

<b>CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL</b>	<b>Cabinet</b> <b>18 October 2023</b>
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<b>Report title</b>	'Event City': a new five-year event strategy for Wolverhampton	
<b>Decision designation</b>	AMBER	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Bhupinder Gakhal Visitor City	
<b>Key decision</b>	Yes	
<b>In forward plan</b>	Yes	
<b>Wards affected</b>	All Wards	
<b>Accountable Director</b>	Ian Fegan, Director of Communications and Visitor Experience	
<b>Originating service</b>	Communications and Visitor Experience	
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<b>Report to be/has been considered by</b>	Core Services	14 June / 13 September 2023
	Strategic Executive Board	20 June / 19 September 2023
	Economy and Growth	27 September 2023
	Scrutiny Panel	

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### Recommendations for decision:

Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Endorse the strategic aim to use city events as a place-shaping tool to make the City of Wolverhampton a 'destination of choice' for visitors with the vision that: *by 2028, we want people to think differently about the city... as a place where things happen, as a place they visit, maybe as a place they might look to relocate\*.*
2. Endorse the five-year operational events growth plan, recommended by consultants IPW, which will deliver a commercially focused programme aimed at boosting footfall, increasing economic and social benefit and transforming the reputation of the city.

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3. Note that additional investment of £399,000 is required to underwrite the delivery of this ambitious strategy. Funding will be considered as part of the 2024-2025 budget-setting process and medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) planning. Wherever possible, the aim will be, as the strategy sets out, to offset this expenditure through income from commercial events and external grant-funding as well as indirect benefit to the local economy.

## 1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out the importance of developing an exciting and sustainable five-year event strategy for the City of Wolverhampton, as recommended by independent specialist consultants IPW.
- 1.2 This report is part of wider plans to secure the city's status and reputation regionally and nationally as a 'destination of choice' for visitors and to seek Cabinet's endorsement to deliver this strategy.

## 2.0 Background

- 2.1 Transforming the City of Wolverhampton, with a clear vision and plan - and maximising both public and private investment to do this - is a key part of the City of Wolverhampton Council's *Our City: Our Plan*.
- 2.2 In recent years, the Council has invested in, or secured investment for, over £100 million pounds-worth of key visitor economy infrastructure projects. This includes investment in a state-of-the-art transport hub at Interchange, next to a new commercial district, The Halls Wolverhampton, a new Box Space entertainment zone, new public realm and improvements to the city's Art Gallery.
- 2.3 Building on this, further investment is being planned as part of the first phase of the delivery of the Wolverhampton Investment Prospectus after Cabinet approved in March 2023 the proposed approach towards the development and implementation of three schemes: City Centre West, St George's and the Accelerated Sites Programme. ([Wolverhampton Investment Prospectus First Phase Delivery Plan.pdf](#) ([moderngov.co.uk](http://moderngov.co.uk))).
- 2.4 All of the points detailed above at 2.2 and 2.3 are part of the Council's wider 'place-shaping' vision to turn the city into a 'destination of choice' where people visit and spend money in the local economy – supporting jobs and growth and growing the Wolverhampton Pound.
- 2.5 The importance of this is set out in *Our City: Our Plan*, where a vibrant visitor economy has the potential to contribute to all priorities but especially the thriving economy strand. Evidence to support investment and growth in this area is further supported by the city's Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) which identifies that the visitor, cultural and events sector is a key potential growth area for jobs and investment.
- 2.6 Tourism, arts, culture and events play a key part in the wider 'city marketing mix' and visitor economy infrastructure / eco-system.
- 2.7 In recent years, the Council has made a significant contribution to the city's visitor numbers and vibrancy through an active and diverse programme of events across a number of council-owned or run venues.
- 2.8 In the 2022-2023 financial year, this Council-led programme delivered the following:

1	<b>450,000 visitors</b> to the city
2.	Estimated <b>£14.8 million</b> to the local economy*
3	<b>Return on investment of 800%</b> when measuring <i>indirect economic benefit</i> **

\* based on figures identified for the West Midlands in the 2015 Great Britain Day Visits Survey

\*\* (ROI in 2022-2023 financial year = gain from investment of £14.8 million minus £1.6 million cost of the investment / £1.635m x 100%). Although this is not a cashable gain to the local authority, it represents a significant gain to the local economy.

- 2.9 Major events included Vaisakhi (23,000 visitors), the Commonwealth Games Time Trial (20,000 visitors), the annual city Fireworks display (17,000), Christmas Lights events (nearly 40,000) alongside very many smaller events in parks that attract 50 to 100 people.
- 2.10 More recently, Wolverhampton Pride 2023 in June brought 5,000 people into the city centre. Just over 300 ticket buyers responded to a post event survey highlighting that the average spend on the day in the city centre was £34.42 (contributing £170,000 to the local economy) and that Wolverhampton was, they felt, a 'welcoming' city. The event also raised £6,500 for city LGBT+ charities and there are plans to grow it in 2024. The reopening of The Halls in the same month has also seen visitors from across the country coming to the city. Figures from The Halls show that around 50,000 visitors came to the city in its opening season and whilst one-in-five had a Wolverhampton postcode, four-out-of-five visited from the wider region and elsewhere. This contributes indirect economic benefit to the city centre and direct benefit to the Council.
- 2.11 Clearly, the Council does not operate in isolation which is why it commissioned independent consultants IPW to carry out a review of the city's events eco-system, city governance and the Council's operational approach to event delivery with a brief to recommend how these could be improved to better benefit the local economy and benefit city's reputation.
- 2.12 The city has strong foundations to build on in boosting its visitor economy from great indoor venues (Grand Theatre, The Civic and Wulfrun Halls) and terrific outdoor spaces (West Park, Racecourse), to flexible leisure spaces (Aldersley and Molineux Stadium) and strong community venues (Bilston Town Hall, church halls etc), as well as urban spaces and green spaces, the University's increasingly diverse provision (Screen School, Arena Theatre) and heritage venues like Wightwick Manor and Moseley Old Hall.
- 2.13 Given the huge potential of the city and the Council's ambitions to increase visitor numbers further to raise the profile and reputation of the city and deliver even greater economic and social value for local people and businesses, the Council's Strategic Executive Board (SEB) requested a new, longer-term framework for events.
- 2.14 To action this and to seek independent advice and validation of the city's approach, the Council commissioned IPW in late summer 2022, to research and prepare a new five-year Events Strategy for Wolverhampton.

