

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Full Council
DATE	26 June 2013
DIRECTOR	Gordon McIntosh
TITLE OF REPORT	Aberdeen's Winter Festival & Hogmanay Celebrations

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform the Council of the options available to expand Aberdeen's Winter Festival into Union Terrace Gardens, to seek approval for recommendations aimed at providing additional programme activities and to confirm plans for Aberdeen's Hogmanay Celebrations.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. To confirm the Council's support for Aberdeen's Hogmanay celebrations in 2013, as detailed in this report.
2. That the Council identify activities in order of preference from those detailed in this report to enhance Aberdeen's existing Winter Festival programme and to confirm their support for delivery in Union Terrace Gardens.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Aberdeen City Council's Finance and Resources agreed that £200,000 would be available in 2013 to support the enhancement of Aberdeen's Winter Festival and the delivery of Aberdeen's Hogmanay celebrations.

Detailed below are the costs associated with the options identified:

Developing Festive/Community Content in Festive Light Switch On Parade

Inclusion of 5 additional elements*	£5,000
Total	£5,000

*£1,000 per community /entertainment group that covers costumes, materials, charitable donation etc.

Ice Rink

Hire of the Ice Rink (NB NOT including staff)	£55,000
Ice Rink Staffing*	£12,000
Support Services**	£10,000
Security	£15,120
Total	£92,120

Costs are approximate and will differ depending on preferred period of hire. Our costs are based on hire from 18 November 2013 – 8 January 2014.

* Based on 4 x G8 grade working 8hr shifts over 7 days between the identified dates.

**Costs include forklift/crane plus driver, all power, licenses, permits, hydro connectivity, fuel, barriers etc.

***Based on the average overall cost per hour of officer £15.00 per hour nightly from 10pm – 10am, 7 days a week, total of 42 nights

Temporary Stage in Union Terrace Gardens

Temporary Staging	£2,000
PA System/Licences/Support Services	£1,000
Total	£3,000

Costs are approximate and will differ depending on preferred period of hire. Our costs are based on hire from 25 November 2013 – 5 January 2014.

These costs do not include staffing and security charges.

Programme of Entertainment in Union Terrace Gardens

Entertainment*	£8,000
Stage/Programme Manager	£1,500
Security	£1,000
Event equipment ie seating	£ 500
Equipment Storage on site	£1,000
Total	£12,000

*Based on 4 festive weekends @ £2,000 per weekend with 6 slots per day, 45mins per performance.

Santas Grotto

Purchase of Grotto*	£1,200
Support Services**	£2,500
Total	£3,700

Costs are approximate and will differ depending on preferred period of hire. Our costs are based on hire from 25 November 2013 – 5 January 2014.

*Unable to identify a company who would hire a grotto to Aberdeen City Council.

**Costs include transportation, installation and dismantling, power, licences, barriers etc

These costs do not include staffing and security charges.

Christmas Tree in Union Terrace Gardens

Purchase of tree	£750
Transportation	£250
Crane	£400
Tree Squad	£1,000
Barriers	£350
Anti-climb Paint	£250
Total	£3,000

Tree socket and power supply already exist at the site.

Aberdeen's Hogmanay Celebrations

Temporary Traffic Restriction Order (TTRO)	£ 850
Provision and firing of fireworks	£10,000
Music Hall welfare room hire	£ 300
HMT-Hire of firing venue	£ 300
Star Hire Mobile Stage on Union Bridge	£10,000
Building Projection-Countdown Clock	£ 2,500
Steward Service	£15,800
Ambulance & Emergency Staff Cover	£ 2,000
Traffic Management	£12,000
Project Management & Staffing	£ 3,000
Medical Provision	£ 750
Street Clean	£ 500
Advertising & Promotion	£ 2,000
Total	£60,000

The total of all activities identified is £178,820 before additional essential expenditure on securing the infrastructure in and around the Union Terrace Gardens site, marketing and promotion relating to the additional activities to be included in Aberdeen's Winter Festival and staffing costs are confirmed.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Depending on the activities selected by the Council, consideration will need to be given to the current resource available within the City

Events Team to deliver an expanded programme of activities during the festive period.

Where new events are introduced to Aberdeen's Winter Festival, the payment of overtime and/or the appointment of external support staff to assist with programme delivery will need to be costed and agreed within the allocated budget.

Also, the infrastructure around the Union Terrace Gardens site has been the subject of structural reports detailing the instability of the arches under Union Street and the balustrade around the location.

The City Events Team in conjunction with the Structures Team will work together to ensure that the recommendations within the report are upheld and that the safety of the users of the gardens, should activities be introduced into the site during the winter period, remain paramount at all times.

Aberdeen's City Events Team have a reputation for delivering safe and enjoyable events across the city on behalf of the local authority and would always seek to ensure that any proposed activities are undertaken within current outdoor event legislation and with all relevant agencies including GEPU, Police Scotland and medical and welfare organisations.

