

Agenda Item	8
Report No	CIA/5/19

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: City of Inverness Area Committee

Date: 21 February 2019

Report Title: Town House Tours

Report By: Inverness City Area Manager and Principal Cultural Manager
High Life Highland

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report informs Members about the operation and performance to date of guided tours of the Town House for members of the public, which began in June 2018. The report further outlines how it is planned to develop the tours this summer.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note and comment on the content of the report**

3. Background

- 3.1 The Highland Council (THC) was keen to create public access to the newly restored historic and very beautiful Town House; High Life Highland (HLH) was invited to develop and thereafter run guided Town House tours. These began in June 2018.

4. Town House Tours

- 4.1 Practical arrangements for the tours were developed in discussion with the Civic & Facilities Team Leader. Two tours, bookable online or at Inverness Museum & Art Gallery (IMAG), were offered each Thursday afternoon for approximately an hour's duration. Staff from Inverness Castle Viewpoint (ICV) and IMAG deliver the tour. A maximum of twelve places are available on each tour and the charges are £7 for adults and £4 for children.
- 4.2 It was originally intended to run tours until the end of September and then cease until Easter. However, given the popularity of the tours and THC's keenness to continue to offer public access to the Town House throughout the autumn and winter, THC asked HLH to continue running the tours. HLH happily agreed to do that, with the proviso that the arrangement could be reviewed if the tours were failing to break even financially.
- 4.3 Reviews and feedback on the tours have been entirely positive, with visitors finding them engaging, informative and entertaining. Visitors also find the interior stunning and are delighted to have the opportunity to be shown round. To the end of December 166 people have joined 31 tours. Bookings taken online to date have all been from the UK, and we estimate that approximately two thirds of these are local residents (identified by phone numbers, email addresses, local knowledge and engagement with the guiding staff). Financially, the Inverness Town House Tours has made a small profit of £65.78.
- 4.4 The public tours have not caused any disruption to business in what is a busy working civic building and the City centre has a third, new, uniquely "Inverness" visitor attraction. Alongside IMAG & ICV, something of an accessible "cultural triangle" has been created around Castle Wynd. This acts as something of a precursor for the planned future major development of the Castle and its environs

5. Going forward

- 5.1 As Town House tours have proved logistically and financially viable, feedback from visitors has been so positive and THC is keen to increase public access, HLH will trial increasing the number of tours each week, with an additional two tours offered on Tuesdays from 7th May 2019. If there proves to be sufficient demand to allow a programme of four tours a week to at least break, then this would become the permanent operating model during the summer months. In addition, it has been possible to arrange private tours (fully chargeable) for groups on demand depending on access to the civic floor and the availability of staff. Going forward, there is no reason why private tours (fully chargeable) for tour operators/specific groups/agencies could not be arranged provided the civic floor and staff are available.
- 5.2 The Tours will be promoted through HLH's website and social media, Inverness Museum & Art Gallery and the Castle Viewpoint and at Visit Scotland Expo 2019 in April (Scotland's annual, flagship travel trade showcase event). An evening reception/FAM visit is to be planned in the spring of 2019 inviting members of Inverness Bid and Visit Inverness Loch Ness to a tour of Inverness Town House and to

also visit Inverness Castle Viewpoint.

6. Implications

6.1 Resource

No Council staff will be involved other than in providing the usual duties in facilitating the use of the town House during normal working hours. High Life Highland will commit the necessary staff to operate the Tours based on demand and close watch will be kept on attendances to ensure that every effort is made to run tours as efficiently as possible. Whilst there is no financial risk to the Council, there no realistic likelihood of significant profits either.

6.2 Legal

The operation of the Tours will be the responsibility of High Life Highland and will be covered by the agreements in place between the Council and High Life Highland.

6.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)

Every reasonable effort will be made to accommodate as many people as possible on each Tour. This will include people with a disability.

6.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever

None

6.5 Risk

Any risk to damage will be covered by either High Life Highlands or the Councils Policies of Insurance subject to the usual terms and conditions

6.6 Gaelic

All appropriate Policies in respect of Gaelic Language will be adhered to.

Designation: Inverness City Area Manager and Principal Cultural Manager High Life Highland

Date: 5 February 2019

Author: David Haas and Judi Menabney

Background Papers: