

1. Introduction

1.1. This report reviews the processes and procedures for organising community led events within our city. It outlines:

- What information, advice and guidance we give to those wanting to organise community level events
- Feedback from the Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS) on their experiences regarding community events
- Work that has happened based on the above
- Ongoing work and possible changes in the future.

1.2. As a Cooperative Council, when we received information from our CVS that the expectations and demands relating to community events are 'too bureaucratic', we undertook to look into the issue and the Your Plymouth Scrutiny panel agreed to receive an update on progress. This report provides that update and asks if this sufficient, or whether a different approach is required.

2. Background

2.1. In 2009, the Eden project started the 'Big Lunch' which aims to bring communities together. It is a simple step of sharing lunch together in order to enable people to feel a part of their wider community. The 'Big Lunch' events are inclusive to all communities and have an important role to play in different groups of people establishing common bonds and so promoting community cohesion. Due to the Jubilee in 2012 and this initiative, we have also seen a revival in the popularity of 'Street Parties'. This was enhanced by the First World War centenary last year and in 2014, when 4.83 million people took to their streets, gardens and community spaces for the sixth annual Big Lunch.

2.2. The 2011, the Localism Act introduced new rights for communities to take greater control in their local areas. It was backed up by a 'Bringing people together in strong and united communities' policy (November 2012 and updated in January 2015). As part of the programme of activities relating to this Act and policy, the DCLG recognised that some of the organisational imperatives related to arranging and holding street parties might be complex for grass root community organisations or inspired individual street party champions. They therefore issued a step-by-step guide providing practical advice for anyone looking to hold a street party in December 2011.

2.3. As part of our 'Welcoming City' actions and neighbourhood support, local groups based on identity, interest and geography have been supported by officers in our Social Inclusion and Neighbourhood Regeneration Units to deliver grass root events. Some small level sponsorship was available (e.g. North Prospect World on the Green, Stonehouse Street Party) and the officers acted as a conduit to other parts of our council such as Parks, Highways and Events who in turn gave their support as relevant to the key individuals within those groups. We also arranged for small scale community events to be advertised through our web site and this is still available.

2.4. In 2014, we enhanced this through changed commissioning arrangements in relation to the support we give to our local CVS. We issued a new contract to the Zebra Collective (which runs Plymouth Octopus Project - POP). We asked them to take the lead in supporting grass roots organisations, motivated individuals and diverse communities to put on events related to the 'Big Lunch'. Between the spring and summer of 2014, they supported 16 community groups to hold 'Big Lunches' and 'street parties'. Although we have not been able to elicit specific facts and details, POP has told us that while supporting community groups to hold these events, it came across some issues that it felt should be simplified and improved. It also said that this was reinforced by some of the comments they had received from the grass roots leaders themselves.

3. Current Arrangements

- 3.1. In keeping with our ambitions to make more of our services accessible via electronic means, advice and guidance about holding events can be found on our web site. Currently our home page does not give obvious or high profile direction of where to find information about holding events. There is also no link within the 'apply button' to the relevant information.
- 3.2. At present, there are two main routes to find the required information. If 'organising an event' is typed into the search engine it goes to the link below. Community groups can also use the alphabet panel and click on 'E' which takes you to an 'Events' link which leads to the same link: <http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/homepage/leisureandtourism/eventsadvice.htm>
- 3.3. These pages advise that their content is actively under review. The information provided is about overall safety and welfare at events like street parties, marches, carnivals and fairs. It contains advice from our Plymouth Events Safety Group which comprises senior officers from the Council and emergency services working in our city. It includes overarching guidance for communities about the key areas they should consider before, during and after organising and holding an event. On this page, the four main venues where events can be held are listed with E-mail contact details. While it helpfully provides a link to the 'licences and permits' section of the web, there is no direct hyperlink to the specific places where advice on holding events in venues other than the Hoe (eg the Piazza and parks) is contained.
- 3.4. There are currently 4 key venues where events can be held. These are (including links):
- **Parks and green spaces:** <http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/homepage/leisureandtourism/parksnatureandgreenspaces/parksnatureevents/parksnatureeventsforms.htm>
 - **The Hoe:** <http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/homepage/leisureandtourism/eventsadvice.htm>
 - **Piazza and city centre areas:** citycentre@plymouth.gov.uk
 - **Buildings:** <http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/homepage/communityandliving/communityinformation/hallsforhire/>
- 3.5. Depending on the venue and specific location for a 'Big Lunch', permission may or may not be required for road closures. Some street parties will also have to apply for road closure permission although this does not always need to happen (e.g. the difference between closing major through fares such as Union Street for the Stonehouse Street party compared to say running a party on Whitleigh Green where a road runs around the venue.) Each application is likely to be unique and applications for general road closures (Amey) can be made via the web link below. On this page Amey advises events organisers that it has a dedicated Events Coordinator that can give them bespoke advice. The page has a clear link back to the safety advice as mentioned above in 3.3. It gives e-mail, telephone and address details of how to contact Amey's Events Coordinator: <http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/homepage/transportandroads/highways/eventsonhighway.htm>