Where monies are required to secure the site for extended use, committee will need to understand the impact on the available budget and the necessity for the City Events Teams to deliver a safe and accessible festive programme.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

The City Events Team were asked to investigate the following activities for members consideration, in relation to the expansion of Aberdeen's Winter Festival into Union Terrace Gardens:

Developing Festive/Community Content in Festive Light Switch On Parade

Members indicated a desire to see the festive themes in the parade strengthened in the coming years and the wider involvement of local community groups following the successful inclusion of the Lord Provost's Community Stars in 2012.

There are opportunities to broaden the appeal of the parade by introducing new themes, quality street theatre and performers but monies will need to be made available over and above the current budget to cover hire of equipment, transportation, materials and charitable donations to external organisations and community groups.

The popularity of the Festive Light Switch On Parade remains strong with an average attendance of 15,000 lining the parade route to witness this annual occasion.

Ice Rink

Interest in the installation of a real ice rink in Aberdeen during the festive period remains high.

The costs detailed are based on an ice rink 10m by 15m which can accommodate 50 skaters at a time.

Previous installations at Union Terrace Gardens have proved challenging due to the significant temperature differences between street level and the base of the gardens. Similarly, the thermals radiating from the ground saw the rink fracture and melt resulting in a lack of hours when the public could access the facility. Ultimately the decision was taken to remove the rink early due to the ongoing refrigeration issues the site presented.

Changing weather patterns across the traditional festive period in Scotland have also resulted in similar installations in other cities being removed early due to defrosting, which presents safety issues for users of the rink and additional stress on the equipment used to create and regulate the infrastructure.

If an ice rink was to be installed, officers would be asked to investigate the costs associated with insuring the installation against loss of income should it fail to operate at maximum capacity during its operational period. This cost would need to be taken into consideration once it had been determined whether Aberdeen City Council would charge users to access the ice rink.

As with previous festive events in the Union Terrace Gardens, significant marketing would need to be undertaken to raise awareness of the planned events in this location and appropriate signage introduced at street level to aid access to the site.

Temporary Stage and Programme of Entertainment in Union Terrace Gardens

In order to provide a focal point during the festive period for local community groups and musicians, the team have investigated the opportunity to install a raised stage structure at the site that could be booked for use during weekends to enhance Aberdeen's Winter Festival.

Groups using the facility would be provided with a platform to showcase their work and could stage impromptu performances that

would seek to promote the diverse range of cultural entertainment that exists in Aberdeen City and Shire.

Consideration needs to be given to the impact of the weather at this time of the year, so the facility may not be accessible in high winds or during wet weather in line with good health and safety practice.

Similarly, as with all temporary structures Aberdeen City Council as the site manager and event organisers would have a duty of care under the terms of our public liability insurance to manage any raised structure to ensure the users safety at all times.

As with previous installations of this type, it is resource intensive and needs to be managed by an experienced stage/programme manager to ensure that the resource is maximised demonstrating best value for the monies invested.

Santas Grotto

To date the City Events Team has been unable to identify a suitable location within the city that would accommodate an installation of this type that is easily accessible and compliments the existing activities elsewhere in the city centre. It has been suggested that further consideration be given to Union Terrace Gardens to see if an appropriate safe space could make this proposal a reality.

The topography of the site would need to be given further consideration and accessibility for children, pushchair users and the elderly, as well as all other users is essential to guarantee the footfall an installation of this type requires to make it commercially viable.

Christmas Tree in Union Terrace Gardens

Several years ago Aberdeen City Council were gifted two Christmas trees for use in the city during the festive period. As a result, it was agreed that an additional tree socket and supporting infrastructure would be installed in Union Terrace Gardens to mirror the regular Christmas tree installation at the Castlegate.

The infrastructure is still in place but requires to be serviced to ensure it is in sound working order and fit for continued use.

What was apparent from the last Christmas tree installation at this site was the size of the tree and subsequent dressing needs to be significant to attract attention ensuring it is not lost at the base of the site as the tree socket location does not have clear sight lines at street level.

Thought also needs to be given to the tree that is gifted on an annual basis from our twin city partner Stavanger and that any activity around

a second tree, compliments that of the Castlegate installation which is a focal point for our Christmas celebrations in conjunction with the Regional Ecumenical Team.

Aberdeen's Hogmanay Celebrations

Aberdeen's Fireworks celebrations have been well received in previous years with 2,500-3,000 people in attendance to witness the turn of the year.

It is proposed that the same event model is employed again on the 31 December 2013.

Previous Hogmanay events have identified that those in attendance come for city centre clubs and events being held locally to the HMT site and is not a driver for large volumes of people to travel into the city centre from home specifically for this event.

Discussions have focused on the enhancement of the fireworks launch at midnight thus encouraging additional people to visit the city centre.

