group were overwhelmed by the community support for the event.

5.9 An appreciation of the level of community support and in-kind activity resulted in the view that the fayre should continue to be run on a not for profit basis.

5.10 The group considered whether the fayre could be delivered by a third party or indeed a commercial company. Whilst this option should continue to be explored, the group felt that the Council should commit to running the fayre for at least the next three years. It was recognised that the commitment to three years gave rise to savings from the procurement of goods and services over a longer period.

Vision

5.11 The current vision for the fayre is specific about the fact that the fayre is run by St Edmundsbury Borough Council. As of next April, West Suffolk Council will deliver the fayre and therefore the wording of the vision is recommended to remain the same with the omission of the Council. The wording proposed is as follows:

"The Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre is a fun, festive and inclusive event for all ages. The event is designed to attract visitors and have a positive effect on local people and businesses"

Timing and Length

- 5.12 The Task and Finish Group agreed that the date of the fayre should remain fixed as the final weekend in November. The rationale behind this timing is influenced by a number of factors. Lincoln holds its fayre the weekend after ours and a number of stallholders attend both fayres. The weekend after this is one of the busiest for our town centre retailers and the disruption of the fayre may affect trade in the town. The fact that "Black Friday" often clashes with the weekend of our fayre is regrettable however holding the fayre the weekend before attracts criticism about holding the fayre too soon.
- 5.13 The best practice information gleaned from other towns that hold a similar event (**Appendix D**) led the Task and Finish Group to consider whether to extend the number of days of the event. Of the five towns considered (Bath, Lincoln, Salisbury, Stratford Upon Avon and Winchester), three hold extended fayres of 18 to 34 days. Only Lincoln and Stratford Upon Avon run fayres on a similar duration to ours (3 to 4 days). The benefits to running events over a longer duration include the ability to spread set-up/down costs across a longer period; higher stall income; and the provision of more attractive stalls (for example wooden chalet style).
- 5.14 The physical layout of each town centre varies from town to town and when compared to Bury St Edmunds. Each of the three towns that hold longer fayres do so with minimal disruption to the function of the town (in terms of accessibility). In Bury St Edmunds, the closure of Angel Hill is an inevitable safety measure that is required for almost all large events in this part of town. The group considered whether the fayre could be held in another part of the town or on the outskirts; however, it was agreed that it was ostensibly Angel Hill, the Cathedral and the Abbey Gardens that needed to be the focus of the showcase. Consideration was also then given to whether the Abbey Gardens could host the fayre on its own; however, it was understood that the gardens are a Scheduled Ancient Monument and are already utilised to the maximum possible without causing harm. It would also be likely that the numbers of people visiting would result in Angel Hill having to be closed for safety reasons. The group was also aware that extending the Fayre over a longer period would extend the impact upon the local businesses.
- 5.15 The group raised the question as to whether the hours of the fayre could be extended each day to help spread the visitors. A number of factors influenced the decision to keep to the same hours including that the current hours are designed to encourage visits to the local pubs and restaurants that exist in town; changing the hours wouldn't affect the coach groups who tend to have left by 5pm each day; and the extension of hours would require a second shift of stewards and staff which would adversely affect costs.
- 5.16 It was agreed that the duration of the fayre should continue to be four days.

Format and Venues

- 5.17 The blend of indoor and outdoor stall locations enables a wide range of goods to be sold. Any products particularly affected by the weather can be protected by available stall positions in the Apex and the Athenaeum.

- 5.18 One of the criticisms of the current fayre was the fact it was the same every year and for some people was feeling stale. The Task and Finish Group considered the idea that stalls should change positions every year and that themed areas could be created for certain types of offer. Ultimately, due to considerations relating to the health and safety of people (the need to spread elements out) and the administrative challenges with running a fayre of this size it was considered that a manageable level of change could make a big difference. The main opportunity considered by the Task and Finish Group was to create a food, drink and entertainment space with some new stalls and the relocation of other stalls in key locations. Creating this space would also offer the opportunity for some covered seating to help enhance the customer experience.

