

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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COMMITTEE	Finance Policy & Resources
DATE	19 April 2016
DIRECTOR	Angela Scott, Chief Executive
TITLE OF REPORT	Christmas Village & Winter Festival 2016
REPORT NUMBER	OCE/16/007
CHECKLIST COMPLETED	Yes

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide members with feedback following the delivery of the Christmas Village on Union Terrace from 26<sup>th</sup> November 2015 – 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2016 and information on the proposed events for the Winter Festival in 2016.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee:

- I. Notes the feedback from the Christmas Village 2015;
- II. Approves financial support of £132,750 to Aberdeen Inspired for the Christmas Village 2016 on Union Terrace, subject to a Service Provision Agreement to be entered into between Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeen Inspired;
- III. To note the in-kind costs to the relevant Services as set out in paragraph 3 below and to approve the in kind service support of £55,000 to cover road services, cleansing and environmental services activities for the Christmas Village in 2016;
- IV. Delegates authority to the Head of Legal & Democratic Services to enter into a Service Provision Agreement with Aberdeen Inspired in accordance with the Committee's decision; and
- V. Instructs officers to investigate other activities that could feature as part of the Winter Festival in Aberdeen.

### 3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

£200,000 of Common Good Fund money was approved at the Council meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2016 for Hogmanay and winter festival activities.

The £132,750 for Aberdeen Inspired in support of the Christmas Village 2016 will be allocated from this total, leaving £67,250 to deliver the Hogmanay celebrations.

2015 costs as follows:

ACC cash contribution – £132,750  
ACC in-kind service contribution - £ 52,254.46  
Aberdeen Inspired - £154,077

Due to operational decisions, stewarding costs were increased to ensure the Christmas Village was a safe and welcoming experience in keeping with a family friendly approach. As such there are no operating profits from which to make a charitable donation.

As stated in the FP&R committee report of 15<sup>th</sup> September 2015, in-kind service costs of £52,254.46 associated with the delivery of the Christmas Village were as follows:

### **Road Services**

Costs for the roads staff, materials, VMS signage, signage and plant required as follows:

£34K - Maintenance team (Tullos) – including Lighting  
£4K – Structures Team  
£4K – Road Safety & Traffic Management team  
£3K – ITS Team (Spring Garden)  
£1K – Roadworks Co-ordination

Total - £46K

### **Environmental Services**

Costs for the roads staff, materials, VMS signage, signage and plant required as follows:

£20K – Landscaping of HMT pocket park  
£1857.84 – Street cleansing and waste management  
£6078.06 – Installation, removal and cleaning of Intrude rabbits  
£176.40 – Sandbags

Total - £6254.46 following recharge of £21,857.84 to Aberdeen Inspired

The Council's principal contribution is matched by funding from Aberdeen Inspired and external sponsorship will be sought for the event this year.

Ongoing public sector funding and service support is critical to the success of the Christmas Village going forward, and securing funding for future years is essential for the growth and development of the Christmas Village and the wider Winter Festival in Aberdeen.

If in kind service support is not available from Aberdeen City Council, this will place an additional burden on the existing Christmas Village budget and delivery of this quality, family friendly event would be very difficult for Aberdeen Inspired. Decisions would need to be made on the cost and inclusion of individual elements of the village which may impact on the overall visitor experience.

Aberdeen City Council will work with its partners to ensure that best value is achieved where public monies are used.

City Centre Masterplan: Following the recent appointment of the City Centre Director, it is crucial that there is early engagement with all relevant services within Aberdeen City Council and external stakeholders. This will ensure that the city's infrastructure supports a year round offer of high quality innovative events that reflect the culture and heritage of Aberdeen while generating economic, physical and social benefits for the city, its residents and visitors. All of these aims are outlined in the Aberdeen 365 theme in the City Centre Masterplan.

Also included in the City Centre Masterplan is the connectivity of public places in the city and their use as event spaces in the future. The City Events team continue to encourage the use of spaces including the Castlegate and Marischal College Quad but this needs to be considered in the wider context of the plan and how people interact with the city centre environment.

