Carmarthenshire Event Organisers Network Seminar

31st January 2017 at the Ivy Bush Hotel, Carmarthen

Summary Report

Contents:

Page: Content:

Produced for Carmarthenshire County Council by:

Carmarthenshire Tourism Association
Contact : Nia Ball
T: 01269 598140
E: nia@visitcarmarthenshire.co.uk
W: carmarthenshiretourism.co.uk

Introduction

The Event Organisers' Network meeting was held at the Ivy Bush Royal Hotel in Carmarthen on the morning of 31st January.

This event was designed to consult with the County's event organisers – from small community events to larger visitor events. This was undertaken to identify their key support needs, and to help cement the activities of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 funded Carmarthenshire Event Organisers Circle Project, being led by Carmarthenshire County Council (CCC).

Carmarthenshire Tourism Association (CTA) was contracted to design, prepare and facilitate the morning session. After initial presentations by Huw Parsons and Sian Williams from CCC, giving an overview of the Project aims, the 60 event organisers in attendance moved into discussions groups, facilitated by team members from CTA and CCC.

After those discussions – with key points noted by facilitators – delegates were asked five questions and were required to write their thoughts onto post-it notes. This exercise helped to identify those more prominent issues and ideas and ensured all event organisers had an opportunity to have their opinions considered in this process.

The notes from each of the discussion groups and 'post-it' exercise have been considered in the Seminar Summary – and in turn, shaped the Project Recommendations section. The recommendations made are by no means exhaustive – this is an additional element to the contract, and felt to be useful in summarising the overall notes and report.

Group Discussion Notes

The following provides a summary of the points made and discussions which took place within the groups. The potential opportunities sections include points made by event organisers, but also those recommended by the report author based on the findings and comments noted previously.

Individual, separate group notes are included in the Appendix 1. These should be considered as an important resource, with lots of useful comments, suggestions and observations included within.

1. Funding / Financing of Events

The main sources of financing events were cited as being from:

- Ticket sales / Entry fees

- Participation fees - e.g. people paying to be part of a sporting event, businesses paying for a stall to sell their products at the event)

- Grants - e.g. Heritage Lottery Fund, Awards for All, Carmarthenshire County Council, Community Councils, BID

- Cash sponsorship

- In-kind sponsorship (contra-deals, support provision of services and products rather than direct cash support).

The challenges and areas of required support put forward in terms of financing events were as follows:

- It was reported that there are difficulties in knowing who to contact for the different aspects of running an event

- Difficulties in identifying suitable grant sources

- Lack of clarity on which events Carmarthenshire County Council (CCC) support with grants – described as being 'sporadic'

- Difficulties in attracting and sourcing sponsorship

- Unclear as to how to value an event, which is key when approaching commercial sponsors – e.g. Return on Investment / spend / value to the local economy

- Local businesses are bombarded with a high volume of requests for sponsorship and support from local events

- Felt that most grant schemes aren't relevant or suited to Events, in particular in terms of timescales (long lead in times) and difficulty in sourcing these grants, especially after the first year of the event

- Many events are organised by groups of volunteers and so not a constituted body – which is then a barrier to applying for grants

Potential opportunities for addressing these finance issues via the Project:

- Creation of an Events Coordinator post for the County - who will help to provide a clear channel of communication, support and guidance (a dedicated first point of contact who can then support and signpost)

- Provide support and guidance for attracting commercial sponsorship

- A co-ordinated approach to 'package' events together for sponsorship (helps to limit the large number and fragmented requests to local businesses and potential sponsors)

- Create and share a 'Business Benefits' model – to be used by event organisers when approaching local businesses for support. E.g. Facts and stats re: importance of events to a local economy, and ideas of ways local businesses can get involved and benefit from local events - which can be used when approaching them for support, rather than just asking for donations.

- Project to support and facilitate the process of raising awareness by local business and community groups of the importance of events, and share good practise. This could be through focussed events within towns which hold events with potential for growth/attracting visitors - or a wider, multi-platform 'campaign'.

