

Report subject	Bournemouth Air Festival
Meeting date	18 June 2025
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>This report provides an update on the feasibility of providing an agreement with a potential operator for 2026 onwards in relation to the Bournemouth Air Festival along with an update on the position of potential for sponsorship for 2026 onwards.</p> <p>Following the work undertaken and discussions that have taken place, this paper recommends to stop any further work on delivery of an Air Festival whilst recognising the process in place for new events to come forward in the future.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet:</p> <p>a. Agrees to Option 4, which acknowledges the ongoing process for new events to come forward and stops any further work on an Air Festival for 2026 onwards.</p>
Reason for recommendations	<p>To enable staff resources to be refocused on working with external commercial and community events to support achieving the corporate strategy of working closely with partners, removing barriers and empowering others, having explored all options and acknowledging the council's current and future financial position.</p>

Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Richard Herrett – Portfolio Holder for Destination, Leisure & Commercial Operations
Corporate Director	Glynn Barton – Chief Operations Officer
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Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Decision

Background

1. The Air Festival concept was developed in 2008 as a free event that would attract people to Bournemouth and build on the vision at the time for Bournemouth to become an 'event full' destination. Since 2008 the Bournemouth Air Festival has made a significant contribution to the local tourist economy, attracting several million visitors and residents and raising the profile of Bournemouth and the surrounding area.
2. An escalation in uncontrollable costs in delivery of the Air Festival since 2019 resulted in an increase in the net budget for the four-day festival from £300,000 in 2019 to £400,000 in 2022. Contributory factors to this increase are primarily the costs of insurance, security, infrastructure and counter terrorism measures which continue to increase.
3. Cabinet in November 2023 approved a 3-day event for 2024 with a reduced Council contribution for one year of £200,000. Cabinet also approved that an external provider be sought to provide an Air Festival going forward, which has been taken forward by officers in consultation with the Portfolio Holder and Leader.
4. The final Council-funded Air Festival took place from 29 - 31 August 2024 with the revised budget as detailed above in point 3. The festival benefited from three good days of weather and attracted in the region of 500,000 visitors to the event across both day and night activities.
5. The final subsidy position from the Air Festival for 2024 was a subsidy cost of £248,000 to the council, utilising £48,000 of the Council contingency set aside.
6. An update was provided to Cabinet in October 2024, on the work to explore options for an external operator to take forward a future Air Festival.
7. Cabinet approved the recommendation to take forward further exploration work on the feasibility of providing a 10-year agreement with a potential operator for 2026, alongside continuing discussions with any potential sponsorship leads to support the delivery of an Air Festival from 2026 onwards.

Feasibility work with potential operator

8. A specification for the underwriting and organisation of the Air Festival for the future was published in February 2024 with an invitation for interested organisations to submit an expression of interest.
9. Two expressions of interest were submitted after initial talks with five organisations. One operator was discounted after detailed discussions as their proposal required direct financial support from the Council.
10. The remaining potential operator attended the 2024 Air Festival.
11. Work has been ongoing with the potential operator to explore feasibility of a 10-year agreement following cabinet approval in October 2024. The proposal requests the rights to produce an air show for a period of 10 years beginning in 2026.
12. The financial model relies heavily on the commercialisation of the event including the area between Bournemouth and Boscombe piers where the proposal includes the provision of a variety of hospitality offers ranging in price.
13. Following their visit to the Air Festival in August, the council has met with the potential operator and has received a detailed list of negotiation points from them in order to progress. Many of these points have a financial implication to the council, which are outside the scope of the original specification.
14. Some of the negotiation points would fundamentally change the specification which went out further to market, and this is explored in the options appraisal below.

Feasibility work on sponsorship

15. Leads for potential sponsors have been followed up at a senior level to gauge any potential funding interest for 2026 onwards.
16. This has included a review of contacts held, with conversations between officers and relevant companies to explore any sponsorship opportunities in the first instance.
17. There have been no formal offers of sponsorship to date.