### 3.0 Progress, options, discussion: The way forward: developing a new business plan and investment in growth

- 3.1 Consultants IPW were procured by the Council to research and prepare a new Events Strategy for Wolverhampton. The brief for this work recognised three principles:
- The strategy is for the city, not CWC
  - 'Our City - Our Plan' outlines the city's ambition to be an Event City
  - Develop an underlying business case and planning process for a five-year events strategy and plan.
- 3.2 IPW's recommendations for an ambitious five-year events strategy identify the need for investment to grow a vibrant city events programme and deliver the required socio-economic benefits, this in turn needs to be underpinned by a robust business plan.
- 3.3 They acknowledged that in developing an 'Event City' strategy, the city is starting from a position of strength and already has an events ecology with over 1,000 events taking place every year at different scales and locations, and with a range of different promoters – independent, community, private/commercial and the Council.
- 3.4 The strategy recommended by IPW is set out at **Appendix One** but the key points for development and improvement are summarised below:
- The city needs a clear vision, five-year plan and targets
  - The events strategy needs to be driven by three primary objectives: changing perceptions of the city; increasing direct and indirect economic benefit and increasing social benefit and value
  - The city operates in a competitive environment and needs to be clear about its offer to the public and promoters
  - City collaboration is essential – the city has some strong brands in this space and these need to be maximised e.g. AEG/ASM, Grand Theatre. WWFC
  - The city needs to invest in a formal Destination Management Partnership (DMP) to deliver effective, joined-up governance and strategic planning
  - The ambition by 2028 is to be a place that hosts events of national profile
  - Events need to be integrated into wider place-shaping plans on regeneration, economy, well-being and the environment
  - Opportunities to coordinate and support local skills, volunteers and artists need to be maximised – given the opportunities in the city with some fantastic employers – potentially through a new 'Skills Academy'
  - The programme needs to be driven by data and place informatics including visitor and market trends
  - The city centre environment is a priority in the first instance
  - The customer and promoter journey needs to be mapped and constantly kept under review to ensure it is competitive with other places
  - The council's various teams that facilitate and support events need to have efficient processes and fantastic customer service to keep promoters in the city

- The events / tourism programme is a driver for private investment in food and beverage and hospitality / accommodation
- Marketing activities need to be joined up and coordinated and include the city's wider offer – this includes improving the city's digital presence
- A single box office and promoters gateway needs to be established
- The three cities initiative has the potential to create further opportunities
- Local businesses should be better engaged in local events support and delivery to maximise benefits
- The programme needs to focus on retaining families in the city centre, keeping big national live sporting tournaments and growing this, supporting the cities diverse communities and maximising the 'Wolverhampton Welcome'
- The programme would benefit from a 'blocks and tentpole' approach to grow it organically.
- Stakeholders need to view the programme from the perspective of 2028 and what is an achievable vision (see **Appendix Two**)

3.5 IPW's business plan recommends 'pump-priming' investment at the front end of the events programme to allow key events to grow and to become self-sustainable. They have based their thinking on the following assumptions:

- by Year 5/6 CWC's net expenditure will be similar to Year 1
- that a level of additional investment will be made available, primarily in years 2, 3 and 4, to develop new initiatives and infrastructure
- additional investment will be sought primarily from external sources already identified, and through increased income generation
- increased staffing resource should be covered by self-generated income by Year 5/6
- the private and community events / markets will be stimulated to produce events at neutral cost to CWC.

#### **4.0 Evaluation of alternative options**

4.1 Option one would be to make no changes to the existing approach and to continue to deliver the current programme which is primarily aimed at delivering community-level events within the city of local / regional significance and profile. This would result in a comparable level of footfall to previous years and would keep the profile, reputation and perceptions of the city at a similar level too. It would mean less direct and indirect economic benefit and fewer social value opportunities. It would certainly mean no investment in the infrastructure to build the wider strategic framework needed to create an 'event city'.

4.2 Option two would be to partially implement the recommendations of this report. This would result in slightly higher levels of footfall to previous years and would increase the profile, reputation and perceptions of the city at a similar level too. It would also mean increased direct and indirect economic benefit and fewer social value opportunities. Whilst it may mean some investment in growing some events and developing some new ones, it would also see no investment in the infrastructure to build the wider strategic framework needed to create an 'event city'.

4.3 Option three would be to implement the recommendations of this report which would see a step-change in the development of an events infrastructure and wider eco-system in the city. This would see significantly increased footfall over the five years of the strategy, greater direct and indirect economic benefit and more social value opportunities for local residents and businesses. It would also significantly improve the profile, reputation and perceptions of the city which, in turn, will help contribute to investment in the wider 'visitor experience' eco-system such as private sector funding for an enhanced food and beverage and hotel offer in the city.

## **5.0 Reasons for decision(s)**

5.1 Option three is recommended for the reasons set out at 4.3 above.

## **6.0 Financial implications**

6.1 The 2023-2024 net budget for City Events is £763,500.

6.2 Recommendations of the report require additional short-to-medium term investment to be implemented to grow the programme to the point that a significant part of it becomes either self-funding or net costs reduce significantly. This would either be achieved through commercial income or from securing external grant funding to deliver activity such as the Commonwealth Games Legacy Funding or UK Shared Prosperity Funding.

6.2 The five-year investment strategy also requires growth in staffing from 2024-2025 to grow the programme to deliver a nationally significant profile and reputation and this will be identified as part of budget setting alongside the medium-term financial strategy (MTFS).

6.3 Following on from the additional investment point made above at 3.5, it is proposed that - due to a number of factors including: a) the opportunity presented in the 2024-2025 financial year through the Commonwealth Games Major events fund and the key city priority to expedite the transformation of the city centre and night-time economy – that the additional funding is allocated in the 2024-2025 financial year. This would be split and allocated as following, based on the IPW recommendations: Major events delivery support would be allocated £274,000 for staff resources to develop and expand the current events programme significantly and deliver major events of regional and national significance; £125,000 would be allocated to staff resources to develop a city-wide destination / tourism plan and governance structures to coordinate, with key city partners, the wider 'eco-system' of city events and support night-time economy development work.

## **7.0 Legal implications**

- 7.1 In growing an events programme, the Council will continue to need to be cognisant of legal requirements around safety, health, licensing and other regulatory considerations essential to event organisation.
- 7.2 The Council, when directly commissioning events, will need to secure artists, performers and acts. These will require robust contracts which protect the Council's position and minimise risk.
- 7.3 Legal services will provide advice or assist with legal agreements as and when requested in relation to any proposals and/or events which the Council proposes to meet the strategic aims.  
[RR/27072023/W]

## **8.0 Equalities implications**

- 8.1 As this report highlights, a vibrant city events programme has the potential to showcase the strengths of a place. One of the City of Wolverhampton's undoubted strengths is its diversity, inclusivity and tolerance. This is encapsulated in Our City: Our Plan which has the theme of 'inclusivity and fairness' as a golden thread.
- 8.2 The Council already organises or supports a range of events which celebrates the city's diversity and diverse communities including Wolverhampton Pride, Diwali, Eid and others. The Council works closely with the community to develop, build and sustain these key events. This strategy can build upon this and increase the number of events that are delivered.
- 8.3 There are also opportunities through recruitment to ensure that the team reflects this ambition. Events which celebrate culture and diversity help communities that here to otherwise may have felt marginalised, feel more connected. They also educate and inform, building bridges between communities and stronger community cohesion. Communities are, and continue to be, a key part in how we engage, listen and constantly improve events so that they are reflective of feedback and support local aims and priorities.