Type of stalls

- 5.19 The Task and Finish Group were keen to ensure the quality offer of the stalls and the festive appearance of the Fayre as a whole. At the 2018 Fayre (in a few weeks), a stall audit will be carried out to increase the knowledge of the quality and appearance of the stalls at present. This information will be used to drive changes for the 2019 fayre. In addition, the stallholders are being asked to adhere to the requirement to make their stalls and themselves appear festive.
- 5.20 The fayre attracts some criticism relating to the offer and pricing of gifts. The group felt that the pricing structure for stalls could be used to incentivise local artisan groups who may wish to take part in the fayre. This would lead to greater variety of stalls and offer (things for people to buy). In addition, the same incentives could be used to encourage healthier food options alongside the traditional choices.

Links to wider economy (retail and tourism)

- 5.21 The understanding of the impact of the Christmas Fayre upon the wider economy is based upon statistics that capture the number of visitors, the likely spend and anecdotal evidence that is hard to verify. Although it is difficult to quantify the impact, the Task and Finish Group thought it was essential that we continue to spread the benefits of the fayre locally and into West Suffolk. The group identified the best opportunity for this was incentivising visitors to return to the area at a time in the future. The group therefore advocates more work with partners to create opportunities for visitors to return at other times of the year and help track measure the impact of these repeat visits.

5.22 Transport and Accessibility

The last review of the fayre in 2015 identified the need for us to work in partnership with local travel providers to promote sustainable methods of accessing the town during the fayre weekend. In addition, it was identified in 2015 that access for disabled people needed to be provided. The Task and Finish Group endorsed both of these actions.

- 5.23 One of the main criticisms raised about transport and accessibility is the provision of car parking. All of the town centre car parks fill up during the

event and other privately owned car parks are added to supply more spaces. The Council runs the park and ride site from Claas at Saxham and both car parks at Olding Road and West Suffolk College are available for park and walk. It is the case that more people want to come to the fayre than the car parks can cater for. Any decision to increase the supply of car parking needs to be taken in the context of the impact upon the number of people in the town centre. For health and safety reasons it is considered that, the event is at its maximum capacity. It is still a safe event and the Task and Finish Group recognised that this was of paramount importance.

5.24 The Task and Finish Group did however explore opportunities to improve the customer experience around the park and ride in particular and at the same time help to make the service more cost effective. For these reasons, the opportunity to provide 'Premier Parking' is being explored with the option of pre-booking, and thus guaranteeing, a space. In addition, the opportunity to pay by card is being explored.

5.25 **Finance**

The Task and Finish Group were clear that the Christmas Fayre should be run, as far as possible, within budget with costs not exceeding income. There was an acceptance that the impact of unforeseen anti-terrorist measures have to be provided if the event is to be allowed to be held. There had clearly been an impact on the finances of the 2017 fayre as a result of the unforeseen cost of the new standard anti-terrorist measures. It is considered important for several reasons, including financial considerations that any proposed changes/requirements relating to anti-terrorist or policing activities are flagged sooner rather than later. The receipt of early intelligence enables the financial impact of such changes to be mitigated.

5.26 One of the factors that had contributed to an overspend in 2017 was the loss made by Park and Ride. In an attempt to reduce this cost, the prices for Park and Ride are being increased this year to £10 per car (from £8). In addition, as detailed at paragraph 5.24 above there are plans to create Premier Parking that will also help to increase the revenue from Park and Ride.

5.27 Members of the Task and Finish Group saw that the biggest income source for the Christmas Fayre came from the fees paid by the stallholders. The information also showed that the fees for the stalls are automatically increased by 4% year on year. The feedback from stallholders (as set out in **Appendix C**) showed that for some businesses, the increases are reaching a level where it is becoming unviable for them to attend. Normally, the increases affect the smaller businesses who are often the type of stall we would want to attract. Therefore as mentioned at paragraph 5.20 above, the Task and Finish Group suggested that there should be more of a differentiation in the fees paid by certain types of stallholders. This would enable the type of stalls most desired to be incentivised to attend by providing them with a pricing structure more suited to their business.