Options appraisal

Option 1 – Continue taking forward feasibility work of providing a 10-year agreement with the potential operator.

18. The council has met with the operator for discussions on their requirements against what we as a council can provide.
19. The current approach has been through expressions of interest based on a set specification. The original request from the operator noted above in point 13 veer considerably from the original specification. Therefore, in order to ensure openness and fairness with the market we would need to tender the opportunity if their requests are considered appropriate.
20. Should this be the case, the timeline to deliver this would make it unviable to undertake this and deliver an Air Festival in 2026.

21. Within the ongoing work with the operator in depth discussions have been undertaken on the commercial model the operator would run and the requirements for ensuring this is workable within the constraints on the open space.
22. To enable the model, a full closure of the open space would be required and non-negotiable to include the foreshore and promenade without access. This would contravene The Open Spaces Act 1906.
23. Whilst conversations have continued, it is recognised that a minimum of 12 months planning time will be required for an event in 2026 which would mean agreement on a Heads of Terms would be required by the end of June 2026
24. This option has been discounted due to the additional timescales required and the financial and legal constraints on the proposals.

Option 2 – Retest the market

25. The option to retest the market with an updated proposal remains, inviting further bids from operators.
26. An alternative option would be to write a new specification for a destination event which does not specify an air festival or the outline of what has been previously delivered to allow for new innovative proposals for a future sustainable event.
27. Compiling a new specification and going forward with a new event would need a significant lead in time allowing for a successful operator to have a full 12 months before delivery once a contract has been awarded. This would mean the delivery of a destination event would be 2027 onwards.
28. This option has been discounted as the market testing is likely to result in a similar response and has demonstrated the need for council financing to make it sustainable.

Option 3 – Seek sponsorship to fund an in house organised Air Festival at no cost to the Council

29. Across all of the departments within the Council it is estimated that a minimum of 5,000 officer hours were used on the Air Festival in 2024.
30. For an in house model to be sustainable, significant commercialisation would be required to include the chargeable admissions, enhanced premium parking and maximisation of catering, alcohol and hospitality.
31. Whilst expenditure costs stabilised in 2024, the implementation of Martyn's Law may further increase security costings for the event in the future.
32. The required sponsorship value would be £400,000 to enable this option to be taken forward.
33. Whilst it is recognised that there has been some interest in sponsorship of the event, there has not been a firm offer which would meet the required amount to move forward with an event therefore, this option has been discounted.

Option 4 – Acknowledging the ongoing process for new events to come forward stop any further work on an Air Festival for 2026

34. This option is based on no guaranteed position of confirming sponsorship or an external operator taking it forward and no funding from the council for the event as agreed at Cabinet in November 2023.
35. This option would cease all further work connected to finding a way forward to deliver an Air Festival and focus the events team resource on supporting external event organisers going forward along with the continuing film office and market management.
36. Proposals for new events of various scales come through to the events team on a regular basis. This open application process continues to be in place should any new proposals come forward for the organisation of a destination event in the future.
37. This option is recommended by officers

Summary of financial implications

38. Option 1 has the potential for direct income loss but some of this may be mitigated by additional visitor numbers. There will be staffing costs related to arranging any contract agreement.
39. Details on the requirements for staff resource from the Council is provided in the human resources implications and should be noted for the financial implications as they would be required for the 10 year period.
40. The detailed list of requirements provided by the operator will have financial implications for the council as there is currently no budget identified within the MTFP to be able to subsidise the operations requested.
41. Should a proposal progress to the point of a heads of terms agreement, a full financial check would need to be undertaken on the operator.
42. To take forward option 2, further procurement resource would be needed with a high risk that bidders would require a subsidy from the council.
43. The Council subsidy for the 2024 Air Festival was £248,000.
44. The apportioned central support overheads for the festival £187,000. This was offset by additional net secondary income generation which totalled £171,000. The direct cost of delivering the 2024 Air Festival to the Council was £264,000.
45. To take forward option 3, there would need to be the prospect of a significant increase in sponsorship or commercial income for the event to be run internally at no cost to the Council.
46. The recommended option 4 has no direct financial implications for the Council as no budget has been provided for an Air Festival in the current MTFP for any future year.