## **9.0 All other implications**

- 9.1 There are no other direct implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

## **10.0 Schedule of background papers**

- 10.1 Report to City Economy Scrutiny Panel, 28 September 2022 ([Public Pack](#))[Inward Investment, Visitor Experience, Culture and Leisure Offer Agenda Supplement for Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel, 28/09/2022 18:00 \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)
- 10.2 Report to Scrutiny Board, 1 November 2022 [Microsoft PowerPoint - Visitor Experience Strategy Plan and Budget Presentation.pptx \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)



## **11.0 Appendices**

11.1 Appendix 1 – IPW Review Report.

11.2 Appendix 2 - IPW aspirational look back on achievements from 2028 perspective

## Appendix One: IPW Review Report

In consultation with stakeholders, and through extensive desk research, IPW identified that the city already enjoyed a diverse event ecology, perhaps more so than many had anticipated – or that many first-time visitors to the city might expect. They found that Wolverhampton is a city with understated pride and an unvarnished authenticity. The draft strategy embraces these qualities and seeks to reflect them in its various recommendations.

It is also cognisant of other local strategies such as the draft Cultural Compact Strategy, Vision and Plan of Action which outlines a series of principles focussed on harnessing the 'transformative power of arts, culture and the creative industries' to address 'challenges faced around economic growth and social value'.

IPW's work aligns often disparate thinking to date and builds on outline objectives and principles, by consolidating a practical way forward in the short-term.

Events are a core part of the visitor economy and any strategy to develop them should complement, and be a keystone of, existing tourism strategies. They can be an effective means of reinforcing the city's brand and can completely transform a city's image – Glasgow's year as European City of Culture in 1990 transformed perceptions of the city and raised its profile internationally. More recently, and closer to home, Coventry's period as UK City of Culture 2021 was a game-changer in terms of the city's national profile.

There is a significant economic impact from events, both direct and indirect, however, they have a broader social impact at community as well as city-scale – they can reinforce wellbeing, encourage participation through volunteering, and be micro-economic drivers.

There are three primary objectives of the Strategy, namely to:

- **Change perceptions of the city** - *by enhancing its profile and reputation nationally and internationally*
- **Increase the social benefit and value from events** - *by creating opportunities for employment and skills development*
- **Increase the economic benefit and return from events** - *by generating significant new direct and indirect spend.*

### Driving footfall

Driving footfall is the key objective of events – whether for social or economic objectives. However, significant competition exists in the market to attract audiences, whether visitors or locals, as well as a lot of choice for promoters as to where they host events. A pivotal question for both is – *Why Wolverhampton?* – why would they choose to promote my event there: is there an audience, what do they like, what are the practical implications, *is there an incentive?* And for the audience: is this something I really want to see, will it be a good experience, will I be safe, is it value for money – as well as all the practical implications of travel, accommodation, food... essentially, *is it somewhere I want to spend my time and my money?* This can be summarised as:

- What will persuade a) public, and b) promoters?
- What's the incentive?
- What's the infrastructure?

In developing a five-year events strategy, the challenge is to match the aspiration to the infrastructure – building on where the city is now and where it wants to be in 5 (and 10) years-time. The diagram (*Figure 1: Level of Impact and Profile*) below illustrates this:



*Fig. 1 Level of Impact and Profile*

### **Growing our events ecology**

There are four principal areas that a healthy events ecology requires – People, Venues, Resources and Infrastructure (*see Figure 2: The 'Events Mix'*) – and when you break each of these areas down, you have a complex system that requires nurturing and oversight.

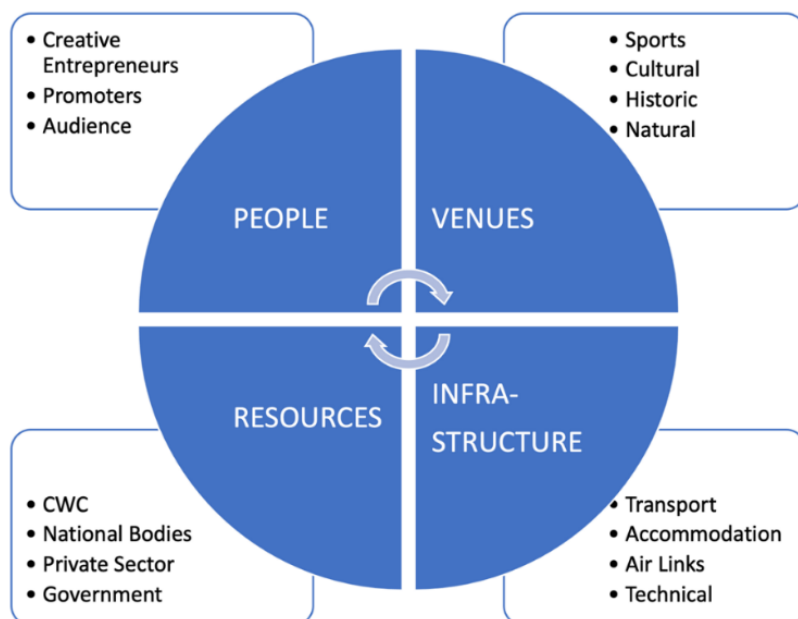


Fig. 2 The 'Events Mix'

The ecology needs to be delivered by a range of partners – public, commercial and voluntary – working to joint objectives. But it requires the strategic direction and monitoring to be undertaken centrally.

A brief SWOT of these four principal areas reveals areas for development e.g., creating an environment that encourages creative entrepreneurs, and improved overnight accommodation: as well as particular strengths, such as the public transport nexus and public sector support. A more detailed SWOT analysis will be developed in conjunction with partners as part of the work to establish a destination management partnership and plan.

Different events need different types of support and infrastructure and, therefore, different partners to help deliver. CWC is a vitally important partner, but its role varies in each circumstance from facilitator to direct provider to partner to investor. This strategy identifies four broad categories of event:

- Commercial - an event for which a rental is paid, or for which box office/earned income is a significant driver
- Corporate - business or private events that range from conferences and seminars to launch parties
- Community - more localised events engaging specific groups or locales, not seeking to be commercial
- Civic - key events in the city's calendar (often annual) that celebrate an important aspect of the city's communities.

As can be seen, the range of events – their scale and type and purpose – is diverse – and finding a common purpose to inform them in an overarching strategy can be challenging.

The three objectives outlined earlier – *increasing profile, social and economic benefits* – provide a broad but clear framework, however, it is a vision that requires to be shared and supported.

