

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Finance Policy & Resources
DATE	7 June 2016
DIRECTOR	Angela Scott, Chief Executive
TITLE OF REPORT	Christmas Village & Winter Festival 2016
REPORT NUMBER	OCE/16/023
CHECKLIST COMPLETED	03/06/2016

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide members with details on the Christmas Village proposed for Union Terrace and information on additional activities programme for the Winter Festival in 2016.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee:

- I. Approves financial support of £150,000 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;
- II. 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;
- III. 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;
- IV. To enter into a three year relationship with Aberdeen Inspired to grow and develop a Christmas Village in future years;
- V. Approves additional financial support of £25,000 to support the delivery of Aberdeen's annual Hogmanay celebrations.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

The £150,000 for Aberdeen Inspired in support of the Christmas Village 2016 will be allocated from this total, leaving £50,000 to deliver the Hogmanay celebrations.

Additional £25,000 is required to support the safe and successful delivery of Aberdeen's Hogmanay celebrations. The cost to deliver this event in 2015 was £78,000.

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

Christmas Village 2015

Feedback on the Christmas Village in 2015 was supplied for committee consideration on the 19 April 2016 along with details of potential additional activities that could 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.

The key points to note from the feedback were:

- 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.

Additional activities

FP&R committee on 19 April 2016 agreed to establish a winter festival working group to consider existing and proposed activities during the festive season. The working group met on the 3 May and subsequently the City Events team has been working with members to explore a number of opportunities linked to the ambitions of the CCMP.

The activation of a number of existing public spaces is being considered including The Green, St Nicholas Square and the upper deck of the St Nicholas Centre. Discussions have been held with potential suppliers who could support the delivery of small, quality led clusters of wooden chalets offering niche products not readily available anywhere else in the city.

The creation of zones is also an option and consideration is being given to establish a food zone in St Nicholas Street combining engaging cookery demonstrations supported by local culinary professionals with chalets selling local, high quality food and drink. Similarly the upper deck of the St Nicholas centre could accommodate a well organised craft market selling local products from crafters in the region.

Three key weekends fall within this period and it is proposed that the space on St Nicholas Street changes each Sat – Sun to cover food & drink, craft and carving and a Victorian themed space selling traditional chestnuts, traditional music and attractive décor.

An approach has been made to the Bon Accord & St Nicholas Centre to explore the opportunities associated with the vacant retail units on the upper deck that could facilitate easier access to the upper levels of the St Nicholas Centre. A meeting will be arranged to explore this proposal and to better understand the current conditions of the space.

Belmont Street has also been the subject of discussion regards the existing farmers market and the opportunity to enhance this event during winter. Traders are being consulted on appetite to support a more festive offer and availability to trade during longer peak periods. Businesses who were supportive of the café culture could be encouraged to develop the space outside their business so they are connected with the external traders. This could also increase the offer of public food and drink and sales of local products from retailers.

Additional entertainment could be strategically placed here and throughout the city centre to increase the festive atmosphere.

These activities would be operational between the 3 – 24 December and could see craft displays, participatory workshops and alternative specialists creating an engaging number of activities that would encourage people to come into the city centre earlier, stay longer and spent additional monies which supports the local economy.

All of these market activities would need to be coordinated by an experienced market operator who could ensure that the stalls were properly staffed and trading to the standards/times agreed with the successful chalet occupants.

The City Events team is currently identifying suppliers of wooden chalets, determining availability and costs as well as providers of mobile catering units suitable for public demonstration activity. Again costs are being sought along with availability to support our winter festival ambitions.

Dressing of the city at this key season in the retail calendar is crucial and if the city wishes to enhance its reputation as a festive retail destination then consideration has to be given to enhancing the existing spaces previously identified, As a result discussions are ongoing regarding the inclusion of additional Christmas trees at St Nicholas Street and The Green with specifications to be supplied to Environmental Services for consideration.

These trees will not impact on the tree gifted annually to the City of Aberdeen from our twin city in Stavanger which is located at the Castlegate and celebrated at a switch on ceremony attended by representatives from the Mayor of Stavanger's office.

In addition, feature lighting is key to citizens and visitors way finding through the city during the festive period. Aberdeen City Council's existing lighting supplier has been contacted to consider lighting options in a number of city

centre locations that would enhance the environs and encourage people to move through the city using alternative routes.

By lighting previously unused spaces, residents and visitors can experience new locations with high quality, local seasonal offers of food and crafts not available anywhere else in Aberdeen.

This activity is designed to complement the offer of existing retailers in the city and will not compromise normal trading during this busy period. Businesses will be encouraged this additional city centre activity to enhance the visitor and shopper experience.

As well as a number of city spaces, the opportunity to include activities in Union Terrace Gardens are being progressed. Contact has been made with Underbelly who currently own the Xmas tree maze concept seen in Edinburgh each year with them visiting Aberdeen in the coming days to view the proposed location for an installation of this type. The same maze in Edinburgh attracted 39k visitors in 2015 and would operate in Aberdeen using a similar model.

Also under discussion is the inclusion of a purpose made Santa's grotto built into the existing arches in the gardens. Secure space would be created to house a decorated area that would see children visiting Santa at various times during the festive period.

The proposed lighting scheme for Union Terrace Gardens would not only ensure this was a safe space but atmospheric lighting could enhance the experience of this location, as was the positive response during SPECTRA.

Approaches have also been made to crafters in the region who could potentially create a wooden sculpture trail with a festive theme that children and parents could engage with.

Discussions have also considered the role that Belmont Street could play in developing a more connected Xmas offer with this location focusing on the cultural aspect of the offer where the pubs and clubs can participate in a three programme of entertainment geared towards an older audience accessing the city at alternative times and supporting the nighttime economy.

A decision was also taken to approach Ice Box the ice slide provider to understand their product, availability and cost before determining whether a suitable location can be identified in Aberdeen. A proposal has since been received and a request to clarify some of the details returned to Ice Box.

A number of these opportunities are currently being scoped by providers with costs to be obtained asap. Should committee decide to proceed to support these projects It is proposed that actioning this element be delegated to the Head of Communications and Promotion in consultation with the Head of Legal as required.

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 – No Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment or 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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