

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Finance and Resources
DATE	6 th December 2012
Acting DIRECTOR	Patricia Cassidy
TITLE OF REPORT	Provost Skene's House
REPORT NUMBER:	ECS/12/063.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To advise Council that the imminent commencement of the contract to demolish St Nicholas House will result in the need to close Provost Skene's House.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. The Committee agrees to withdraw public service at Provost Skene's House until further notice.
2. The Committee instructs officers to identify and cost extended opening hours at other Museums and the Art Gallery, thereafter, to report to Education, Culture and Sport, and Finance and Resources Committees, with recommendations.
3. The Committee instructs officers to ensure that users, visitors and external agencies are advised of the changes to the delivery of public service.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There will be additional costs to protect the House and Collections, and also compensate its Revenue Budget for loss of income, which will all be met from the Demolition contract.
- 3.2 Other financial implications, including from extended opening hours will be brought to a future meeting.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Failure to close the House will result in an unacceptable Health and Safety risk to visitors and staff, as it will be in the "danger zone" of the

demolition and thereafter, dependent on the redevelopment of the St Nicholas House site.

- 4.2 The current front-of-house and catering staff will be re-located to other Museums and Galleries venues, in consultation with trades unions.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

- 5.1 Provost Skene's House dates from 1545 and is furnished to show how people lived in the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries. The house is named after one of Aberdeen's most famous residents, Lord Provost George Skene, who is thought to have commissioned the carved plaster ceilings. In the Great Hall, these include thistles, fleur-de-lys and crowns and date from around 1660 and Charles II. In the 17th-century bedroom there is a plaster-sculptured coat of arms of three daggers with wolf heads. There is also an important painted ceiling on the vaulted ceiling of the top floor painted gallery, which contains ten panels telling the story of Jesus's life. As it was painted prior to the Reformation and has survived, it has considerable national importance.
- 5.2 The likely commencement date for the demolition contract is mid-January 2013, prior to the next meeting of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. The contract will run throughout 2013 and thereafter, dependent on decisions about the site's redevelopment, may be closed for some time thereafter. The city's aspirations to be UK City of Culture in 2017 will be taken in to consideration in the decisions about how long Provost Skene's House will be closed. Dependent on advice from colleagues involved in managing the Demolition contract, the current intention is to operate as normal until Sunday 30th December, as advertised, and not re-open until further notice.
- 5.3 During the closure period, a number of measures will be in place to ensure continued access to the cultural heritage of the city, as seen through its Museums and Galleries venues. Options for extended opening hours at the Tolbooth (currently seasonal), the Maritime Museum and the Art Gallery will be brought to the next meeting of the Education, Culture and Sport, and Finance and Resources Committees. The website presence for Provost Skene's House will be reviewed and enhanced.
- 5.4 Provost Skene's House is Grade A Listed and it important that the fabric of the building is protected, both internally and externally. The contract for St Nicholas House will include obligations to protect the windows and doors, and in addition, a programme of regular internal and external inspections will be undertaken by the contractor, with staff from the Museums and Galleries Service.

- 5.5 The Collections currently on display include furniture on loan from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and a painting of the Duke of Cumberland from the National Portrait Gallery in London. Officers are consulting with the lenders about appropriate arrangements to protect these items and also those of the City.
- 5.6 Protecting the House itself will require that all the services and utilities are maintained during the closure and this will also be factored into the costs of the Demolition contract.
- 5.7 At the Council meeting on 6th October 2011 it was agreed to demolish St Nicholas House; in recognition of the importance of the St Nicholas House site to the future of the city centre, officers were instructed to explore options open to the Council to ensure any development of the site is of the highest quality and is sympathetic to Provost Skene's House and Marischal College.

6. IMPACT

Corporate - This report relates to 'Aberdeen – the Smarter City', in particular:

- We will improve access to and increase participation in arts and culture by providing opportunities for citizens and visitors to experience a broad range of high quality arts and cultural activities.
- We aspire to be recognised as a City of Culture, a place of excellence for culture and arts by promoting Aberdeen as a cultural centre hosting high quality and diverse cultural events for the whole community and beyond.
- We will embrace the distinctive pride the people of Aberdeen take in their city and work with them to enhance the sense of well-being here, building strong communities which look out for, and look after one another.
- We aim to leave a legacy which will make compelling reading in a new chapter in the history of Aberdeen and we aim to do this with one voice.

There are also clear links with the delivery of the city's Cultural Strategy, "Vibrant Aberdeen" and the bid development to become UK City of Culture. It also has direct links to the city's Learning Strategy and in supporting the experiences and outcomes of the Curriculum for Excellence.

In terms of the Single Outcome Agreement, the programme contributes to Outcome 3, "We are better educated, more skilled and more successful, renowned for our research and innovation" and Outcome 13, 'We will take pride in a strong, fair and inclusive national identity'.

The new SOA guidance for Community Planning Partnerships includes the following key national priorities as appropriately, including particular

focus on how local inequalities of outcome will be reduced through a clear strategic focus on the:

- Early years and early intervention
- Outcomes for older people
- Employment
- Economic recovery and growth
- Health inequalities
- Safer and stronger communities

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Meeting of Council, Thursday, 6th October 2011, (Item 11.)
Finance and Resources Committee, 29th September 2011, St. Nicholas House - Site Redevelopment - EPI/11/281
Meeting of Finance and Resources Committee, Thursday, 12th November, 2009, (Item 35.)

8. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

Neil M Bruce, Service Manager, Culture and Sport
neilbr@aberdeencity.gov.uk ☎523144