

Adelaide Writers' Festival – Alternative Event

Monday, 19 January 2026
Special Council

Public

Council Members:
Councillor Keiran Snape
Councillor Janet Giles
Councillor Eleanor Freeman

Contact Officer:
Michael Sedgman, Chief Executive Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pursuant to section 82 of the *Local Government Act 1999* (SA) (the Act), the Chief Executive Officer is required to call a special meeting of Council at the request of at least three members of Council.

The Chief Executive Officer received a request on 14 January 2026 from Councillors Snape, Giles and Freeman in accordance with the requirements under section 82 of the Act and has called this special meeting of Council to consider the following Motion:

'That Council;

Noting the City of Adelaide's longstanding support for the Adelaide Writers Festival and the impacts of the cancellation of the 2026 event, including an expected, estimated 50 million dollar boost to the City economy and the loss to our community of the City's most significant forum for books and conversation, asks the Administration to;

1. Immediately enter into discussions with the not for profit, Writers SA to assist the organisation to curate and manage an alternative event in February/March 2026 featuring participants who had been prepared to participate in the cancelled event
2. Request the Adelaide Economic Development Authority (AEDA) to make available to Writers SA any funding it considers appropriate to facilitate the alternative event
3. Supplement any funding for the alternative event from AEDA or sponsors of the cancelled event or other organisations and new sponsorship agreements with an amount from the Council's QF2 review not exceeding \$250,000 and
4. Make available to the alternative event any available venue such as the Town Hall, any Council owned or controlled building and public space, including the Park Lands.'

ADMINISTRATION COMMENT

1. A commitment of \$350,000 annually for the next 3 years was endorsed by the AEDA Board and approved by Council in its 2025/26 budget, to sponsor the Adelaide Festival.
2. The funding was recommended to the AEDA Board as the result of a contestable application process through the AEDA Events and Festivals Sponsorship Program.
3. The \$350,000 forms part of the Adelaide Festival's overall revenue and supports the funding of 6 main program elements, being:
 - Theatre
 - Music
 - Dance

- Visual Art
 - Adelaide Writers' Week
 - Festival Club
4. The funding commitment was communicated to the Adelaide Festival Corporation via letter to the Chief Executive on 2 July 2025, following adoption of the City of Adelaide (CoA) budget on 24 June 2025. The agreement is yet to be executed.
 5. No funds have yet been disbursed.
 6. Previous years' funding for the Adelaide Festival (AF) program of activities (including Adelaide Writers' Week (AWW)) is as below:

Year	CoA Funding provided
2024/25	\$360,000
2023/24	\$360,000
2022/21	\$360,000
2021/22	\$320,000
2020/21	\$320,000

7. To date Council has received a total of \$5,204 from deposits for AWW Events for venue hire and \$9,137 has been received as deposit for Adelaide Festival events. No deposit has yet been received for the Adelaide Festival opening concert in the Park Lands.

	Deposit	Total	
Festival			
Adelaide Town Hall	\$9,137	\$30,435	4 musical events
Parklands	-	\$10,505	Opening concert - Pulp
Writers Week			
ATH	\$5,204	\$17,345	Auditorium and Banquet Room venues
Total	\$14,341	\$58,285	

8. The AWW booking for Pioneer Women's Memorial Gardens and Esther Lipmann Garden in Red Gum Park / Karrawirra (Park 12) has been held at the request of the Adelaide Festival Corporation, pending the final direction of the new incoming Adelaide Festival Board. Site Hire fees will be \$13,410 if the booking proceeds.
9. Council also charges remediation costs for Adelaide Festival parklands venue use. Those associated with Adelaide Writers' Week in 2025 were \$16,000.
10. Other involvement with AF and AWW includes liaison with event organisers on a Park Lands Event booking and Adelaide Town Hall venue bookings.
11. It is Council's understanding that Writers SA has a small organisational footprint and operates on a limited budget – approximately 3 to 5 FTE, with only 2 full time staff (a Director and Operations Manager), and is not likely to have the capacity or capability to deliver an alternative event currently with a short turnaround.
12. Similarly the Council Administration does not have the capacity nor the in-house capability to curate or otherwise deliver the event in the proposed timeframe, even as a partner with Writers SA.
13. Given the short lead time, current capacity constraints across the sector, and competing event commitments, it is not feasible for CoA to operationally support or deliver an alternative literary event at this time without significant risk.
14. Notwithstanding the cancellation of 2026 Adelaide Writers' Week, the Adelaide Festival contributes significantly to the City and State economies and provides a significant contribution towards CoA's strategic objectives. As such, any diversion of the funding commitment from the broader Adelaide Festival program is likely to have some detrimental impact on the above outcomes.

15. No public information is available on the economic benefits to the state from Adelaide Writers' Week specifically, or the program delivery cost, or the revenue it generates. However, economic impact for the broader Adelaide Festival (reported by the Adelaide Festival Corporation - **Attachment A**) reports that it:
- hosts 365,402 total attendances (including WOMADelaide)
 - generates \$47.1m net towards the Gross State Product
 - attracts 27,400+ visitors to the state for ticketed events
 - generates 121,485 total visitor nights.
16. Key risks if CoA were to operationally support an alternative event:
- 16.1 Insufficient planning and delivery timeframe.
- 16.2 Increased financial, operational, and reputational risk borne by Council.
- 16.3 Reduced capacity to support existing major events during this period (e.g. Garden, Gluttony, Adelaide Fringe, Lassu, Infamous, Big Bounce, Adelaide Oval events).
- 16.4 Outdoor delivery risks, including weather impacts and safety considerations.
- 16.5 CoA community centres and libraries do not have the same capacity for audiences as a large outdoor event with multiple stages and coordinated scheduling.
- 16.6 Potential alternative venues (noting limitations): University buildings or Mercury Cinema.
17. The viability of an alternative event would be contingent on Adelaide Festival and AWW being willing to support existing bookings and facilitate a handover to alternative event coordinators.
- 17.1 An alternative event would rely on securing experienced personnel at short notice ideally those already engaged by Adelaide Festival/AWW to manage logistics such as travel, accommodation, scheduling, and artist/author support.
- 17.2 AWW relies upon a substantial volunteer group from the Adelaide Festival to facilitate the days events – front of house, etc.
- 17.3 Key value is book sales to draw the support of booksellers or publishers for any event to be viable or attractive to prospective authors.
18. Based on Council's experience with delivering events, it is estimated that the scale of AWW (the 2025 event had over 220 authors) is likely to cost in the vicinity of 6 to 10 times the \$250,000 proposed and as such, \$250,000 may not be sufficient to deliver an impactful alternative event.
19. An additional \$250,000 to establish a temporary event in 2026 would necessarily require funds to be diverted from other Council priorities and commitments. This does not take into account revenue foregone from venue hire nor the likely impact on CoA resources to support such an event, noting the limited resources within the Writers SA organisation (3-5 staff total, 2 full time).

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A – Adelaide Festival 2025 Impact Report

- END OF REPORT -