- A range of training workshops could be organised to address issues and needs discussed, including:

  o Business Planning

  o Constitution – 'How & Why'

  o Financial Planning / Book keeping etc

  o Events / Project Management

  o Writing effective grant applications

  o Innovative ways to source funding for events

- To include on new Events Circle web portal:

  o Creation of a flow-chart depicting who does what – clarity of available support and services

  o An overview of the key steps for organising an event (a Toolkit of Practicalities – including things like lead in times, regulations, things you need licences for, 'how to fill the form' samples etc)

  o Facts and statistics on event benefits to the local community

  o A list / register of local businesses who are interested in sponsorship opportunities

  o Details of suitable grant schemes – must be kept up-to-date

- Advice on setting up a constituted body – which types, what means to you as individual, who to contact etc

- Business Benefits model (as above)

- Information on the BID scheme

2. Marketing & Promotion

The main marketing activities undertaken by the event organisers present were:

- Social media – in particular, Facebook

- Radio – event listings on web pages and events promotion slot / presenter reads. Some taking paid-for adverts

- Website events listings – e.g. visitwales.com, discovercarmarthenshire.com, Carmarthenshire Events on Facebook

- Producing and distributing posters & leaflets

- Listings and adverts in local papers – examples of specific titles mentioned include Tennant 2 Tennant magazine, Carmarthenshire News, Papurau Bro/Community papers (their readership across Wales is bigger than the Western Mail)

- Promote to local tourism businesses – promoting in their own activity, recommending to guests and customers

- Write and circulate press releases / speak to journalists

- CCC target the county's big employers to distribute information to their staff – so on staff room notice boards, in payslips etc

The main challenges and support needs put forward from a marketing point of view were:

- A need for improved marketing support

- Help improve skills and knowledge of event organisers (most of whom aren't professional event organisers and are volunteers)

- Poor level of communication between event organisers – for example, resulting in duplication of efforts, events targeting same audience being held during the same day.

- Difficulties in marketing events with limited budgets / resources

- A need to strengthen links with local tourism businesses

- Strict rules / unclear rules over road-side posters and promotion

Potential opportunities for addressing these marketing issues via the Project:

- Facilitate an opportunity for event organisers to meet with relevant CCC departments / other organisations (e.g. Officer from Highways team to discuss road-side promotion and signage rules and regulations, licensing, police, St John's Ambulance, marketing)

- Co-ordinate group printing schemes for Events Circle members

- CCC to manage a roadside banners initiative (as done in NPT) – with allocated/set locations and a rota for different events)

- Creation of a system to reduce occurrence of events being held on same day

- A system for event organisers to communicate – perhaps a closed Facebook group?

- Co-ordinate joint promotional activities – e.g. Umbrella marketing: Similar events to be promoted together under same umbrella – shared costs, higher profile, all benefit

- Events which are relevant for visitors: become more active in tourism networks such as CTA, to give platform to network with wider tourism businesses

- Support to target those big employers in the county to distribute event information (e.g. opportunities to be included on company 'intranets', staff room noticeboards, staff newsletters, staff incentive schemes, payslips etc)

- Possible training to be offered:

    o Writing Press Releases

    o Low cost marketing ideas

    o Social media marketing

    o Online design tools / Creating own posters and infographics (free tools like 'Canva')

    o Email Marketing

    o Using Eventbrite

- Information that could be included on new Events Circle web portal:

  o Media contact list and deadlines (inc local media, newsletters from Visit Wales etc)

  o Legalities / regulations for road-side promotion, leaflet displays etc

  o Contact list for Community Boards / town display boards – a contact list with name & number for how to access community boards and other display hot spots, and detail whether free or charges.

  o List of 'National Days' with ideas of ways to link to these for promotional purposes

  o List of photographers and film companies (recommended by other Events Circle members)

3. Suppliers & Entertainment

The main, common supplies and services sourced by the event organisers are:

- Translation
- Design and print
- Marquee
- Furniture
- Barriers
- Generators
- Portable toilets
- Catering
- Insurance
- PA equipment
- Electrical services
- Staging
- Entertainment
- Security
- Entertainers (e.g. Music, dancers, face painters, guest speakers, children's entertainers, storytellers)

The main challenges and support needs put forward from a supplier point of view were:

- Commonplace to be 'starting from scratch' in sourcing suppliers and entertainment for each event

- Lack of knowledge about entertainers – can their testimonials be trusted? Need to have confidence in who being booked, have proven track record

- Costs of some entertainers are high, especially for small community events

- High infrastructure and supplier costs for most events

- Lack of community owned assets that event organisers can utilise (e.g. stalls, marquees, staging)

Potential opportunities for addressing these supplier issues via the Project:

- Explore 'group/pool' purchase of key supplies – e.g. market stalls, staging etc. (St Clears and Ammanford can provide feedback of how this works). This could also work with entertainers (book same artist for X number of events, negotiating lower cost based on multiple booking)

- Organise an event to showcase suppliers using a Wedding Fair model – e.g. sound systems, staging, dancers, props...

- Identify local businesses who can be part of the event experience – contra deal, no charge for service, but promotional opportunity for them. (e.g. food tasters or cookery demonstrations from local restaurants, outdoor activity centres with mobile 'have a go' activities, National Trust den building)

- Information which could be included on the web portal:

  - List of recommended suppliers and entertainers – highlighting which events they've been involved with – recommended and rated by events circle members

  - Arrange preferential rates with suppliers for members of the Events Circle

  - Details of community owned assets available for event organisers to use (whether free or at a charge) and contact details

  - Details of local activities and attractions who could be part of some events, with interactive elements (and done at no charge, based on promotional opportunity offered by their involvement)

  - Event Case Studies: A series of case studies for a small community event, medium town event and large scale event with costings included

4. Sense of Place / Local Distinctiveness

It's evident that there was less discussion on this topic area in each group – and this it seems is due to the number of 'real' community type event organisers present, organising events for a specific local audience (e.g. Tenants' Association), and who unlike those organising

visitor facing events, are less familiar with sense of place and it plays a less prominent role in their events.

Needs of event organisers from a Sense of Place / local distinctiveness viewpoint:

- Twrch Trwyth Festival shared as a good example – but challenge now is to take the local distinctiveness / theme through the town's whole event programme.

- Seems to be a lack of understanding by event organisers of the concept of sense of place / local distinctiveness and its importance in being incorporated into an event

- Event organisers need to understand more about their local area's distinctive offer (e.g. myths & legends, food, people) before they can communicate this better in their events.

- Local businesses need to be on board – nothing worse than promoting a local product and then finding that the maker / shop that sells it is closed when visitors are around.

Potential opportunities for addressing sense of place issues via the Project:

- Training that could be offered:

  - Local Distinctiveness (An introduction to sense of place and the local distinctiveness of Carmarthenshire? Myths, legends, food, culture etc)

  - How to incorporate local distinctiveness into an event

- Information to include on the new Events Circle web portal:

  - Links to Carmarthenshire's Local Distinctiveness toolkits

  - Links to Visit Wales' sense of place toolkits, Year of Legends toolkit...

  - Links to Discovercarmarthenshire.com – to help strengthen knowledge of Carmarthenshire's visitor offer

5. Volunteers

- All events rely heavily on volunteer support – with many fully organised and led by volunteers

The challenges and areas of support put forward in terms of volunteers were:

- Difficulty in attracting and finding volunteers – a continuous and challenging task to recruit volunteers, for all roles and levels (executive levels through to on the day help)

- Jobs Centre – now rules in place that stops jobseekers from volunteering more than a certain amount of time – causing challenges for those trying to recruit volunteers from a potential unemployed/jobseekers pool

- Lack of support in helping to find volunteers

- CAVS – need clarity on what support they offer in terms of sourcing volunteers

- Difficulties when volunteers don't commit or deliver as needed. Particularly problematic in the organising committee as everyone is volunteering their time for free so it can be hard to hold someone to account for not completing their tasks

