

Agenda Item	19
Report No	CIA/30/18

## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** City of Inverness Area Committee

**Date:** 31 May 2018

**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 details the implementation of a programme of Town House Tours which will be open to all members of the Public. The Tours will commence in June and will be facilitated by High Life Highland.
- 1.2 Tours will be arranged so as not to interfere with the operation of the Town House as an administrative base for the Council.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
  - i. Agree to the Programme of Town House Tours commencing for 2018 as detailed in the report and **Appendix1** attached
  - ii. Note the collaborative work done in preparation between the Council and High Life Highland
  - iii. Note that the Tours will be promoted through Highlife Highland and that all reasonable opportunity will be used to seek promotion elsewhere and
  - iv. Note that an evaluation report will be provided to the City of Inverness Area Committee in late 2018 or early 2019 with proposals for the 2019 Tourist Season.

### **3. Background**

- 3.1 High Life Highland (HLH), at Highland Council's (THC) request, undertook the development and thereafter the successful running of Inverness Castle Viewpoint. This new attraction has proved extremely popular with locals and visitors alike and has made a valuable contribution to the City centre visitor offering. Work is also underway to redevelop the Castle and environs into a major new cultural attraction, although completion will be several years off. In the interim THC was keen to create visitor access to the historic Town House and asked HLH to consider if and how that might be feasible, balancing considerations about what is a busy, working building, with security needs, and the visitor experience opportunity.
- 3.2 From the outside alone the Town House is acknowledged as the most visually impressive building in the City centre and the lavish interior within is a stunning example of Victorian opulence and swagger. It is regarded by locals and visitors to the City as the jewel in Inverness's architectural crown, particularly since the stunning renovation work was completed this year. However, whilst loved by many, the Town House is accessible to just a tiny minority. Providing guided tours would remedy this missed opportunity and provide a further new visitor attraction in the City centre with real "Wow" factor.

### **4. Tour Proposal**

- 4.1 In order to test out both demand and expectation and operational practicalities, it is proposed to begin offering tours on a fairly modest scale. This approach would afford the opportunity to 'fine tune' tours and, if appropriate, to increase capacity.
- 4.2 Discussion with the Civic & Facilities Team Leader concluded that, considering the working pattern of the building, tours would most easily be accommodated on Thursday afternoons. Two tours will be offered each afternoon, each of approximately an hour's duration. Tuesday's have also been "pencilled in" and, if there is evidence of demand for additional capacity, tours could also be offered then. Initially tours will be offered during the main visitor season, from June until the end of September. Similarly, if there is evidence of demand for additional capacity, this can be reviewed.
- 4.3 The tours will be led by staff from Inverness Castle Viewpoint and Inverness Museum & Art Gallery (IMAG), be bookable online or at IMAG and, initially, offer a maximum of twelve places on each tour (subject to review on evaluation).
- 4.4 Town House tours will be marketed primarily through IMAG's various marketing various platforms, alongside the Museum and the Castle Viewpoint. This will include prominent promotion through social media and leaflets being distributed to Inverness hotels and B&Bs. The forthcoming tours were also promoted (and generated significant interest) at Visit Scotland Expo 2018 in April (Scotland's annual, flagship travel trade showcase event). Additionally, if places remain available on tour days, a swing sign will be temporarily placed outside the Town House, promoting the tour and advising how to book.

4.5 Detail on the actual tour content is appended. As the ground floor of the Town House is not accessible to wheelchair users, the ground floor tour will be filmed and available on an iPad for those customers to view on the first floor.

## **5. Finances**

5.1 The limited capacity of the tours, coupled with the high staff to visitor ratio, mean the tours will never be a “money spinner”. Charges for adults will be £7 and £4 for children. On the same profit share basis that is in place between the Council and HLH for the Castle Viewpoint, even if every tour was fully booked throughout the four months, the Council and HLH would receive just £1k profit each. However, to break even over the four months each tour would need to have, on average, a minimum of just two adults and one child on each, which would appear achievable.

5.2 The primary driver for offering Town House Tours is not commercial in any case; it is to add a third, uniquely “Inverness”, visitor attraction to the City centre. IMAG, the Castle Viewpoint and the Town House would thus create something of a ‘cultural triangle’ around Castle Wynd, which will provide an excellent precursor for the planned future major development of the Castle and its environs.

## **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: 11 May 2018

Authors:: David Haas and Judi Menabney

Background Papers:

Tour Schedule		
<b>Tour Route: Front Door of Townhouse (Mercat Cross) – Lobby – Staircase – – Member’s Lounge - Dignitary Room – Committee Room – Great Hall</b>		
	<b>Location</b>	<b>Top Visual Priorities (TVP)/Must Tells</b>
	Lobby	Welcome and Introduction.
	Outside Main Entrance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mercat Cross &amp; Cullicudden Stone.</li> <li>• “The Dogs”.</li> <li>• Text on building across the street .</li> </ul>
	Lobby	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inverness City Charter.</li> <li>• Beam from Oliver Cromwell’s Fort.</li> </ul>
	Stairwell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Painting of Queen Anne.</li> <li>• Crests on stained glass windows.</li> <li>• Story of the “decorative panel” (alternative side with artist’s impression of a camel and an elephant).</li> <li>• “The Holy Family” painting.</li> </ul>
	Member’s Lounge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• .</li> <li>• (Just outside the Provost’s office is an interesting plaque presented to the City of Inverness from South Africa).</li> <li>• Corridor – Provost’s photographs (note the change of the crest on the Provost’s chain)</li> <li>• Member’s Lounge ( a peek in).</li> </ul>
	Dignitary Rooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A place where receptions/events are held to allow a more intimate setting.</li> <li>• Gifts from other cities/countries/ dignitaries are displayed in this room.</li> </ul>
	Committee Rooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usage (Inverness City Area Committee meetings are still held here – VC to HQ).</li> <li>• “Inverness Formula” – signatures on wall and press cutting.</li> <li>• Press box/gallery.</li> <li>• Flora MacDonald painting.</li> <li>• Charles Edward Stuart painting.</li> <li>• Chandelier (most expensive in building).</li> <li>• Queen Victoria stained glass window.</li> </ul>
	Great Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Portraits of Provosts.</li> <li>• “Horse’s Head”.</li> <li>• Piano.</li> <li>• HMS Inverness Bell.</li> <li>• War Memorials.</li> <li>• Military colours.</li> <li>• Minstrels’ gallery.</li> <li>• Stained glass windows &amp; ceilings.</li> </ul>
<b>Questions</b> <b>***End of Tour***</b> <b>Escort guests to front lobby and exit.</b>		