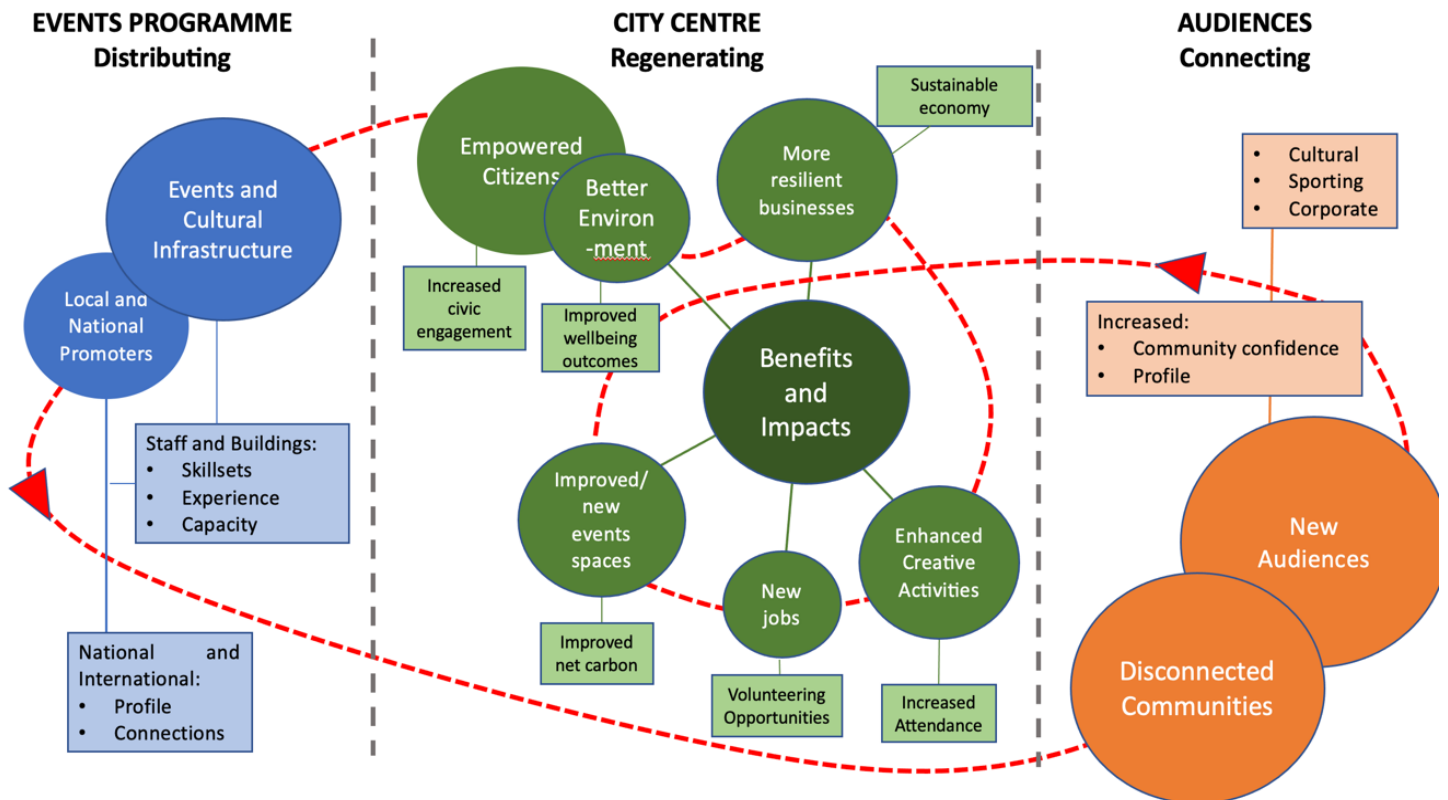
Practical aspects of oversight and governance, market intelligence, and encouraging investment are constants – but these are most effective when done collaboratively. CWC has a pivotal role in determining the strategic direction, but its delivery requires buy-in from a broad coalition of partners in the public, private, third and academic sectors, addressing key questions:

- is the vision shared?
- is there an appropriate performance framework for city events based on shared desired outcomes and outcome measures?
- are internal-CWC and city-wide governance structures needed to coordinate and develop city events?
- can the new strategy be underpinned by market intelligence and a customer-focused approach?
- can the city facilitate and support private investment in high quality events that fit the city's key themes?
- what's the balance between accessible public events that increase social value and commercial events which generate income for reinvestment in the programme?

### **Wider social and economic environment**

Underpinning this approach is a Theory of Change (see *Figure 3: The Broader Social and Economic Environment* below) that considers the broader environment of economic and social impact in Wolverhampton i.e., *why* investment in events is important. Events are looking to attract new audiences and visitors to the city, but also to engage disconnected individuals and communities. Partly this can be done through attendance at events, but the latter is often through direct involvement in the creation of a more localised event, often at very modest scales.

Enhancing creative activities through events can lead to more confident and resilient communities, more empowered citizens, and ultimately a more resilient city environment, physically and psychologically.



*Fig. 3 The Broader Social and Economic Environment'*

Events are only part of the answer. They are most effective when they are part of an integrated approach to city regeneration, development or enhancement. They link well with strategies to improve the city economy, wellbeing, and the environment. They thrive on excellent transport infrastructure, effective city marketing, and a welcoming and attractive public realm.

They have complete synergy with the local food and beverage (F&B) and accommodation offer. They can help drive improvements in this area – as seen recently with the arrival of the V&A in Dundee and the consequent improvement and increase in local F&B/accommodation support infrastructure.

Ultimately, it is about setting a sense of place – reinforcing it for locals, introducing it to visitors – and being confident in the delivery. There is much for Wolverhamptonians to be proud of historically and in contemporary Wolverhampton – and much of it is in the character of the people who live there. Grounded, with a good sense of life's priorities. These are pride-worthy values – they are also worth sharing – and reflecting in the programme of events (and their marketing).

Although CWC is not the only events provider in the city, it is a principal partner and driver, and it's useful to consider to what extent it may be involved in various initiatives. CWC has two main functions: as a facilitator – making things happen; and as a direct funder and/or promoter.

## Setting targets to measure future success

Visualising the future – setting targets for where the city wants to be – is an essential part of the Strategy. To this end, IPW...took the approach of developing a narrative from the perspective of 2028, looking back at the previous 5 years. This can be found at **Appendix two** and is intended to illustrate how to achieve the objectives rather than be definitive about particular events.

The starting point is having a clear vision:

*“By 2028, we want people to think differently about the city... as a place where things happen, as a place they might visit, maybe as a place they might look to relocate.”*

Appendix one provides an illustration of what can be brought to reality within the next five years. The type and range of events build on those that are happening, or have happened, or have been discussed and planned with potential partners.

It recognises that Wolverhampton is not starting from scratch – it is already an Events City. IPW found in their research some 1,000 events in the city a year including 30,000 visitors a fortnight to the football, 300,000 a year visiting the Grand Theatre and an estimated 300,000 a year set to visit The Halls. There is an infrastructure of spaces, people and funding that exists, but can be made to work a bit harder with some strategic focus and a bit of pump-priming in its early stages.

