

REPORT TO: POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE ON 22 JUNE 2010

SUBJECT: BUCKIE TOWN HOUSE: BUCKIE AREA FORUM LEASE

BY: DIRECTOR OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To invite the Committee to consider a request from Buckie Area Forum for the use of vacant areas in Buckie Town House.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section (A) 41 of the Council's Administrative Scheme relating to asset management.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that committee consider:

- i Buckie Area Forum's request to lease the hall and room 4 for the provision of a community radio station. That this lease is for a period of 6 months with an option by the Council to extend it for a further 6 months depending on the outcome of the DBS Out of Elgin Office project.;**
- ii If agreed, that Buckie Area Forum meet any additional costs (energy, cleaning, caretaking etc) associated with their occupation of the rooms, including obtaining any necessary permissions.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At the meeting of the Moray Council on 11 February 2010, Council approved savings which included the closure of Buckie Town House for community bookings. This meant that the hall and room 4 have been vacant from May this year.
- 3.2 As a consequence of this, a request has been received from Buckie Area Forum who wish to lease the hall and room 4 for a period of 1 year. The rooms would be used to support community projects, in particular to trial the provision of a community radio station. The projects would be led by Buckie Regeneration Group (a sub group of Buckie Area Forum). It is the groups intention, that should the radio station prove successful, then they would look for a permanent base.
- 3.3 The provision of a community radio station is one of the major objectives for the Buckie Area Forum. A co-ordinator has been appointed to take the project forward and a number of sites have been investigated. Buckie Town House, due to its height, central location and accessible parking, is the preferred location but if it is unavailable, alternative accommodation would be sought.
- 3.4 In order to meet funding deadlines Buckie Regeneration Group have purchased specialist equipment at a cost of £12,000. This is currently

temporarily stored at Buckie Town House. The equipment includes a short wave radio transmitter (similar to a TV aerial). If the Town House is approved as a location this would need to be erected on the roof which would require planning permission.

- 3.5 Buckie Area Forum has indicated that, if offered a lease of the rooms, they would apply for a grant from the Council to defray the rent. The forum would meet any additional costs (energy, cleaning, caretaking etc) arising from their use of the rooms.
- 3.6 Room 4 is also currently informally used by Moray Desktop Publishing for the storage of some items of equipment. Should Buckie Regeneration Group occupy the room, discussions will need to take place as to how this equipment can be accommodated.
- 3.7 In light of the above and the comments made at 4(c) below, it is proposed that Committee approve the request by Buckie Area Forum subject to the following:-
- That any lease is for a period of 6 months with the Council having the option to extend for a further 6 months depending on the outcome of the DBS Out of Elgin Office Project.
 - That the Buckie Area Forum be informed that the outcome of the Council's Out of Elgin Office review will determine the future use of the premises;
 - That Buckie Area Forum meet any additional costs associated with their occupancy of the rooms.
 - That discussions are held with Moray Desktop Publishing to see if their current level of access to room 4 can be accommodated.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Single Outcome Agreement/Service Improvement Plan

The proposals contribute to the Single Outcome Agreement 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

A wide ranging review of Council offices outwith Elgin is currently underway which will consider alternative options, including Town House West for the provision of office accommodation capable of supporting the outcomes of the DBS programme. As a consequence, it is not recommended that any long term agreements are entered into.

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

The Chief Finance Officer has provided the following advice:-

1. 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.

2. 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.

(d) Consultations

Consultation has been carried out with the Libraries and Museums Manager; Asset Management Working Group; Deborah Brands, Principal Accountant; Rhona Gunn, Acting Principal Solicitor; Alan Macbeth, Development Officer and Educational Services SMT whose views, where expressed, have been incorporated within the report.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 That the Committee considers the request from Buckie Area Forum for the use of vacant accommodation within Buckie Town House taking account of the current economic climate and the ongoing DBS Out of Elgin Office project.**

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Background Papers:

Ref: DMD/JR/Reports/P&R Committee/22 June 2010/Buckie Town House:
Buckie Area Forum Lease