

REPORT TO: POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE ON 30 MARCH 2010

SUBJECT: CULLEN, DESKFORD & PORTKNOCKIE HERITAGE GROUP

BY: DIRECTOR OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To invite the Committee to consider a request from the Cullen, Deskford and Portknockie Heritage Group to waive the hire fee for the use of the Memorial Hall in Cullen Town Hall to operate a temporary heritage centre throughout June, July and August 2010.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section 20 of the Council's Administrative Scheme relating to relief from charges.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee considers waiving the hire fee for use of the Memorial Hall within Cullen Town Hall for a three month period June, July and August 2010.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Cullen, Deskford and Portknockie Heritage Group (CDPHG) are currently looking to establish a permanent base from where it can exhibit a permanent heritage display, hold meetings, undertake administrative work and store its growing collection of unique historical records and artifacts.
- 3.2 The Group currently meet in Cullen Community Centre on a monthly basis and have a small display area in the foyer as well as dedicated use of one PC within Cullen library. Larger artefacts are stored in a single garage located behind the Community Centre. The damp conditions are causing the artefacts to deteriorate significantly. The remainder of resources, artefacts etc are stored at members' homes causing problems with insurance, logistics, health and safety, damage and loss.
- 3.3 CDPHG have been actively involved with the community and other organisations by giving talks and presentations and setting up heritage displays for events. The Group have been involved in heritage-based initiatives, most recently participating actively in the Moray Connections initiative and joining the Masons Mark Project of the Aberdeenshire Council. The Group already presents a busy open weekend every summer and last year's Homecoming event, held during a week in June, attracted over 1500 visitors.
- 3.4 CDPHG are looking to enhance and expand the service they provide to the local community and to ex-patriots seeking their origins. The Group believes that the heritage centre will complement the work of Cullen Tourism Initiative who occupy a room, at no charge, within Cullen Town Hall directly opposite the Memorial Hall during the summer months. It is envisaged that the heritage

centre will attract visitors to the area and contribute to tourism income in the local community.

- 3.5 CDPHG see this request to use the memorial hall in Cullen Town Hall as the first step in their plans to secure a permanent heritage centre. The group wishes to use the facility on a trial basis during the summer in 2010 with a view to requesting more permanent use should the trial prove to be a success. The group are clear that they will need to vacate the premises at the end of the three month period and that further application would need to be made for any future use of the facility. CDPHG are aware that there are no guarantees that the facility will be available to them on a permanent basis as the future operation of Cullen Town Hall will form part of a wider review of the use of Council properties by community users.
- 3.6 Attached as **Appendix 1** is a business plan for Cullen, Deskford and Portknockie Heritage Group which sets out in greater detail the need for permanent premises.

4. **SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

(a) **Single Outcome Agreement/Service Improvement Plan**

The proposals contribute to the Single Outcome Agreement of the Community Planning Partnership with the Scottish Government in respect of the 'Outcomes' allocated to the 'Wealthier and Fairer' Group and the stated priorities of the Council's Plan for 2008-2011 in relation to the economy, jobs and tourism. The proposals will contribute to the Council's priorities of economic development and tourism.

(b) **Policy and Legal**

There are currently a number of Council property reviews ongoing, of which Cullen is a part.

(c) **Resources (Financial, Risks, Staffing and Property)**

Financial Implications

The Chief Finance Officer has provided the following advice:

Where use of Council buildings at no charge is being considered, it is recommended that a charge for incidental costs, such as heat and light should be made to the occupants based on an estimate of the costs incurred by the Council. A more significant issue, however, is managing the expectations of local communities. From previous reports to the Council over the past 12 months, Members will be aware that during the next 4 years there will be a dramatic reduction in the level of funding available for public services. The most optimistic position for the Council is that annual costs need to reduce by a further £15M by 2013/14 following the budget reduction of £5M for 2010/11. Since the last update to Council on 11 February, the indications are that the levels of reductions will be more than previously reported and will go on for longer. The Corporate Management Team are working

on a strategy to enable the Council to continue to reduce expenditure accordingly. The content of the strategy will, of necessity, include many items which Members will not wish to reduce, but, given the scale of the problem, ultimately Members will be faced with fewer and fewer options and difficult choices will have to be made. One such area will be accommodation currently available to communities across Moray. A full assessment needs to be made of: the accommodation available, the community use and the costs to the Council. In the meantime, Members are advised to recognise that it is highly unlikely that the Council will be able to continue to maintain and make available all of the accommodation that is currently available. Any decisions to allow new groups to make use of existing accommodation should therefore be on the **strict understanding** that the Council will be reviewing its estate and may require the group to vacate the accommodation permanently at the end of any short term let agreed.

There would be no loss of income associated with this request as CDPHG are prepared to make way for other user groups who would normally hold events during this period.

(d) Consultations

Consultation has been carried out with the senior officers in Educational Services, Libraries and Museums Manager, Aileen Scott, Principal Solicitor, Stuart Beveridge, Senior Estates Surveyor and the Chief Financial Officer who are all in agreement with the terms of the report.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 That the Committee considers the request to waive the hire fee for use of the Memorial Hall in Cullen Town Hall from Cullen, Deskford and Portknockie Heritage Group to operate a temporary heritage centre throughout June, July and August 2010.**

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Background Papers:

Ref: DMD/JR/Reports/Policy and Resources Committee/30 March 2010/Cullen, Deskford and Portknockie Heritage Group