## 5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

This report outlines the feedback from the Christmas Village in 2015 and details potential events that contribute to the common good of the city, are inclusive, maintain and develop the city's continued civic pride and showcase Aberdeen's ability to attract and host major cultural and sporting events.

Following a debrief meeting on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2016 and presentation of the event illustrating visitor footfall in excess of 500,000 visits, those in attendance agreed that the Christmas Village proved a popular addition to the Winter Festival programme but consideration should be given to the following points in determining the future direction of this event:

- Early confirmation of Aberdeen City Council's ongoing support for the Christmas Village in partnership with Aberdeen Inspired;
- Agreement on the preferred location for the event should it continue, and the opportunities to activate other areas in the city during the festive season with additional Christmas activities;
- Expansion of the ice rink, the quantity of market stalls and quality of product on offer;

- Maintain the existing template but change one key element each year to drive customer interest/loyalty;
- Earlier targeted promotion of Aberdeen as a festive destination location and create packages to influence travelers.

Appendix One of this report is the minute of the Christmas Village debrief on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

Appendix Two details the analysis of the research undertaken by Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce as commissioned by Aberdeen Inspired.

Winter Festival 2016: The following options have been provided for members consideration when determining their support for the activities in the Winter Festival 2016 programme.

Christmas tree: The current location means the tree is isolated from other winter activities. The level of decoration on the tree was low in comparison to the trees placed in the Winter Village, this is relative to the different size of the trees and historic acts of vandalism that saw the tree damaged and decorations removed without permission.

Consideration should be given to increasing the decoration on the tree and the location for the Christmas tree in the future, including the St Nicholas Street Gold Zone, so it is more prominent and better connected to events that are happening elsewhere in the city centre. Additional activities could also be added to the existing Castlegate site including a Santa's grotto or regular performances rather than a switch on event. This would need to be discussed with our twin city Stavanger who donate the tree and the Regional Ecumenical Team who currently support the switch of the Christmas tree.

Christmas Lights Switch On: Officers could consider if a parade is the best way to turn on the Christmas Lights. Consideration could be given to multiple locations on Union Street delivering alternative switch on activities over the period of an hour.

If a parade remains the favoured approach the switch on parade and reindeer parade be combined to enhance the experience.

Similarly, officers could consider if the Christmas lights switch on and Christmas tree switch on be combined into a single occasion.

Nativity Scene: Officers could explore whether this event is better organised by the local churches and not Aberdeen City Council.

Hogmanay: This year's event suffered in terms of attendance due to the earlier start time, the Winter Village being in place and people being dispersed across the city centre. The level of attendance and popularity of the performances on stage did not draw the crowds in earlier or sustain attendance throughout the night, with the majority of the 5,000+ crowd congregating from 11.30pm onwards for the always popular fireworks display.

That said there were many thousands viewing the fireworks from Union Street.

For this to be a successful event and attract an increased crowd consideration needs to be given to having a known headline act performing. The budget for this event would need to be reviewed and increased or alternatively the same format followed but the stage could be relocated as follows:

- Union Street – Good space that people congregate in naturally to watch the existing fireworks display. Build schedule for infrastructure would need to be reviewed to minimise disruption for businesses during the day on Hogmanay.
- Broad Street/Marischal College – This venue would limit the attendance to the event. Would be a good intimate venue with potential to fire fireworks from the car park at the rear of Marischal College;
- Union Terrace – This venue works well if there is no headline act involved as it only accommodates a smaller stage and the footprint is narrow.
- Castlegate – This could accommodate a bigger stage without having to close roads until the day of the event and has been used in previous years. Limited scope for fireworks but could consider the car park at Marischal College (cube).
- Schoolhill – This site worked well for the scale of the stage, performers and was able to cope with a bigger crowd as we approached midnight . If a similar scale of event is chosen for 2016 then this site could work well with a Winter Village attraction on Union Terrace.