- 3.6. Forms and prices regarding road closures are not published within the same link and those using the web need to use the search engine to find 'apply for road closure'. This then takes them to another link where this information is clearly laid out:http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/temporary_traffic_regulation_order_form.pdf
- 3.7. Our parks and green spaces team (managed by Street Cleansing and Grounds Department) currently manages 238 events a year. On the web, three key documents are required to make an application to hold an event on our land. There is an overall guidance giving the terms and conditions of use, an application form and a risk assessment. Information and requirements are clear and in plain English. There is a helpful example of how to do a risk assessment plus a checklist to use to make sure all the right documents are returned. Applications need to be made 28 days in advance of the proposed event and applicants are given phone details, email contacts and address details of where to send their request.
- 3.8. In relation to the Hoe, we have already had 32 events booked for 2015. Bespoke guidance about using the Hoe is contained within the overall safety and welfare at events web page as noted in 3.3 above. The forms that are required are contained in this guidance at the end. In addition there is an accessibility check list which we co-designed with Plymouth and District Disability Action network some years ago.
- 3.9. The guidance on this generic events web page also refers to the Guildhall and gives contact details in relation to using this building as well as Harewood House, Plympton and St Maurice Guildhall and Tothill Community Centre. The charges are clearly laid out as is the way to make a booking. Access information about each venue is also available. While these venues would not be used for street parties as such, they could become a focal point for such an event and also cater for a 'Big Lunch'.
- 3.10 The City Centre Company has its own web site which can be sourced via a link from the council site. Its' web is called ShopPlymouth available on this link:
<http://www.visitplymouth.co.uk/shopping/home> The City Centre Company has a bespoke Events Officer for the City Centre and Piazza. It responds direct to any enquires about events and assists people throughout the process including bespoke requirements and forms (not available on line).
- 3.11 At present, there is no charge for holding events in our parks or grounds including the Hoe. The City Centre Company has a sliding scale of charges for using the Piazza based on the size of the event and the size/type of organisation (e.g. commercial, charity, statutory). A variety of services support a significant number of events (e.g. dog shows, vehicle access and bike displays) including preparatory work, enquiries, administration, support on the day and post event clear up, representing substantial council in kind support to our local community groups.

4. The Issues

- 4.1. In the main, the matters that have been raised by the CVS focus on: the website; paperwork; complexities in identifying the most appropriate officer to book an event; and finding a named officer to support event organisers complete our requirements. The different booking forms, which are of varying lengths, have also been cited as a potential concern to some organisers, though it has been acknowledged that after completing the process for the first time it then becomes more straightforward.
- 4.2. **Website** - Small groups have fed back to the CVS that it is difficult to locate the correct person to speak to when finding out where to book an event. They say that there is not a central page on our website where they can easily locate everything they are required to do. While we do have an umbrella web site with the core information users need, they then have to refer to other pages, only some of which are provided as links.

This can mean an involved search, for more details. We clearly sign post web enquiries to the right department but the feedback is that users would like to be directed to specific officers.