- Ensuring professionalism – volunteer help is vital and encouraged, but sometimes too many people getting involved becomes hard to manage

- Challenging to source enough volunteers so that too much work and responsibility is on one person / the same few people

Potential opportunities for addressing issues surrounding Volunteers through the Project:

- Undertake joint promotion by event organisers or a centralised campaign to raise awareness of volunteering opportunities at the County's events

- An event (similar to a Jobs Fair) to promote opportunities and to source volunteers

- Explore rewards schemes / time-banking for the Events Circle members

- Creation of a Volunteer Card – the volunteers show the card at various stalls in the event/s and access a discount (e.g. at food stalls, craft stalls, activities)

- Co-ordinate Events Circle members to help at each other's events (provide some time in helping one in return for their help) – cross volunteering and support

- Encourage local groups (sports, special interest etc) to help at events in return for promotion/advertising space

- Approach local colleges and universities – especially with subjects/courses linked to event management, business management or marketing– to provide help in various aspects of organising the event. Explore work experience opportunities

- Possible information to include on the web portal portal:

  - Guidance/contacts who can help in sourcing volunteers

  - Directory / network of volunteer organisation and their specialities ('volunteer bank')

  - List of Event Circle members who are happy to volunteer at other events in return for volunteer support at their own

  - Contacts for local colleges and universities

- Training that could be offered:

  - Volunteer / staff management

6. Community Engagement

The challenges and areas of support put forward in terms of Community Engagement in local events were:

- Overall there is a low satisfaction level amongst event organisers with the way community groups and members engage in their events. Llandeilo seems better than others, but still a challenge and a need to be strengthened

- Suggested that it's more difficult to get local people and businesses to support events in the larger towns (e.g. Llanelli or Carmarthen)

- Reported that the community in Ammanford is starting to get engaged, but there needs to be consistency across events and having more or a programme throughout the year will do this

- A need to improve communication between the event organisers and wider community members

- There's generally a lack of knowledge of those within the wider community who can get involved and how they can be reached – e.g. who are the key individuals, local groups, associations, schools

- The importance and benefits of events to the economy/community isn't recognised

Opportunities for addressing issues related to Community engagement:

- Facilitated community events – a chance to find out more about their local events, their importance to the area's economy, and clear ideas of how they can involved, support and benefit from them

- Sourcing good practise examples – to share with the Events Circle at future events and / or on web portal

- Include on new Events Circle portal:

    o Case Studies/Good Practise

    o Listing of ideas of how different community members/areas can engage with events

    o Quotes / testimonials from local groups or businesses highlighting the benefits offered to them by their involvement in or support of an event

Post-It Exercise Notes

The following list the top comments made by event organisers on their 'post-it' notes. For each question asked, the answers are listed in order of importance/priority based on the number of times the point was made. The figures noted against each point in brackets show the number of people who listed this.

There were many more points and comments made, and each of these can be seen in Appendix 2. As with the Discussion Group Notes, it's advised that there are many useful comments and suggestions listed within those. Below highlights the more prominent comments – however, others although only noted by individuals, offer useful direction for the Project.

1.Top challenges faced in running & managing events

1. Marketing & Promotion (15)

2. Sourcing volunteers / Staffing (13)

3. Funding / Financing events (9)

4. Community Engagement (5)

5. Compliance & Legalities (5)

6. Weather (5)

7. Predicting attendance figures / ticket sales (4)

8. Sourcing / Promoting to Sponsors (4)

9. Lack of time time (3) *Linked to point 2 – i.e. difficulties in finding volunteers and/or staff

10. Competing events (3)

2. Top Opportunities / Ideas Discussed

1. Sharing information / Creating a Network (15)

2. Event Organisers web portal / one stop shop (9) * *Linked to point 7 – i.e. a central point of contact / Events Co-ordinator*

3. Marketing support / joint marketing (6)

4. Supplier listing / database (6)

5. Learning good practise from other events (5)

6. Sharing resources between events (4)

7. Central point of contact / County Events Co-ordinator (4)

8. Volunteers Promotion & Recruitment activities (e.g. Jobs Fair type event, 'cross-volunteering' amongst event organisers) (4)