Summary of legal implications

47. Section 145 of the Local Government Act 1972 allows the Council to do anything or arrange for anything to be done (or contribute towards the expenses of doing of anything) necessary or expedient for the provision of an entertainment of any nature.
48. However, this will always be subject to any other requirements or consents which are required.

49. This area is leased to the Council and if option 1 is pursued, landlord's consent would be required under the provisions of the lease – the exact extent of which will depend on the details of the proposal. This consent should be obtained before any contractual arrangements are entered into with any third party.
50. A check should be made for any rights which have been granted or acquired by third parties over this area which may have to be accommodated within any proposals.
51. The beach area between Bournemouth and Boscombe pier currently hosts temporary event days including 8 days allocated for the Air Festival. If the 8-day period (including set up and breakdown) is exceeded, the use of this area for events could exceed the 28-day permitted period for temporary use with planning permission required.
52. It will be necessary to comply with the requirements of all relevant legislation, including but not limited to highway, road traffic, planning and procurement statutory requirements.
53. Option 4 has no direct legal implications for the Council as no work will be undertaken.

Summary of human resources implications

54. Option 1 will take significant contract management and support from the events team, anticipated to be particularly focused for the first 24 months. The staff resource is estimated to be equivalent to 1 x FTE Event Officer with significant management support.
55. Additional officer resource will be required for central Council departments for Option 1 to enable delivery from a third party to include legal, finance, planning, licencing, seafront and health & safety. Whilst the event would not be directly run by the Council, it has a duty of care to ensure the plans in place are suitable and sufficient from a safety perspective and also to cover statutory requirements.
56. On option 2, it is noted that approximately 5,000 officer hours are attributed to the Air Festival each year.
57. For option 4, event proposals sit within the existing resource for the events team for any future interest. The staff within the events team are now managing markets across BCP along with the newly formed film office which will redirect the resources previously used from this team for the Air Festival.

Summary of sustainability impact

58. Ceasing the Air Festival will reduce the environmental impact in terms of emissions and event fuel consumption.
59. The main challenge for sustainability for the event was the mode of transport to the event and any future events considered will need to consider this alongside other ways to minimise any environmental impact.

Summary of public health implications

60. An air show has the ability to provide a positive living experience to residents and visitors which supports active living and is positive to wellbeing. Take forward option 4 takes away this positive experience. Work with external events to ensure a varied events programme across BCP will assist with mitigating this.

Summary of equality implications

61. An initial EIA screening document focused on option 1 was completed and taken to an EIA panel on 4 September 2024 and it was agreed a more detailed assessment would be required should an option that sees the Air Festival be delivered in 2026 be agreed upon and full plans have been communicated.

Summary of risk assessment

62. A table summarising the risks can be found below.

Risks	Level	Mitigations
Financial – Loss of income to commercial services without a destination event such as parking	High	Continued work with stakeholders on the Town Centre regeneration Promotion of the film office and events to encourage external companies
Reputational – Loss of experience events staff and inability to recruit replacements staff with the level of experience required to deliver a destination event in the future	Medium	Staff engagement and other opportunities within BCP for retention
Reputational – Loss of a destination event for Bournemouth bringing tourism and business to the area	High	Continued work with stakeholders on the Town Centre regeneration Promotion of the film office and events to encourage external companies

Background papers

Cabinet 2 October 2024 - [democracy.bcpccouncil.gov.uk/documents/g5903/Public reports pack 02nd-Oct-2024 10.15 Cabinet.pdf?T=10](https://democracy.bcpccouncil.gov.uk/documents/g5903/Public%20reports%20pack%2002nd-Oct-2024%2010.15%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10)

Cabinet 22 November 2023 – [\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 22/11/2023 10:15](#)

Appendices