

The Highland Council

Adult and Children's Services Committee

Minutes of Meeting of the **Culture and Leisure Contracts Scrutiny Sub-Committee** held in Committee Room 2, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 2 May 2013 10.00 am.

Present:

Mr B Fernie	Mr G MacKenzie (Substitute)
Mr E Hunter (Video Conferencing)	Mr W Mackay (Video Conferencing)
Mrs L MacDonald	Ms J Slater

In attendance:

Mr H Fraser, Director of Education, Culture and Sport
Mr J Macdonald, Learning and Leisure Client Manager, Education, Culture and Sport Service
Mrs J Graham, External Funding Manager, Education, Culture and Sport Service
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Office
Miss M Murray, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

Also in attendance:

Mr C Marr, Director of Eden Court

Mrs L MacDonald in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs I Campbell, Mr A Christie, Mr B Gormley, Mrs B McAllister, Mr M Rattray and Mr G Ross.

2. Declarations of Interest

The Sub-Committee **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Item 5 – Mr G MacKenzie and Mrs J Slater (Non Financial)

3. Presentation: Eden Court

Mr Colin Marr, Director of Eden Court, undertook a presentation during which it was emphasised that Eden Court was the main venue for performing arts in the Highlands. In addition, it supported and ran a number of community and arts educational activities, both in Inverness and across the Highland area.

In his presentation, he explained that Highland Council owned the building and that Eden Court leased it, there being approximately 30 years of the lease remaining. A major refurbishment and expansion had taken place 5½ years ago costing £23 million,

£4 million of which came from Highland Council and the Inverness Common Good Fund, and a description of the works was provided. The redevelopment had won a number of awards for architecture but the theatre was particularly proud of the conservation award it had won for the “chimneys” which provided a system of natural ventilation where air was taken through all parts of the new building without using any electricity, saving 30,000 tonnes of carbon per year. Attendance figures were also provided and it was highlighted that, within 3 years of the refurbishment, 70% of the Highland population had attended a ticketed event demonstrating that Eden Court was the best attended theatre in the UK per capita. As a result, Eden Court Theatre had made a considerable impact on the local economy and an example of this was the recent Scottish Labour Party conference which had attracted 900 delegates to Inverness over 4 days.

Turning to the theatre’s art and education aspect, Eden Court was, in addition to being the largest education department within an arts centre in the UK, the only theatre in Scotland to provide SQA qualifications for young people resulting in an increase in numbers of young people continuing to study the arts in organisations such as the Royal Conservatoire. There was good distribution of Eden Court’s arts and education work throughout the Highlands and reference was made to the Bodycurrents project which, although now ended, had inspired the creation of a dance development strategy with the aim to increase dance opportunities and participation and bring long term benefits to communities and individuals.

In relation to the funding of Eden Court, Mr Marr referred Members to the tabled packs which, apart from a selection of brochures for the theatre, contained a response to recent funding cuts. The current level of funding provided by the Council is £485k revenue support; £136k for expressive arts programme; £24k to deliver SQA Dance and Drama. The pressure that local government budgets were under was appreciated and a request made that, in determining future funding levels, discussion take place with the Theatre as to how this could be managed.

Looking to the future, Eden Court was now on a much more sure footing. Issues had arisen after the re-opening but these had now been resolved and the Board of Governors was aware of the need to grow its commercial revenue. The Theatre had successfully attracted such prestigious performances as The National Theatre of Scotland’s acclaimed play “The Bacchae” and had succeeded in giving creative opportunities to all in the Highlands. It would, however, welcome, being part of the health and wellbeing agenda as it firmly believed it had an important part to play. Reference was made to a project which had taken place in Elgin where, arising out of Proceeds of Crime funding, a group of young people involved in vandalism had been encouraged to make a horror film. Through the process many of these young people’s lives had been turned around and 2 of them were now at college studying film making.

In discussion, Members welcomed the exciting work which was taking place. Not only did its outreach art and education projects build confidence but there was a knock-on ripple effect in communities. In response to Homecoming Scotland 2014, it was explained that, although not bidding for funding for any projects, the Theatre would be working closely with partners and was likely to be a venue for a number of major events. A question was also raised as to booking arrangements and Members were advised that generally artistes preferred the main body of the auditorium to be filled first and this also helped to reduce stewarding costs. In addition, there was corporate sponsorship of the boxes so, in some instances, these seats were released for sale

later than the others. However, every effort was made to accommodate specific requests whenever possible.