As importantly, there is a will to do this, and a recognition that for positive change to take place, the status quo is not an option. The city has ambition to develop in many service and geographic areas, and events will play a part in making this happen.

There's no need to reinvent the wheel. The next 5 years will be a challenging period because of external macro-economic and social issues – but that will always be the case, whenever the strategy is implemented. The city needs to adopt a 'strengths-based' approach, focusing on the assets the city already has and start with them.

There is hard and soft infrastructure already in place – for the latter, the city's events team has a wealth of experience, knowledge and goodwill. For the former, Wolverhampton has terrific transport strengths – it's easy to get to and to leave – an important consideration for external visitors.

It also has a unique demography, and that should be reflected to a greater extent in the annual events programme – reminding people (in the city as well as outside) what a vibrant range of cultures the City of Wolverhampton has.

Similarly, talking with the city's current stakeholders (actual and potential) in the events ecology revealed a range of opportunities for new events, co-curation, and networking. Some of these are indicated overleaf, and others are included in the earlier '2028 visioning'.

The presence of AEG/ASM in the city is a great opportunity to work with an events operator of international scale not only in The Halls, but potentially across the city. Leveraging their experience and connections will make a significant difference to the larger-scale event offer and infrastructure in the city.

ASM's range of contacts will allow them to develop the corporate market over the next 5 years – initially this should have a focus at the Halls, but with the intention to increasingly roll out across the city in the subsequent 5 years.

The city should work towards data-driven decision-making – know your audience: find out why they've come as well as where they're from. Keep in touch with them – push information to them, pull useful data from them. There are commercial digital partners that can help with this that, allied with the city's city centre 5G rollout, can make this a reality within 5 years.

The events sector is an industry and there are skilled and unskilled jobs in that market – administrative, marketing, technical, driving, performance, management. The city's public and academic partners need to work with its events and cultural providers to develop a clear ladder of opportunity for young people and those returning to the jobs market. This is an area with particular appeal for a younger demographic and can help address some of the city's broader employment challenges in this area. In summary, make the most of:

- AEG partnership
- ASM Corporate Development
- Place Informatics – audience data
- Digital: 'Welcome App' and Visit Wolverhampton platform
- Skills Development – ladder of opportunity
- 3 cities partnership

Some opportunities are specifically event related (highlighted in the 2028 visioning). While the focus is often on the larger 'tentpole' attractions, the majority of the city's events will be on a smaller scale at community level. This is an ideal scale to demonstrate Wolverhampton's diversity.

Some events already exist – others will need to be encouraged and supported through proactive schemes that attract new promoters. Targeted funding incentives can build the city's reputation in specific areas such as live music and a potential 'Bands in Bars' concept scheme.

Consumer markets with different specialisms – clothes, food and drink – are affordable ways of creating city-wide events that are light on permanent infrastructure and respond well and quickly to local demand. However, the council will need to ensure a seamless approach across commissioning directorates to improve quantity, consistency and market development.

### **Delivering wider economic benefit**

A key challenge is to retain the economic benefit of events in the city. As the diagram below (*Figure 4: Retaining Economic Benefit*) shows, the principal indirect economic impact comes in two areas – overnight accommodation and food and beverage (F&B). There is direct spend on ticket sales and merchandise at the event itself, which is of interest to the promoter to ensure its sustainability, but beyond that the aim should be to keep the events indirect spend in the city.



## Direct Economic Benefit for Wolverhampton?

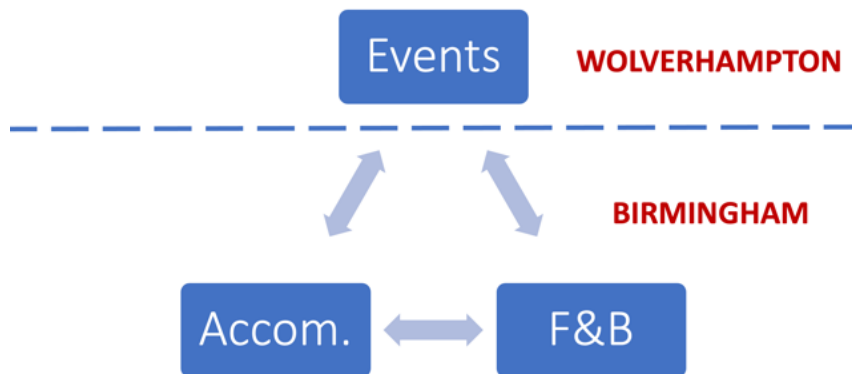


Fig. 4 Retaining Economic Benefit

Birmingham's accommodation and F&B offers will always be an attraction for some, but proximity to the event is a key deciding factor for audiences looking for somewhere to stay or eat. As the event programme develops, so does the opportunity for providers in this area.

Hotels and restaurants will begin to cluster in the city as the events footfall increases, but this may need to be incentivised in the early stages.

The impact of events at local level goes beyond the economic. A programme of micro-grants targeted at initiating small scale events in local communities is a cost-effective way of stimulating volunteering, as well as celebrating local diversity. This can be seen from the tremendous success of the Kings Coronation Celebration Grant which supported 140 local community-building events over the 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

Broadening the base of local events activity in the ecology helps develop the overall supply chain, as well as creating an early rung in the ladder of opportunity for young people looking to establish themselves in the sector.

### Building on the city's distinctiveness

One of the beneficial consequences of this approach is to enhance the distinctively Wolverhampton nature of the city's events offer. Events are indivisible from tourism, and a crucial part of the strategy is to re-focus the messaging to the visitor about the city. This needs to be fully integrated with the overall city messaging and consistency of message is key.

There are several audiences this needs to be pointed at, and while the overarching message must be uniform, the detail of the city's offer will require more nuanced marketing to promoters, to locals, to regional visitors, and to those from the rest of the UK/international.

For example, local parents with young children may be persuaded by safety messaging, visitors by ease of access, and promoters by audience reach and diversity. So, messaging/marketing the city must address the key questions:

- *Wolverhampton Welcome* – what is the unique selling proposition (USP)?
- Authentic, grounded community
- Easy city to navigate, safe, helpful

- We want to help you make events happen (*promoters*)
- Wolverhampton? You're welcome (*public*)

## **Essential infrastructure: setting up a destination management partnership**

The messaging needs to be delivered and authentic, and to that end, and in line with the recent national [De Bois Review of Destination Management](#) recommendations which have been endorsed by Government, a local Destination Management Partnership (DMP) that is strongly events-focussed – e.g. Visit Wolverhampton – is a very important means to achieve this and needs to be strongly considered.

