

Scottish Environment Week/ Festival – review and next steps

Background of SEW and context for review

LINK has been organising Scottish Environment Week (SEW) in Parliament since 2005. SEW takes place in February every second year with the smaller-scale Scottish Environment Festival happening in the interim years. Being permitted to hold a full Week's programme only every second year was a consequence of pressure on the Parliament from other organisations for similar Weeks.

A call is put out to LINK members 6-9 months before SEW to ask for ideas for the programme. This programme is then developed with a Steering Group made up of LINK staff and members. The aim of SEW has been to demonstrate how the environment contributes to Scotland's economic and social wellbeing, and to engage Parliamentarians beyond the 'usual suspects'. Scottish Environment Week/ Festival takes a 'lobbying light' approach.

Over the years, LINK has received funding from a range of organisations to deliver SEW. In recent years, Historic Environment Scotland was one of the primary sponsors but this funding ceased in 2017. Thus, it was considered timely to conduct a review as there is currently no dedicated sponsor of SEW. In addition, it has been noted by staff and members that, while MSP attendance continues to be high at the evening reception, there is often poor MSP attendance at the lunchtime events.

Survey and results

LINK circulated a questionnaire survey to members May-July 2017 and then a small group (Alice, Lisa and Daphne from LINK staff and Helen and Charles from Board) met to discuss the results.

The survey received 20 responses from 16 member organisations. Questions were asked to gauge respondents' overall engagement with SEW, and whether SEW brought benefits to member organisations, their work areas and delivery of strategic priorities. We also asked whether SEW was beneficial for members' contact with MSPs and for views on how they would like SEW to continue in future.

The survey results indicated that members thought SEW was beneficial and that they value the opportunities it gives them to showcase work in Parliament. However, there were several comments about the low turnout of MSPs at lunchtime events which reflected previous observations.

We asked for views on how SEW/F should continue in the future including (1) the status quo; (2) a full SEW programme every second year with only a Parliamentary evening reception in intervening years; or (3) an annual Parliamentary evening reception with other advocacy events throughout the year. Option 3 received the most votes (40%) with views split fairly evenly across options 1 (25%) and 2 (20%).

Proposed way forward

- Continue with an annual Parliamentary evening reception in February as this is considered a valuable networking event and has good attendance of MSPs and Government officials. Have a topical theme each year and aim to secure a sponsor based on that theme.
- Ask the five LINK Groups to propose ideas for events for parliamentarians based on the Group's advocacy priorities. The events would likely be held in Parliament but another venue close to Holyrood could be used if more appropriate.
- The Advocacy Office Administrator would support the organisation of events by booking with Parli events team, sending invites and organising catering. It would be up to the Groups to decide the format of the event, liaise with speakers and to suggest potential sponsors.
- The primary aim would be to secure external sponsorship for the events. If that isn't possible, costs would be covered by Group members.

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