9. Central list of potential sponsors / businesses with an interest in partnership working with events (4)

3. Top Training Needs

1. Social Media (12)

2. Marketing & Promotion (11)

3. Compliance & Legislation (9)

4. Grant funding Awareness / Writing grant applications (3)

5. Event Management (3)

6. Financial Management (2)

4. Top events highlighting good practise

1. Hay Festival (4)

2. Green Events / Llanwrtyd Wells Events (2)

3. Narberth Food Festival (2)

4. Aberaeron Food Festival / Fish Week (2)

5. The Green Man Festival (2)

6. Carnivals in different areas (2)

7. Big Cwtch Festival (2)

8. Royal Welsh Show (2)

9. West Wales Motorcycle Show (2)

10. Ironman Wales (2)

11. Celtic Connections, Glasgow (2)

5. Other things suggested to be addressed by the Project

1. Central Co-ordinator / single point of contact (3)

There were many other comments, however, these are all individual, different ones. All other individual comments and can be seen in the Appendix 2.

Observations & Recommendations

The notes from each of the discussion groups and 'post-it' exercise have been considered in the Seminar Summary – and in turn, shaped this 'Observations & Recommendations' section. The recommendations made are by no means exhaustive – this is an additional element provided in addition to the requests of the contract, and felt to be useful in summarising the overall notes and report – which provide many other ideas and recommendations.

Central Co-ordination Role

Many references and requests were made for a central one point of contact / County Events Co-ordinator. This exists to a certain degree via the Project Co-ordinator during the Project term – but are there opportunities for such a role within relevant organisations in the future / post-Project? If this isn't sustainable, it's vital to ensure that all of the useful information to be included on the new web portal is comprehensive, kept up to date and maintained, so as to act as the 'one-stop-shop' into the future.

A Different Approach for Different Event Types

There was a very wide range of event organisers at the event – from Tenants Associations to organisers of large-scale, growing sporting events. Whereas there are many areas of commonality, different type of event organisers evidently have different support and development needs. Organisers of community events were keen to learn from other area

carnivals; organisers of larger visitor facing events were keen to learn from higher profile events like the Hay Festival.

On this basis, it's perhaps worth considering a 'twin or triple track approach'. The County's event can be grouped in the following way:

- Community Events:
    - Small community events focussed to a specific, local audience (e.g. Tenants Associations, Local Health Board)
    - Wider community-facing events (village carnivals)
- Visitor events (those with potential for attracting visitors / highest economic impact)

New Web Portal

Discussions have led to many great ideas for resources to include on the new Events Circle website portal. As noted previously, this should become a 'one-stop-shop' for event organisers – with information to support the 'Where to Start' type queries through to useful information for experienced event organisers (e.g. directories of suppliers). It's vital that this is kept up-to-date, and it's suggested that when any new information is added – for example, details of a new grant scheme suitable for events – an email is also sent to members of the Circle to inform them of the new web update. This reminds them of the existence of the web portal and highlights it as a regular source of information and support, helping to ensure that it is used by event organisers.

Event Organisers Supplier& Support Event

The suggestion was made to organise a 'wedding fair' type event for event organisers – with an opportunity to meet with relevant CCC departments (licensing, planning), other organisations (e.g. Highways, St John's Ambulance), and event suppliers such as marquee hire and entertainment. A 'one-stop-shop' for sourcing all support, advice, products and services needed for arranging events.

This would be very beneficial – and should there not be budget from this particular Project funding, then other alternative sources could be explored, including the RDP Leader fund, with money available for such network building events.

Communication Between Event Organisers

The need for improved communication came up strongly during the session – communication by / with those who support events, but even more so, between event organisers.