This body can be relatively small (perhaps with seconded staff from CWC and others), but it brings the key partners together and can be tasked with coordination and delivery of the events strategy, wider city visitor experience as well as ensuring consistency of messaging. For some it will function as a DMP, others as a Convention Bureau, and for others as a Promoters Gateway. Simply, it is an advocacy and enabling tool for the city with clear function and structure, including:

- Quasi-independent governance
- Conduit for private sector engagement
- Maximise/collate local assets
- Coordination and monitoring

The DMP has the potential to be the strategic forum to progress key policy issues such as the eco-systems for visitor experience in the city centre and urban centres, night-time economy vibrancy and audience/market development. Building on the above, the events programme should also proactively look at how events can help address the perceived challenges in the city, such as:

- Perceptions of the city
- City centre environment
- Current DMP offer online
- No joined-up events supply line
- Centre vs wider city
- Transport in the city

Some of these will create opportunities to subvert existing perceptions (as outlined in the 2028 visioning) – and look at how existing civic assets can be used imaginatively. For example, using the city's pop art collection to help shape the design and theming of a new hotel in the city centre.

The Box Space initiative is already looking at ways that an underutilised urban environment can be transformed through programming of events and a curated pop-up food and beverage offer.

## **Improving the visitor experience**

The over-riding aim of the events supply chain must be user-focused to improve the visitor experience – from the ways in which customers find out about the event to maintaining contact with them afterwards to see how they enjoyed it and push future information to them.

Events cultivate friends of the city – people are coming to enjoy themselves and the city has to deliver: the event itself has to be good, but the rest of the visitor experience – the journey to and from, the food, the built environment – essentially, the Wolverhampton Welcome. Making it easier for visitors to know about and get to events is vital. Figure 5 below shows how the total visitor experience journey fits together.

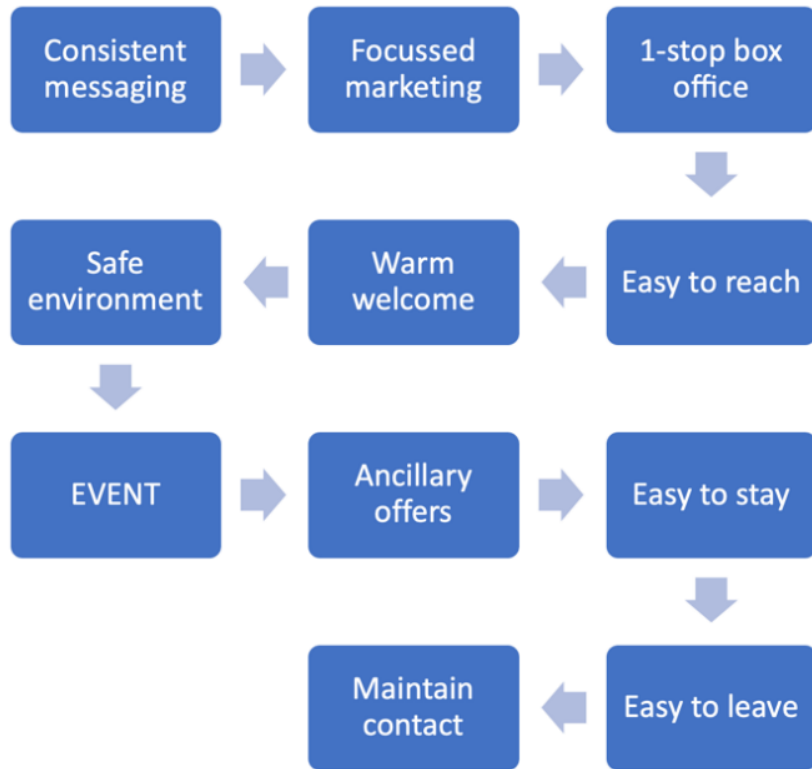


Fig.5 Visitor Journey

The same has to happen for events promoters – they need to know they will be welcomed and supported and encouraged to deliver events in the city. As the diagram below illustrates, (Figure 6: the Promoters Journey) this requires a quite different (and equally complex) supply chain, with a range of public sector providers required at various points – various CWC services, police, volunteers.



Fig.6 Promoters Journey

Critical to the success of this is the coordinating role that CWC can play with its own internal services – licensing, roads, events – to make the experience as joined up and easy for the potential promoter, whether they are a local community group or a national organisation. This coordinating role is another that Visit Wolverhampton would be well placed to deliver if it were located within CWC. The key thing is to make it easy for the promoters for events to happen.

The metrics for success are twofold – there are the outcomes that are sought during and after the event, for instance: increased footfall, greater economic impact and per capita spend yield, more people volunteering to deliver, and such like. There are also the metrics by which to assess at the planning stage whether to support or deliver an event. At its simplest, these are: the Profile it will deliver (does it reinforce the city brand and objectives), the Reward/Impact it will have (*direct* in terms of event sustainability, and *indirect* via additional spend locally), and consequent level of Risk.

The illustration below considers these from a CWC perspective in terms of a large event delivered by (Figure 7: Assessing benefit/impact of large-scale events) a third party (A), by CWC (B), and an event such as the recent British Art Show (C).

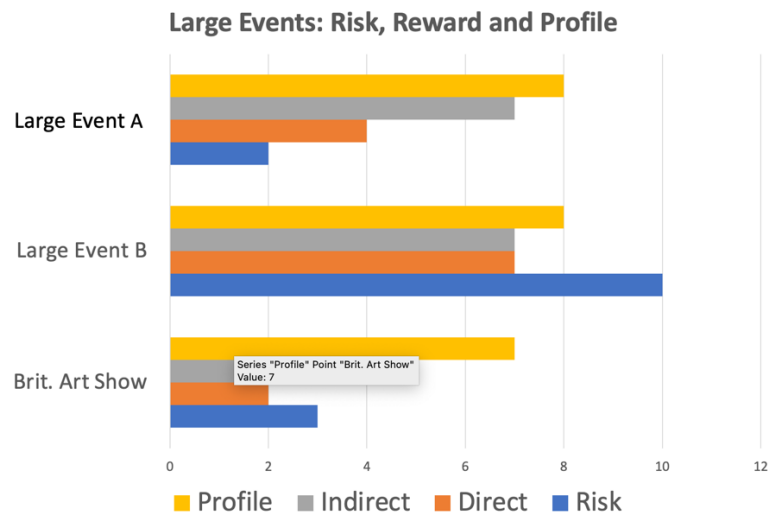
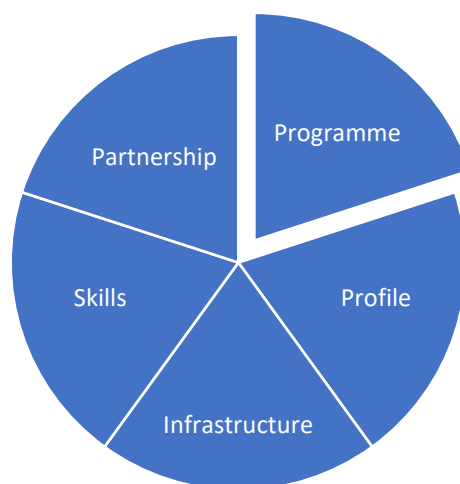


Fig.7 Assessing benefit/impact of large-scale events

It's important not to underestimate the impact an effective events programme can have, often quite disproportionate to the level of public sector investment. And well delivered public events bestow a view of good civic management and competence by CWC more generally. But it's equally important to be realistic about the contribution of events. Events will not change the city centre economy, but they will make an important contribution to that change. They won't single-handedly transform the perception of the city, but they have a major role to play in helping make that a reality.