Thereafter, the Sub Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

4. Homecoming Scotland

There had been circulated Report No CLCS/04/13 dated 24 April 2013 by the Director of Education, Culture and Sport which outlined the background to Homecoming Scotland 2014, listed the Highland projects and events receiving assistance and highlighted other proposals to celebrate and market activities which would take place across the Highlands this year.

In summary of the report, the need for Highland to be represented well in the programme of events was emphasised. The structure of the Homecoming programme for 2014 was being developed along three strands, namely Signature, Funded and Partner Events and examples of the various projects were provided. In addition, a series of sub themes had been developed to encourage activity throughout Scotland covering topics such as Ancestry, Food and Drink, Active (sports and activities), Creative (arts and music) and Natural (environment). The Scottish Government was also encouraging Local Authorities to adopt a common approach to events and to produce an events guide which could be used in national and regional marketing campaigns and, to facilitate this, the Scottish Government had produced a template. Discussions were taking place with the Council's partners in the tourism industry to ensure as many community events as possible could be included. Although there was a lot of work still to do it was an exciting initiative with considerable potential.

In response to questions it was explained that some of the World events would bring competitors from as far away as the USA and Australia while some of the other events might attract competitors closer to home. In relation to the marketing of events it was hoped to have both a web based programme, to allow the programme to be updated regularly, and a printed version which would be published at reasonably regular intervals.

The Sub-Committee **NOTED** the main elements of the Homecoming 2014 programme in Highland and that a further report would be submitted to a future meeting.

5. Supported Organisations – Submission of Accounts

Declarations of Interest:

Mr G MacKenzie declared a non financial interest in this Item as a Director of the Strathpeffer Pavilion Association and a Board Member of the Highland Football Academy but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

Mrs J Slater declared a non financial interest in this Item as a Director of Blas but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No CLCS/05/13 dated 24 April 2013 by the Director of Education, Culture and Sport which presented information on the financial activities of four organisations in receipt of funding from the Council.

Speaking to the report, the Learning and Leisure Client Manager informed Members that it was the intention in future to present additional information to the Sub Committee regarding the running of these organisations, the activities they were currently involved in, its role in the local community, the number of users and how this fitted in to the Programme of The Highland Council 2012 – 2017.

In studying the financial information presented, comment was made that the organisations' balances appeared to be reducing and it was recognised that the reducing public subsidy could cause difficulties for such organisations. However, the position was closely monitored and future reports would also contain information as to the level of business each organisation had.

The Sub-Committee **NOTED** the Financial Statements submitted by the organisations listed.

6. Future Agenda Items

There had been circulated Report No CLCS/06/13 dated 24 April 2013 by the Director of Education, Culture and Sport which outlined topics proposed for future meetings of the Sub-Committee and invited Members to suggest other items they would like to consider.

As Members were aware, the Sub Committee met 4 times a year and 2 of these meetings focused on High Life Highland (HLH). HLH was scheduled to attend the Sub Committee's next meeting and, in addition to the Service Delivery Contract, the Library Service would also be discussed, with the remaining eight areas of work then being considered at future meetings. At other meetings organisations such as Inverness Leisure would be considered and it was also intended to include voluntary or community organisations supported by the Council through Service Level Agreements in areas such as youth work, sport or the arts so as to provide Members with information on the wide spectrum of activity taking place in the Highlands. In addition, other issues such as Village Halls and grant schemes could be explored, together with any other topic Members considered appropriate.

In discussion, Members emphasised the need for liaison between Highland Council and HLH. Instances had occurred where Local Members had been unaware of issues prior to them being reported in the Press. In response, it was confirmed that HLH would be advised of this and hopefully this could be addressed when they next attended the Sub Committee in August 2013 but, in the interim, the Chief Executive of HLH was attending Ward Business Meetings and this would present Members with an opportunity to raise this matter directly.

Thereafter, the Sub-Committee **NOTED** the items proposed for future Sub-Committee agendas.

The meeting concluded at 10.45 am.