Many of the key issues and challenges would be addressed by facilitating communication between them (e.g. knowledge of good calibre suppliers of products and services, issues created by 'competing' events or events targeting the same audience held on the same day). This could be done simply by:

- The creation of a digital forum platform – it's suggested that a closed Facebook group would be the simplest and easiest to develop and maintain, and most importantly, to maintain post-project with no linked costs

- Facilitating regular (quarterly?) event organisers meetings. As done by CTA for other sectors, these sessions are low-cost activities (refreshments and possibly room hire) – but provide the valuable opportunity to share issues and challenges with each other, and to identify ways of working in partnership (such as joint-marketing activities). * These could be split further into the two or three event organisers type groups suggested earlier for most benefit.

Marketing & Promotion

This was the top challenge cited by those in attendance at the meeting. Many issues were raised and opportunities suggested. Some of these challenges can be addressed via training workshops, some by resources added onto the web portal – but others, such as a central print buying scheme or joint/umbrella marketing initiatives would be driven forward via Event Organisers' sector meetings as suggested above.

Training Provision

Many training needs have been identified and suggested, with the top 6 from the 'Post-it Notes' exercise highlighting Social Media, Marketing & Promotion, Compliance & Legislation, Funding Awareness/Writing Grant Applications, Event Management and Financial Management.

It's understood that the Project may not have budget to organise many training courses for the event organisers, therefore, CCC need to explore who they can work in partnership with for delivery of these. Or to identify who is already delivering training on these topics and signposting to these in communication channels to the Events Circle members. Those such

as Business Wales, Superfast Business Wales, Carmarthenshire Tourism Association and Coleg Sir Gâr provide regular business training events – or general support and advice provided by CCC's Business and Community support teams perhaps?

Social Media was the number one training need area – and so, sign-posting to Superfast Business Wales, or exploring whether specific tailored courses can be provided by them for Event Organisers. Also, the CTA is currently running a Project, which offers subsidised training to tourism-related businesses, and which includes a variety of workshops and one-to-one sessions linked to topics of Business Planning, Marketing and Customer Service. There are opportunities for some workshops to be provided exclusively to Event Circle members.

Finding Volunteers

This was the topic area with most discussion in each of the groups it seems, with most of those in attendance faced with challenges in running their events with a lack of volunteer numbers – or the time and commitment challenges brought by being run only by volunteers.

An idea which was made and discussed by a couple of groups was that of organising a 'Volunteer Recruitment Fair' – in the same fashion as a Jobs Fair, this would promote volunteer opportunities with the County's event organisers. This could be exclusively for Events, or could be widened for the tourism and leisure industry in general.

The issue of a lack of volunteers could also be addressed by potential work undertaken to strengthen community engagement with events – see below.

Strengthening Community Engagement

It's evident that supporting the growth and improvement of community engagement in local events is a must, whether by encouraging local businesses to embrace the events, community groups to be part of the event or individuals to volunteer in their organisation.

Arranging Community Engagement events to raise awareness of the importance of events to the locality is a planned activity of this Project – however, it's understood that the three towns of focus for these haven't yet been decided.

This seminar hasn't necessarily helped to identify these – though comments that the larger towns have more challenges that the smaller, and that Llandeilo is held as good practise (though it seems with some room for improvement most recently).   In choosing the three locations, those with the most challenges and need for support should be considered, but so to should be those which offer the potential for most impact and change.

Learning from Good Practise

There was much support for organising good practise visits and for inviting representatives from exemplar events to future meetings.

A range of events were listed by those in attendance as potential for learning good practise from, and the top ones being the Hay Festival. This is no surprise, as this is a shining example of a small community led event, growing over the years to become a large event of international acclaim. Others listed which provide similar levels of learning potential include: The Green Man Festival, IronMan Wales, Narberth Food Festival, The Big Cwtch, Green Events (Llanwrtyd Wells) and Celtic Connections, Glasgow.

Networking, Sharing, Collaboration...

Finally, discussions and comments show that there's clearly a need for this Project – and first and foremost for its ability to bring people together; creating a network for communication and sharing information amongst one another. 'Network', 'Sharing' and 'Collaborating' are words which are repeated throughout and it's important, therefore, to ensure that at the crux of the Project is providing opportunities for the County's event organisers to do this.