Events can help contribute to many areas of civic policy, but **the strategy requires specific targets**, and the following are collated from the narrative above (not in order of importance) and grouped in 5 key areas for development. These are further broken down into targets underneath:



Profile / Marketing

1. Increased awareness of the city nationally
2. Coordinated marketing of transport options

3. Coordinated marketing of wider hospitality, food and beverage offer.

#### Infrastructure Investment

4. New visitor infrastructure – hotels
5. Successful delivery of new assets eg Box Space initiative
6. Single box office and information point of entry for visitors
7. Promoters gateway – single point of entry
8. Data collation on visitor/market trends
9. Increased economic impact

#### Skills Development

10. Increased volunteer support for events
11. More opportunities to showcase local artists
12. Increased jobs
13. New vocational course in events operation and management

#### Partnership Collaboration

14. Local businesses engaged in event support and delivery
15. Three Cities Event concordat
16. Creation of Destination Management Partnership / Convention Bureau (e.g. Visit Wolverhampton)

#### Programme

17. Families retained in the town centre
18. Greater presence of televised live sport from the city
19. Fixed schedule of national sporting events
20. Support for increased diversity celebrations

Oversight of the events calendar is another key role of the Destination Management Partnership (DMP) / Visit Wolverhampton, which can take a strategic approach to the annual planning calendar. The diagram below (*Fig.8: Illustrative Events Calendar: Blocks and Tentpoles*) illustrates taking a *blocks and tentpoles* approach. It is recommended that the Council look at themed periods – a designated week, fortnight or month that a range of promoters of all scales can generate work under that banner across the city. Within that, there needs to be tentpole events – high-profile one-offs that draw attention to the city. Focusing on more self-generated content should be an integrated element of every annual programme – ensuring that Wulfrunians see themselves, their activities and their communities reflected in their city.



Fig.8 Illustrative Events Calendar: Blocks and Tentpoles

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[NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED]

### **Number of Events**

A proportionate annual increase in the number of events is proposed, particularly from years 2 to 4, as illustrated in the table (*Table 1: Summary of Years 1-5 Number of Events*) below:

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Total Funded Current Events	12	12	12	12	12	12
Total Commercial Events		8	13	16	29	29
Total Corporate Events		2	4	6	7	7
Total Community Events		9	14	17	17	17
Total Civic Events		3	5	5	5	5
<b>TOTAL BUDGET</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>70</b>
<b><u>Indicative Attendances</u></b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Year 4</b>	<b>Year 5</b>	<b>Year 6</b>
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Total Current Events	?	?	?	?	?	?
Total Commercial Events		56,000	97,000	112,000	209,000	209,000
Total Corporate Events		2,000	4,000	6,000	7,000	7,000
Total Community Events		22,500	35,000	42,500	42,500	42,500
Total Civic Events		3,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
<b>TOTAL BUDGET</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>83,500</b>	<b>141,000</b>	<b>165,500</b>	<b>263,500</b>	<b>263,500</b>



***Economic Impact***

The Economic Impact (EI) is based on a per capita amount calculated differently for each of the 4 event categories i.e. a Commercial event visitor has a greater impact than one attending a community event. The additional annual EI is indicated in the table (*Table 2: Summary of Years 1-5 Projected Economic Impact* below:

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
	£	£	£	£	£
Total Commercial Events		1,848,000	3,201,000	3,696,000	6,897,000
Total Corporate Events		90,000	180,000	270,000	315,000
Total Community Events		180,000	270,000	300,000	300,000
Total Civic Events		45,000	75,000	75,000	75,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,163,000</b>	<b>3,726,000</b>	<b>4,341,000</b>	<b>7,587,000</b>

*Table 2 Indicative Summary of Years 1-5 Projected Economic Impact*

## Action Plan

In terms of operational delivery, based on the specific targets, outlined earlier, there are several operational areas outlined above – Profile; Infrastructure; Skills; and Partnership - that will require planning and implementation – a timeline for these is suggested in the table (*Fig.9: Operational Action Plan summary*) below:

	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
<b>Profile / Marketing</b>						
Development of Brand	█	█	█	█	█	█
Development of Website		█	█	█	█	█
Online Marketing Portal			█	█	█	█
<b>Infrastructure Investment</b>						
Box Space Fanzone		█	█	█	█	█
Data Contract			█	█	█	█
Promoters Gateway				█	█	█
Single Box Office					█	█
Pop Hotel opens						█
<b>Skills Development</b>						
Vocational Course - preparation	█	█	█	█	█	█
Wolves Welcome Crew			█	█	█	█
<b>Partnership Collaboration</b>						
Visit Wolverhampton established	█	█	█	█	█	█
Three Cities Concordat		█	█	█	█	█

*Fig.9 Operational Action Plan summary*

The priorities are suggested by the scheduling above, but the key one is the creation of a wider city ‘vehicle’ i.e a Destination Management Partnership (DMP) like Visit Wolverhampton, to take forward and coordinate the other initiatives. The Council may need external support to develop this, given current resource levels.

The exact nature of this body should be explored further, however, it should have both a *catalytic* role i.e. bring partners together to help develop and deliver some initiatives, such as the development of the Events Academy vocational course; and a *coordinating* role, for example, ensuring the development of a brand with associated online presence is invested in by all key partners.

Such a body should also have oversight of development of the annual events programme, not necessarily as a direct provider, but by ensuring there is the broad geographic and thematic range of events across the calendar, as explored earlier.

The DMP will also have a very important role locally in working with and influencing the work of the emerging Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) being developed at a regional West Midlands footprint level by the West Midlands Growth Company (WMGC). Indeed, WMGC have a vital role to play in supporting the development and operation of the local DMP to ensure that the city benefits as much as possible from the regional and national opportunities that will potentially be filtered through the LVEP.

The DMP will also create a collaborative public/private sector partnership environment which makes the city’s position and case stronger when applying for national funding streams. One of the key pieces of work of the DMP will be to develop a strategic pipeline of projects, with strong ‘shovel-ready’, evidence-based business cases, so the city is prepared and agile when national funding rounds are announced – often at short notice.

