

## Best Value Introduction

Audit Scotland describes Best Value as “ensuring that there is good governance and effective management of resources, with a focus on improvement, to deliver the best possible outcomes for the public.” The duty of Best Value applies to all public bodies in Scotland. It is a statutory duty for local authorities, such as councils.

In 2016 a revised framework for the auditing of Best Value was approved by the Accounts Commission. A key element of the framework is the publication of a Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) for the council at least once during a five-year period. It is informed by the Annual Audit Report, other statutory reports and Audit Scotland reports including the Local Government Overview series (performance, finance) published annually.

The BVAR will be considered by the Commission, in public, and action may be required of the council. The fieldwork for the BVAR for Aberdeenshire Council will take place between February and April 2019.

The fieldwork for the development of the BVAR includes:

- Interviews with councillors, senior officers and partner organisations;
- Observation of council, committee and board meetings;
- Review of documents and performance data and;
- Focus groups with councillors, officers and community groups.

Each council’s BVAR incorporates an analysis of the Best Value characteristics aligned to the themes of:

- Vision and strategic direction;
- Performance;
- Use of resources;
- Partnership working;
- Improvement and transformation

## Case Study Criteria

As part of our preparation for our Best Value Assurance Report we will be compiling a narrative to show the council's transformation since the last Best Value Audit. In order to do this, the Best Value Key Officer group will be sourcing case studies from all services. To ensure that the case study stays relevant to Best Value's key themes, the below criteria has been set out:

- Please ensure that a relevant link with BV criteria is demonstrated throughout
- Where relevant, please complete each section of the template as fully as possible
- Each section must contain narrative along with relevant links of evidence
- Each case study should show a consistent and clear link to at least one of the council's [11 priorities](#) ( point 6).

## Case Study Template

### Across the Grain – Festival of Doric Culture and Trad Music

How does this link with the criteria of Best Value?

- Partnership working (in that the content & delivery of an Aberdeenshire-wide festival like this is co-dependant on working with communities, partners and creatives in order to share the workload and costs, add diversity to the programme, and allow the festival to be more self-sustaining)
- Effective management of resources (in terms of staffing, facilities and finances)
- Focus on improvement (essential for future programming and content, growing audiences, narrowing the gap between expenditure & income and maximising staff resources)

How does this link to our priorities?

- Support a strong, sustainable, diverse economy (through encouraging visitors and supporting cultural participation)
- Encourage active lifestyles and ... with a focus on mental health (through offering a unique opportunity for people to participate in a cultural event for the benefit of their wellbeing)
- 

What research was undertaken to ensure best practice?

- Both annual festival events have been evaluated, a combination of formal and anecdotal approaches, including filmed vox pops from attendees and audiences
- Feedback has also been gathered from third sector arts organisations and key partners who programmed their own activity as part of the festival
- Analysis of key findings, lessons learned and successful outcomes have been applied to future activity

What was the background to the case story?

- The need for an activity to bring everyone together in celebration of the region's Doric distinctiveness came from Aberdeenshire's cultural and heritage communities; Aberdeenshire Council's Arts & Heritage team took the lead on giving this structure, content, finances and delivery as part of its strategic role for the sector
- AtG is an innovative and new cultural product which is unique to the North East of Scotland. The pilot festival in October 2018 successfully brought communities and the sector together under a new cultural brand with a regional impact, something that Aberdeenshire had been lacking. Audience and participant numbers reached almost 2000.
- The programme for AtG 2019 represented the development of the festival; it had almost double the number of events and activities than the pilot year with audiences @ 3,150.

What activity was undertaken?

- Across the Grain 2019 was a month-long festival celebrating of Doric culture and its trad music roots across Aberdeenshire. This is the second year of operation. The festival included 93 performances in a range of community venues, from a popular 'Call my Bluff' contest to intimate performances by award-winning contemporary musicians, a world-first Doric PechaKucha event to workshops hosted by Puppet Animation Scotland and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

How did this contribute to improved outcomes?

- Is integral to creating a strong and diverse creative industry in the region (ref Cultural Strategy) and supporting a thriving programme of performances, exhibitions, classes and events, so developing our local economies.
- Supports people that support creativity – facilitating happier and healthier people and (mentally) healthy lifestyles
- Brought people together under a shared banner regardless of their location, size or type of activity
- Created opportunity for small, locally known voluntary groups as well as nationally recognised cultural organisations to have equal access to audiences and be on the same bill
- Diverse and broad programming created opportunities for people in our communities to come together to participate, share, learn, make and have fun; widening access to, and appreciation of, Doric culture and trad music from a 21st century perspective
- Audiences, participants and partners see the festival as a success and want to be a part of it (of the audiences who gave feedback, more than half shared their contact details so they could receive future festival information; two thirds of partner feedback said there was a considerable benefit to sector of taking part in the festival; more than half the partners and third sector said it helped them to grow local audiences and gave them opportunity to consult with these audiences to inform their future activity)
- There is a genuine interested in the festival and a need for it
- Aberdeenshire Council / LLA recognised for its commitment to celebrating and promoting Doric culture

#### How did this assist in delivering value for money?

- The festival event provided a range of activities; more than half were free or encouraged donations, thereby making it as accessible as possible to audiences, to allow them to try new experiences and no or low cost – a key factor when establishing a brand new event and to help grow audiences.
- This therefore allowed 3,101 people (estimated) to attend events - averaging almost 32 people per performance.
- Feedback from users was positive, with performers valuing the opportunity to develop their audiences and users having a positive experience of Doric culture, often for the first time.
- The total cost of AtG 2019 was £24,786; this was a £7K increase in spend compared to the pilot year. As part of lessons learned from the pilot festival, more funding was invested in a greater number of bought-in professional performances and activities, and there was a higher marketing spend.
- Across the Grain continues to be delivered as part of our Place Partnership with Creative Scotland; this 50:50 funding arrangement is allowing us to trial and test approaches with a lower financial risk

#### What did we learn?

- 44% increase on number of events and 55% increase in number of people attending the festival in 2019 compared to 2018
- AtG and what it represents is delivering to audience and participant needs; there is continuing need for the development of a diverse programme that is specific to the local Doric Culture
- Scaling back activity from an entire month to a long weekend will prevent diluting audiences, acknowledging that people will attend one or two events, and avoid over-stretching staff resources
- Audiences reported very high / high percentages of feeling happier and more connected to their community; this indicates the festival factors highly in terms of Health & Wellbeing outcomes, community and social benefit
- AtG themes appeal to an older demographic; marketing and promotion were successful in reaching people aged 45+ but there are opportunities to reach out to families and young people using other methods or formats
- Self-directed activity, drop-ins and community engagement events were very popular; bringing communities together is a big thing and matters to people
- Targeting specific audiences in the months leading up to festival with outreach and participatory programmes helps people invest in the final product and be more likely to purchase a ticket for an event aligned to an activity they have been involved with
- Need to introduce an agreement for partners when they sign up to the festival, in terms of expectations for coming under a recognised banner, so they know what LLA can provide but what their contribution is re: marketing, data collation and evaluation