New festive events to consider:

- RedBull crushed ice race – This event has been held in Belfast previously. Possible courses could be Marischal College to UTG, Hazlehead Park games field and football pitches, Queens links Golf course, Beachball room.
- Ice Sculptures - Create an ice sculptures village in Marischal quad within a purpose built unit where the temperature can be managed. See [www.theicebox.com](http://www.theicebox.com)
- Toboggan run - Have a sledge route in Union Terrace Gardens from HMT to the bottom grass through the canopy of the park. Supplier to be identified and bespoke course designed.
- Ice slide – Introduce an ice slide in Union Terrace Gardens that goes from the slip road down over the space of the council crest to ground level. There is a company that does this, either using their design or by creating a bespoke slide. See ice slide Liverpool 2014/2015 or acorn-events.
- Festive maze - Have this in Union Terrace Gardens similar to Edinburgh with the maze made from artificial box hedges at waist height and have artificial Christmas trees strategically placed within the maze. The maze could be decorated to enhance the Christmas offer with fairy lights, baubles and ribbons.
- Santa's grotto and elf workshop - This could be a standalone unit with a workshop within or attached to the grotto or linked with

another festive activity such as ice skating or the ice slide. Could be a sponsorship link up with a local cabin maker to use their cabins and dressing.

- Outdoor film screenings - Use Marischal Quad and project onto Mitchell Hall. Have small festive food and drink stalls within quad.
- Christmas market with Christmas tree on St. Nicholas street. A Christmas tree on upper deck of the St Nicholas Centre with stalls down the side of Marks and Spencer to telephone phone box. This could also be considered for The Green.
- St Nicholas Street Gold Zone with tree in the circle at Clydesdale bank with stalls around it and stalls at the side of Marks and Spencer.
- Roller disco as an alternative Christmas activity within a marquee. Could be UTG, Pocket park HMT, Castlegate, Marischal College. The Green could also be made into a retro zone with activities such as roller rink.
- Build on existing Belmont Street market and connectivity to other city locations during the festive period.
- Festive light show using some of the techniques/installations from SECTRA.
- Illuminated and interactive public art that would brighten the festive period.

## 6. IMPACT

Improving Customer Experience – Supporting and delivering a diverse programme of city events is expected to improve the experience of customers (Aberdeen's citizens, businesses and visitors) by:

- Raising awareness locally, nationally and internationally of the festivals and events held in Aberdeen
- Better positioning of Aberdeen as a city destination for those looking for new and unique event experiences
- Providing city infrastructure that attracts and supports external event organisers
- Maintaining and building on the profile of Aberdeen as a great place, to live, study, work, invest and visit. This will also help promote and enhance the long-term economic prosperity of the North East of Scotland by attracting more business and leisure tourism to the area.

**Improving Staff Experience** – Delivering the Christmas Village and wider Winter Festival provides the staff involved with valuable experience of dealing with a wide range of internal (Elected Members, senior officers) and external (businesses, contractors, suppliers etc) customers from diverse sectors including creative, cultural and event industries.

Staff within Aberdeen City Council from the Council's Promotions and Communication Service will work closely with colleagues Culture services, Transportation and Environmental services to improve the city's tourism performance and make it an even more attractive city to visit.

**Improving our use of Resources** – By working in partnership with internal and external event partners, of which Aberdeen City Council will take a lead role, the Council is able to share the workload and take lead or supporting roles where appropriate, without compromising the level of service delivered to the customer – the Aberdeen’s residents and visitors to the city.

This will also help Aberdeen City Council understand the needs of destination development and marketing to help support tourism growth, and delivery of the tourism objectives in the City Centre Masterplan and the Regional Economic Strategy.

Corporate: The contents of the report relate directly to delivering the quality of life aspects of the Administration’s **Smarter Aberdeen** vision as follows –

*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.

Public – Neither an Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment nor a Privacy Impact Assessment is required for this report. There may be some public/media interest in the parts of the city events programme that involve participation by Elected members and/or officers.

## 7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Aberdeen's programme of festivals city events programme is key to the destination promotion that Aberdeen City Council, Visit Aberdeen, Aberdeen Inspired and Visit Scotland Aberdeen City and Shire currently undertake.

Should this diverse and engaging programme not continue, then Aberdeen could potentially cease to be an attractive destination for visitors and local residents with economic spend being distributed elsewhere in Scotland and event organisers considering alternative delivery locations.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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