In previous years, Aberdeen has provided a stage for local music groups to perform in the lead up to midnight and it is proposed that a similar installation on Union Bridge would seek to encourage residents of and visitors to the city during the evening to arrive early and enjoy a programme of entertainment on the approach to midnight.

Christmas Markets in Union Terrace Gardens

Following discussions with the City Centre Manager he advises that the proposal to locate the International Market or German style Christmas Markets in Union Terrace Gardens, has been raised a significant number of times in recent years.

The current operator of the International Market, Group Geraud and other potential operators have all explored this opportunity and dismissed it as unworkable.

The market stalls have to be on hard standing as the stalls do not have flooring and a significant number trade in food and are at least three metres deep. To comply with safety legislation there is a requirement for least a further five metres of hard standing at the front of the stall for the public to access the produce and products. This hard standing also has to accommodate the vehicles during the installation and dismantling of the stalls.

The gardens hard standing area is a narrow circular road and is at best four metres wide.

The possibility of using the arches has also been explored and declared unsuitable as the arches are structurally unsound, plagued by water ingress, have no ventilation and have no suitable vehicle access to that level.

Pedestrian access is unsuitable for the markets as attendees also include the less able bodied and elderly, most of whom would be excluded from attending an event of this type in the gardens during the winter period.

Infrastructure Issues in and around Union Terrace Gardens

As with all events delivered by the City Events Team in Aberdeen, significant consideration is given to a number of key issues before determining whether a site is suitable for use.

In relation to Union Terrace Gardens, investigations have centred on the topography of the site to ensure that the infrastructure required to deliver any of the proposed activities can be safely delivered to and installed in the site, that where possible level and/or hard standing space is available to provide a sound installation platform and that ingress and egress for contractors, emergency services, participants and the general public are not compromised in any way.

In relation to the activities proposed, unfortunately not all of them can be accommodated in the space available following consideration of crowd flow models, emergency corridors and the existing infrastructure that we would need to be accessed including the electrical supplies, tree socket and hard standing.

As detailed earlier in the report, the infrastructure in and around the site is not as sound as it could be due to a lack of investment over the years. Other sites in the city have been modernised and developed to accommodate the needs of today's event organisers, where this space has not benefitted from such upgrading.

As a result, the maintenance of safe ingress and egress to the site, the unstable balustrade and concerns around the load bearing abilities of the arches in the site under Union Street all have to be taken into consideration when installing events in the site and encouraging large amounts of people to attend.

Safety and security across the site during use as an events venue will be key to making this programme a success and taking into consideration the short daylight hours during the winter period and the changing climate at that time of year, monies will need to be invested in regular snow and ice clearing on the footways and around the gardens along with appropriate lighting to ensure safe movement in and around the site at all times.

Also, there will be a need to invest in security to protect any infrastructure that is installed, as there have been acts of vandalism and anti-social behavior at other winter festival activities in previous years. This will directly relate to the hours of operation that are agreed to maximise the accessibility and benefit of any additional activities introduced.

Event appropriate lighting across this site is essential again to support the safe delivery of activities and to enhance the security of those working in and visiting the gardens during this time.

This and other locations in Aberdeen are currently subject to a separate discussion being undertaken with the Infrastructure Services Team around city lighting.

Similarly, colleagues in Education, Culture and Sport are investigating the opportunities around an outdoor lighting programme that would support the City of Culture Illuminate the North theme and enhance the shoulder months of Aberdeen's Winter Festival in February-March 2014.

Finally, it is recommended that monies within this budget be allocated to enhance the attractiveness of the site during the winter period as access to the site can be unwelcoming and directional signage at street level would aid people's awareness of activities in the gardens.

This is not to the detriment of the safety of the site and we would not allow people to view the activities in the garden from street level thus putting undue loading on the balustrade but encourage them to come into the site to experience the event for themselves.

Working in conjunction with other city organisations, including VistAberdeen, Aberdeen BID, ACSHA, Event Scotland and VisitScotland, the City Events Team would seek to maximise awareness of Aberdeen's programme of events, look for opportunities for connectivity and enhancement with existing festive activities across Aberdeen City and Shire and to promote Aberdeen's Winter Festival at a local, national and international level to residents of and visitors to Aberdeen.

6. IMPACT

Corporate

Aberdeen – the Smarter City

- We will promote Aberdeen as a great place to live, bring up a family, do business and visit.
- We will ensure that Union Street regains its position as the heart of the city and move cultural activity

centre-stage through re-invigorated cultural leadership.

Smarter Living (Quality of Life)

- 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 diverse cultural events for the whole community and beyond.

Smarter Economy (Competitiveness)

- We will work with partners to promote the city as a place to invest, live, work and export from.

Community Plan

- Work with other organisations, agencies and groups, including Visit Scotland and Visit Aberdeen, to encourage tourism and the provision of facilities for tourists.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers have been supplied in support of this report.

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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