- 4.3. **Paper work including risk assessments** - The CVS has told us that while the wording within the paperwork is generally straightforward, at times there is confusion about which form to complete and the amount of detail required. Often, smaller groups did not feel equipped to complete risk assessments even though an example is available on line. Our Events Team and Street Cleansing and Grounds Department are willing to (and frequently do) support community groups complete risk assessments, but this can require extensive advice and explanation. This can be very time and resource intensive and has to be balanced with other competing priorities.
- 4.4. **Notice periods** – We do require the organisers of events to give us sufficient notice of proposed events and to clearly lay out their plans. Some events organisers have expressed disappointment when missing the required deadlines. So they are asking for better clarity on our processes including deadlines, and would like consideration about different types of events having different requirements. For example, giving larger events that require more regulation a deadline long enough away from the date of the event and, for the smaller ones, giving a shorter period of notice.
- 4.5. As a result of this feedback, Zebra/POP and our local Pride in Plymouth community group have recently formed their own CVS Events Network. It has approximately 12 members from small to medium community groups including those from diverse backgrounds. It consists of organisations such as Life Play Learning, Stonehouse Timebank, Friends of the Museum and the Hoe Residents Association. Their intention is to support each other with the process of organising events, share best practice/resources, and provide ongoing feedback about improvement suggestions to ourselves. We have been informed about their meetings and an officer from our Social Inclusion Unit attended the first two. There are plans in hand to ensure that this network is attended by officers in the Events Team (who will refer back to Social Inclusion and Grounds as relevant). This will help ensure our work on small events aligns with our city wide priorities and vice versa to the CVS and community groups' imperatives.

5. Next steps

- 5.1. Both our Street and Grounds Service and Events Team are willing to act on service improvements especially now that the new Purple Guide has been issued. They are also undertaking a benchmarking exercise against other Local Authorities seeking out viable best practice to inform our local procedures.
- 5.2. As part of this exercise, they will be considering our website information especially as it seems crucial to making community groups' experience of organising events simpler. There is an opportunity to consider whether we could take action to streamline the current information and enhance our current centralised web page to make it more of an umbrella resource page containing all the information needed. Other cooperative councils such as Liverpool and Lewisham have this in place <https://www.liverpool.gov.uk/leisure-parks-and-events/events/> and <http://www.lewisham.gov.uk/inmyarea/events/planning-an-event/Pages/default.aspx>
- 5.3. At the same time, both services will be considering the other ideas from the CVS. These include having a 'one size fits all' guidance on our web that could include more information about what is required to organise and manage (including things like crowd control, marquees, and managing noise). The application form and risk assessment requirements might also become 'one form for all events' especially if it becomes possible to complete it to varying complexity depending on the

size and nature of the event. If this was accompanied by FAQ, then simple and clear links could be given to required licences, permits and associated costs if it is not possible (due to keeping it simple) to contain all this information in one place.

- 5.4. Information about what will happen once an application is made, and to what timelines, would also be useful, as it would mean that small events organisers would know what to expect and when. This might be as easy as making a clearer cross reference to our current corporate standards for dealing with all our customer enquiries. The CVS would be interested in working on a co-designed interactive events toolkit containing this and things like '10 top tips' and the '10 things to do list' for organising an event. Their ambition is to use this to enable smaller community groups to help themselves more and be less reliant on officers' knowledge and time, which in turn will help communities take control and save resources for all concerned.
- 5.5. The Events Network has also mentioned that a city wide diary and map would be useful especially if it was interactive for groups to 'click on' and check location and availability of sites for their events. The Network has told us that our forms and information are clear and in plain English but would like to see this backed by more encouraging language about welcoming community events led by small, medium and large community organisations. As we formalise our events strategy as part of Mayflower 400, the alignment of our grass roots communities' activities to this will be essential.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1. We welcome the Scrutiny Panel's overview of:
- the information we have received from the CVS and the newly formed Events Network
 - what we are already doing, and
 - what else we might do in response to their feedback and our own benchmarking findings.

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**NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY SERVICES
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