5.28 It was felt that more could be made of sponsorship for the fayre. Members recognised that selling sponsorship packages was a specialist task and also that care should be taken to make sure that the sponsorship amount is more

than the time/money spent on signing sponsors up. It was therefore suggested that a piece of work should be commissioned to find out how much the fayre could potentially generate in sponsorship terms and also what the best method of achieving this potential would be.

- 5.29 The Task and Finish Group felt that a number of other town centre organisations should be asked whether they would like to make a contribution towards the Christmas Fayre.

Staffing and Volunteers

- 5.30 Following the 2015 review, a number of changes have been made to the way the fayre stewards are recruited and organised. The need for experienced and well-trained stewards is a constant requirement every year. The role of stewards is different to the role of guides and volunteers and there is some scope for the guides and volunteers to be more easily identified as people who are there to support visitors and make sure that their visit to the fayre is an enjoyable one.

Safety and Security

- 5.31 The safety and security considerations are of paramount importance in the delivery of the Christmas Fayre. The congregation of 130,000 people in total over the four days of the fayre requires a higher level of planning and resourcing than other Council-run events. The Service Manager for Health and Safety prepares an Event Safety Plan every year that incorporates the results from a wide number of agencies and consultees. The safety plan goes to the Safety Advisory Group (SAG) which is an advisory group made up of Event Professionals from the Police, Police event team, Fire, Ambulance, Building Control, Environmental Health, Licensing and Health and Safety. The purpose and scope of SAG is to provide a forum for discussing and advising on public safety at an event. They aim to help organisers with the planning, and management of an event and to encourage cooperation and coordination between all relevant agencies. They are non-statutory bodies and so do not have legal powers or responsibilities, and are not empowered to approve or prohibit events from taking place. Event organisers and others involved in the running of an event, retain the principal legal duties for ensuring public safety.
- 5.32 The safety plan also goes to West Suffolk Joint Health and Safety Panel. The safety plan as per last year will be tested at a Police led Table Top Exercise involving players from all emergency services, Security Company officers and other observers. Following this, final tweaks will be made to the plan.
- 5.33 The safety of visitors to the fayre includes ensuring that food standards are high. The current requirement for all food stalls is that they meet Food Hygiene rating 3 or above. All food stalls are supplied with the Food Safety leaflet that provides advice and guidance to enable food stalls to meet West Suffolk market inspection standards. In addition, there is a requirement for all stalls with animals for petting to have an appropriate risk assessment and procedures in place to ensure risk of infection is low.

Examples from other places

- 5.34 As identified in **Appendix D** and at paragraph 4.1 above, five other towns were surveyed to find best practice and lessons that we may be able to translate the learning to in the delivery of our fayre. These were considered at the first meeting of the Task and Finish group.

Communications and marketing

- 5.35 A communication plan is prepared for each Christmas Fayre to make sure the key messages are sent out via all available channels. The Christmas Fayre is in a slightly unusual position in that it does not need to promote the event to potential visitors, as there is no shortage of people attending. Our challenge is more about providing visitors, local residents, stakeholders and businesses with the most relevant and up to date information about the event. One of the initiatives the Task and Finish Group felt would help enhance the visitor experience was a directory and map of stalls. At the moment, there are some visitors who do not appreciate that there are more stalls on Angel Hill (when visiting Apex) and vice versa. The map/directory would help to show the scale of the fayre and would help to spread the visitors throughout the town. The map/directory also gives the opportunity for visitors to be made aware of the local businesses/retailers and their offer. The proposal is that a map and directory (also to be made available electronically) be prepared for the 2019 fayre and the possibility of charging for the map is to be considered to help with the costs.
- 5.36 It was clear to the Task and Finish Group that there are a number of other events held in the run up to Christmas around West Suffolk. It was felt that there would be a huge advantage to jointly promoting these other events at the same time as the Christmas Fayre. This would reduce duplication and improve penetration of the marketing materials. The opportunity here is to work with other partners who hold similar events and co-ordinate the marketing activity for the benefit of all.