New events should be phased in over the 5-year period illustrated in the table (*Fig.10: Programme Action Plan summary*) below including both community and commercial:

Event	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
Sounds in the City Festival						
Bands in Bars (support scheme)						
Wolverhampton Welcome Weekend						
Cycling Festival/Road Race/Trial						
British Kabaddi League / Final						
Kabaddi World Cup / Final and outreach / Festival						
Winter Festival of Light						
Football Development						
Comedy Festival						

Fig.10 Programme Action Plan summary

## Appendix 2: IPW...aspirational look back on achievements from 2028 perspective

### **Wolverhampton 'Event City 2028'**

By 2028... ...people will think differently about the city...

The annual **Summer in the City festival**<sup>1</sup> in West Park has played a part in that since 2024 – showcasing the city's offer as well as its pulling power to attract major musical talent. But also, people became more aware of what the city has to offer and the authentic, unpretentious way it goes about its business.

### **The small city with the big heart**

Marketing has played its part in the turnaround of perceptions, there's no doubt about it. A consistent and collaborative approach to both messaging and application of the city brand have played well to the national audience who'd never been, or previously thought of coming to Wolverhampton. And **positioning the warmth of the population and their welcome as its biggest selling point really resonated** with residents who were able to demonstrate the civic pride they've always felt in tangible ways, particularly through an upsurge in volunteering.

The *Wolverhampton Welcome Crew* – a **team of volunteers** regularly come out to greet event-goers with their distinctive black and gold livery and their advice on where to go, how to get there, and how to get the best out of the city, have become the city's most distinctive feature, particularly on big event days and during the themed months.

2028 will see the third **Welcome Night** – an event that has grown each year and is set to involve over 120 local businesses, cultural and community organisations. This **open-door city-wide free event** has started to attract visitors from nearby towns and cities as well as pulling in over 15,000 local people for its 6-hour duration. The street-food festival that started alongside it in its second year will return, and organisers are currently looking for further dates during the year.

The reopening of The Halls in 2023 was a major turning point. The music offer in the city got bigger and better overnight. The city was once again on the map for major touring bands. And for audiences. Wolverhampton Wanderers' partnership with Warner Records – Wolves Records – reawakened the local music scene giving a platform to new local bands. CWC built on this with the **Bands in Bars support scheme for local pubs** that in its third year saw over 40 local bands playing 300 gigs annually across the city.

The **focus on retaining families in the town centre between 5 and 7pm at weekends** began paying dividends when the focus moved to Queen Square. The *Life's a Beach* project, part of *Summer in the City* month, has become a regular and loved part of the seasonal offer. While the Autumn circus skills fortnight is beginning to spread into neighbouring streets. Two new family-friendly cafés have opened in the area, each of which has a small performance area that feature a variety of kids entertainers.

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<sup>1</sup> A major annual music festival run by external partners

Sport of all sorts, indoor and outdoor, continues to provide the city's pulse. The Grand Slam of Darts, has been retained in the city – despite fierce competition from other cities and towns - with enhancements to the Aldersley Stadium venue to improve the visitor experience.

Wolverhampton was founded by a woman, Wulfruna, so it was appropriate when the FA, Molineux, and CWC signed an agreement in 2025 to **host three England women's football international matches annually** in the city for 3 years. Women's football's coming home.

In 2025, the city hosted the UK Road Race Championships agreeing a two-year deal. The annual GB time trials have reignited interest in cycling at community level and the second *Wolves in the Saddle* family day of cycling is scheduled for later this year.

Wolverhampton Wolfpack continue to dominate the British Kabaddi League (BKL), formed in 2022, and a city-wide league has been formed featuring 8 community teams from the Black Country. With the rapid rise of the sport in the UK, the Council agreed a 3-year deal with BKL which has seen the **UK finals being held in Wolverhampton for two of the three years** along, with the World Cup in 2025. A TV deal with the between BKL and BBC has been extended with international rights now sold to 18 broadcasters. The estimated TV reach is 145m annually which means that the profile of the city is growing globally through this continuing relationship with BKL.

The opening of a 4-star Pop hotel in early 2028 was hailed by one national newspaper as, '*yet more evidence that this is a city that's prepared to confound your expectations – who knew that one of the UK's greatest pop art collections was hidden in the Black Country?*

The **Box Space** has been a huge success for almost four years. The combination of flexible programming – from fanzone to family, from cutting edge to comfort food – has proved popular with a range of locals and visitors. And the visuals continue to be amazing – the commissioned projections, data-mapped onto the adjacent buildings – provide a free 20-minute show every day at sundown that still has people gathering to watch. That has led to more projection-mapping commissions being planned for other unexpected city centre sites.

Visitors still remark on how easy it is to get to the city from elsewhere in the UK, and e-bike stations have improved how folk can get around the city centre. Ease of access has been one of the factors that's seen a **ten-fold increase in the number of national corporate events that take place in the city** now. The Halls remain a destination of choice for conferences, but an increasing number of mid-scale seminars and gatherings are taking place at the University, and a bespoke small events programme – such as music nights and food festivals - that accompanies them is regularly highlighted by delegates as one of the reasons they would come back.

The **creation of Visit Wolverhampton** in 2024 - a **Destination Management Partnership (DMP)** based on a formal partnership between city visitor economy anchor institutions – has made a huge difference in coordinating the various visitor offers in the city, as well as providing a focus of consistent messaging and marketing. Based in the CWC offices and led by a senior Council officer, the organisation is planning a further 5-year plan that will see the corporate market extend further into the city, using more venues and locations.

One of the benefits of location next to the UK's second city continues to be the opportunity to pick up elements of much larger events Wolverhampton would be unable to afford by itself. Hosting training camps, an educational and cultural programme linked to the 2028 Euros later this year is

one of those. The **Three Cities Initiative continues to explore ways the city works together with Birmingham and Coventry to mutual benefit.**

Negotiations to create a **single box-office digital entry point for visitors** finally bore fruit in 2027. This follows the 2025 major revamp of the city's online marketing offer, which now makes it easy to navigate the complete events programme of the city at a glance. Smaller community event promoters are now beginning to use this portal to host and advertise their own events and they too are set to benefit from being part of the single box-office presence.

Following several years of internal review and external partnership discussion, the 'Promoters Gateway' was launched in 2027, through Visit Wolverhampton. This **enables external promoters to approach a single portal for guidance on how to establish an event in the city**, including advice for community groups. Significantly, the service provides up to the minute data on current audiences including their origin, demographic breakdown, likely dwell time, and the areas of the city they prefer to visit. This data began to come online in 2024 following a partnership with the West midlands Growth Company (WMGC).

The steady growth in events has begun to find its way to the job market where an estimated 200FTE jobs are believed to have been created in recent years. Projections from independent economic impact analysis forecast this could grow by 10% year on year over the next decade. To meet this demand for jobs, which has been focussed primarily on young entrants to the job market, **a new 'Events Academy' - vocational course in Applied Events Operation and Management- is in development** and is due to take its first course entrants in 2029.