

To the Chair and each member of the Cultural SPC

Report on findings of research into the Summer Fun Nights programme in Cork

Limerick Culture and Arts Office has undertaken further research into the Cork Summer Fun Nights Programme to understand the rationale for the investment, the level of investment and the outcomes of the investment. This report was prepared in respect of a Notice of Motion raised at the Culture Strategic Policy Committee for consideration around the potential in Limerick to host a family-friendly public bonfire night.

Cork Summer Fun Nights – rationale

The main objective of the programme in Cork was **not** to establish a new celebratory event but instead to respond to extreme antisocial behaviour around an existing tradition which was taking place in unstable communities. In the mid 2000's over 80 illegal bonfires were being lit across the city on June 23rd. The negative effects of these unmonitored events were:

- Severe antisocial behaviour leading to instability in communities at multiple locations across the city
- Extreme pressure on emergency service resources with cost implications
- Damage to public and private property
- Direct economic impact on spend for statutory bodies, blue light services, local authority parks and cleansing departments
- Environmental impacts including the burning of toxic materials causing air pollution, extreme littering and dumping, damage to public parks.

The programme aimed to establish family friendly events in areas of high risk of illegal bonfire activity and over time replace illegal bonfires with supervised safe bonfire events or in some cases, remove the bonfire element completely, at the request of the local community.

Investment

The Cork Fun Summer Nights Programme has been running for the past 10 years across 4 communities annually on St. Johns Eve June 23rd. The investment is on average €40,000 per annum across 4 locations. Expenditure costs include - barriers, generators, security, health and safety officers, project coordinator and creative content programme.

Outcomes

The success of the project appears to be in the grass roots deep community engagement lead by the RAPID Coordinators and Recreation and Amenity Department supported by key stakeholders. This deep community intervention was required to engage residents in the affected areas and over time introduce a more stable family friendly ethos to the event. The result has been that at the request of some communities no fire element is included in the programme. Speaking with colleagues in Cork they also noted that the cultural programming was only made possible later in the project development once the community level interventions had stabilised the event.

Limerick

To our knowledge and experience, Limerick does not have a strong tradition of celebrating with bonfires on St. Johns Eve. There are some some celebrations in October in the county based towns and villages around Halloween and in the City on May Eve.

In consulting with the Service Operations Directorate of Limerick City and County Council the main issue identified in Limerick is antisocial behaviour over the four days around May Eve in residential communities with a pattern of antisocial behaviours. In these areas, there is a tradition of gathering rubbish and materials often toxic if burned, to fuel bonfires in public green areas. The result of this behaviour is unsafe activity and an added cost to the Service Operations Directorate of Limerick City and County Council.

This is reflected in the fire call out statistics for 2017 which indicate that there is a slight rise in fire call outs in May compared with other months e.g. May has an increase of 6% comparative to April and October.

Feb	58 fire related callouts - - no known significant celebration in this month involving bonfires
April	126 fire related callouts – no known significant celebration in this month involving bonfires
May	134 fire related call outs – May Eve
June	71 fire related call outs – St. John’s Eve 24 th June
Oct	126 fire related call outs – Halloween 31 st Oct

Limerick Culture and Arts Office welcomes this interest in civic cultural community celebrations, which preserve important traditions that form part of our Irish heritage. From further research and investigation into events of this nature Limerick Culture and Arts Office advises that the following points be taken into consideration when discussing the introduction of a similar programme in Limerick:

- There is no one single night in Limerick with a strong tradition of bonfire related celebration. Instead there are 3 possible occasions and all are only celebrated in small pockets across the city and county with May Eve being the most celebrated in communities with a pattern of instability in the City.
- At present Limerick does not have a significant issue with illegal bonfire celebrations comparative to what was experienced in Cork.

- In Cork this programme was only rolled out to communities where reported negative effects of this tradition were confirmed.
- The success of this programme was the coordinated approach led by a strategic Social and Community Development ethos. Cultural programming was a secondary element of the delivery introduced later in the programme as it evolved and stabilised.
- If a similar programme is to be established in Limerick, a long-term commitment is paramount to its success. One off actions may lead to unmet expectations of communities and perpetuate issues in the long term.
- The programme should aim to empower and inform through grass root community engagement and participation seeking to up skill and empower citizens to enjoy fire safely and in an environmentally friendly way.
- The introduction of bonfires in local residential communities with social problems without a long-term commitment of delivery and community engagement may propagate unsafe behaviours.

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