Management and resources

- 5.37 The imperative to keep the delivery of the Christmas Fayre within budget constrains the opportunities to make major changes to the fayre – because there are inevitable costs of the proposed changes. The proposal is that a separate one-off budget be set up to enable the proposed initiatives to be funded outside of the existing operational Christmas Fayre budget. In addition, the opportunity for staff to become involved with the delivery of the Christmas Fayre each year can be mutually beneficial; therefore, the wider officer team are encouraged to support the delivery of the fayre going forward.
- 5.38 The 2015 review considered in detail the alternative options for the delivery of the fayre. These included running the fayre as a commercial event; establish an arm's length vehicle to run the fayre and other events across West Suffolk; and end the Councils involvement with the fayre and explore future options for running the fayre with existing town centre organisations. The last of these three options was discounted for the reason that neither existing town centre organisations were in a position to "take on" the

enormity of running the fayre along with its inherent risks. In addition, both organisations are looking at Bury St Edmunds being the focus of activity and therefore neither are in a position to truly represent West Suffolk in its entirety, which we have committed to as part of the overall vision.

- 5.39 The option of delivering the Christmas Fayre as a commercial event implies that there is an option of generating income that the current arrangement does not tap into. Whilst there may be scope for additional sponsorship (see para 5.28 above), there is not the opportunity to raise income dramatically. A ticketed event could be considered, however the impact of cordoning part of the town off and restricting access to local residents seems to go against the re-stated vision for the fayre. Members of the Task and Finish Group were also keen to keep the level of community involvement and good will. These things would be eroded by a profit driven approach.
- 5.40 The key opportunity is to continue to investigate whether a separate company could be set up providing the opportunity for several bodies (who are already delivering events across West Suffolk) to come together. Whilst it is accepted that this would take a while to bring together it would have the advantage of creating a specialist team that could be supported by the right infrastructure and skills.
- 5.41 At the end of each year, following the Christmas fayre a session is held at which lessons are learnt for the future. At the moment, this is mainly officers and is specific to the fayre just held. There is an opportunity for the Task and Finish Group to reconvene to look at recommendations for the next years' fayre. This does not need to be a full review to the extent that the 2015 review and this year's review have been; however, it could pick up opportunities and provide the officer group with a clear steer on the detail of these recommendations for the next year.

6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 The Christmas Fayre Review Joint Task and Finish Group met four times over the summer of 2018 to review the Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre event. The group were supplied with information of different types designed to support this review. **Appendix A** included key details about the fayre arranged in the order of each of the review areas. In addition, the group spent time looking at the recommendations of the 2015 review and assessed progress against this review to date. The details of this progress are attached at **Appendix B**. It became clear that the review in 2015 had been a more process related review.
- 6.2 The Task and Finish Group sought a significant amount of consultation from a variety of different groups, some closer to the event and others indirectly affected. The breadth of consultation undertaken did not result in as broad a range of views as one may have expected. The majority of people were very positive about the fayre and were willing to contribute to the review in the spirit of making the event even better.
- 6.3 The Task and Finish Group have distilled a number of recommendations, set out in the action plan at **Appendix F**, which are to be presented to both Overview and Scrutiny meetings. In addition, in order to deliver the

proposals set out in the action plan it was suggested that a one-off fund be established to cover the costs of change only.

The request of the Task and Finish Group is that both Overview and Scrutiny Committees will then make these same recommendations to Shadow Executive (Cabinet) for their approval. The view of the Task and Finish Group is that the proposed changes will result in the continued improvement of the fayre for at least the next three years.

- 6.4 At the end of the review period, the Task and Finish Group were asked to reflect on the process of the review. The group considered whether they had held sufficient meetings to go through the necessary business; whether the frequency of the meetings had been appropriate; and whether they had received all of the information necessary to undertake the review. Members of the group commented on the amount of information that had to be considered and as a result were pleased with the number of meetings and that they had been given sufficient time to prepare between meetings. The group expressed their collective support for the process and the part they had been able to play in improving the Christmas Fayre.