

**MEETING OF THE PUBLIC HALLS SUB-COMMITTEE**  
**of the AMENITIES COMMITTEE**

**Held on Monday 2 November 2015**  
**at 5.00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall**

**Present**

Councillor: Cllr Mrs C E Reynolds (Chair)

Councillors:	C Brown	C Holliday
	Mrs B J Churchill	J S King
	D S Enright	C K Woodward

Officers:	Town Clerk	Democratic Services Officer
	Responsible Financial Officer	Bookings Administrator
	Works and Contracts Supervisor	

3 members of the public

**H513 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

**H514 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllrs B J Churchill and C K Woodward declared an interest in agenda items 5 and 6 on the Corn Exchange as they were trustees on the Witney Corn Exchange Trust.

**H515 MINUTES**

a) **RESOLVED:** that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

b) **MATTERS ARISING:**

A member commented that at the last meeting there had been no budget for the Public Halls Sub Committee presented and asked if the Town Clerk had looked into this. The Town Clerk replied that this would be addressed later in the meeting under the agenda item on the Financial Report.

**H516 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Mr James Condon

Mr Condon wished to address members on his proposal for a music event at the Corn Exchange. He had organised such events for ten years at The Palace and had also previously held an event at the Corn Exchange. He wanted to use the venue as a one off and potentially regularly if this was successful.

He was proposing to hold an event on Boxing Day 2015. He had an event plan already. The event would start at 8pm and run through until 2/3am. The Chairman asked if he could e-mail his proposal and accompanying documentation to the Town Clerk.

H517 **CORN EXCHANGE – FIRE RISK ASSESSMENT & COMPLIANCE UPDATE**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Facilities Manager. A member asked if there was a Fire Risk Assessment and the Town Clerk replied that there was but there were some outstanding issues. Meetings had been arranged with the contractors to resolve these. Importantly there was a huge trail of correspondence between the Town Council and the contractors to prove compliance on the part of the Council.

A member queried the handover process and the Town Clerk explained that there had been several "handovers" and some training on the M&E. There was still an outstanding snagging list but there were further meetings arranged to help resolve this. The Chairman said that she was confident that everything would soon be sorted out. The member said that the Town Council should convey that it was not happy with the service provided and the Town Clerk promised to put this across at a forthcoming meeting. The electrical installation would be discussed at a meeting the following Tuesday.

A member commented that he could not see a cost in the report for the proposal to install an entrance mat at the side door. The Town Clerk agreed to obtain one.

Another member felt the Council should not be unduly concerned at the situation with the contractors as it was common to have a 12 month period after practical completion for snagging. The Works and Contracts Supervisor commented that some issues were very important as operational manuals/training had not been given on all items, leaving staff unsure how to operate things such as the heating system.

A member noted the proposal for the mat for the side entrance and expressed concern that this would replace the main entrance. It was explained that this entrance may be used to access the main hall when there were two simultaneous events. The matting was therefore suggested to protect the floor in adverse weather if used as a temporary entrance.

Members discussed the wooden floor and the potential for damage – e.g. from furniture being moved around. Re-sanding regularly was not a preferred option, as this could reduce the lifespan of the floor by 3/5 years. The Town Clerk informed members that the manufacturers of the floor were visiting and advice would be taken from them. The Town Clerk asked members if she could procure any recommended machinery to maintain the floor if it was recommended by the manufacturer. Members agreed to this.

**RECOMMENDED:**

1. that the report be noted;
2. that the update on the Fire Risk Assessment, compliance and snagging works be noted and that feedback on these items from forthcoming meetings be brought back to the next meeting;

3. that the Council's terms of hire and deposit scheme be revisited at the next meeting after advice had been taken on the maintenance of the floor;
4. that costs for matting for the entrance doors are bought to the next meeting of the Committee;
5. that any purchase of machinery for the upkeep of the Corn Exchange floor as recommended by the manufacturer be delegated to the Town Clerk;

H518 **CORN EXCHANGE – STAGING OPTIONS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Facilities Manager on staging options for the Corn Exchange. Members were cautious not to purchase something that might not suit the Trust's requirements and felt that this was a decision to be made by the Trust at a later date.

Members discussed the current charges for the tiered seating, and were informed that it took 2 members of staff 2 hours to erect it and 2 hours to put it away again, which also had implications on the ability to take other bookings. Members felt that hirers may well expect it to be included in the cost when hiring a venue such as the Corn Exchange, but were mindful that it did cost the Council money to provide it.

A member proposed that there should be no charge for the staging and tiered seating for the duration of the Town Council's tenure, although there should be a charge if it had to be set up during unsociable hours/hours outside the working day, at a cost of £50.

Another member stated that people thought that the hire charge for the Corn Exchange was more than the Langdale Hall had been, whereas in fact it was the same, but the square footage available was less.

Another member asked that the banner advertising the Langdale Hall for hire was removed.

Members also discussed an idea to offer an initial free hire to encourage theatre style bookings at the Corn Exchange. It was agreed that again this was something for the Trust to decide.

**RECOMMENDED:**

1. that the report of the Facilities Manager be noted;
2. that there should be no charge for the provision of the stage and tiered seating in the Corn Exchange unless the set-up was required outside of the working day, in which case the charge should be £50.
3. that the option to offer an initial free hire to encourage theatre style bookings at the Corn Exchange be not agreed.

4. that the quotation for the additions to the tiered seating unit be not progressed, however the Works Contracts Supervisor purchases the spares for the existing unit as required.

H519 **PUBLIC HALLS USAGE DATA AND HIRER FEEDBACK**

Members considered the report of the Bookings Administrator on the usage data of the public halls and feedback from users. A member commented that it was good to see such positive feedback. The feedback suggested that the hire charges of the Corn Exchange were stopping people from using it, but members felt that this was something for the Trust to review and set appropriate charges.

The Chairman expressed concern that the public thought that hire charges were more to cover the cost of the work carried out, which was not the case. All the positives of the situation should be emphasised.

Members also considered a letter from a hirer complaining about a perceived 200% increase in hire charges. An investigation had been carried out and it transpired that previously she had incorrectly been given a charity discounted rate and had not paid any VAT. Therefore the actual increase was 15% plus VAT at 20%. As a goodwill gesture, a member proposed that the charge for the additional hours hired for the event should be refunded, including the VAT as applicable. A letter would be sent by the Town Clerk to the hirer to this effect.

The Bookings Administrator drew the Committee's attention to the pricing structure of the hire charges. She explained that the current system was for hire in 4 hour blocks of either a morning or afternoon session at set times. There were numerous occasions when someone wanted to hire a hall for a period that straddled the morning and afternoon sessions and the current system did not allow for this. She asked if this could be changed to provide more flexibility, although the four hour block hire would remain. Members agreed that this was sensible.

The Town Clerk had circulated a request from Mr John Richards to run a cinema in the Corn Exchange, as he had done prior to its closure. Although there had previously been issues with this, members felt that his request must be treated fairly and in the manner of a request from any other potential hirer. The building would be offered to him at the correct rate and all his equipment should be brought in and removed on the day of hire, in compliance with the Council's terms and conditions of hire.

The Bookings Administrator asked the Committee what sort of bookings were permissible. How did members feel about, for example, boxing? Members felt that all bookings should be encouraged but any that may result in spillage of fluids onto the floor would need to be reviewed after the meeting about the maintenance of the floor. The Town Clerk also highlighted Mr Condon's proposal presented earlier that evening. She emphasised that the Council's caretakers would have to lock up at 3/4am on a Bank Holiday on enhanced rates. Members felt that this was part of the job.

**RECOMMENDED:**

1. that the report be noted;
2. that the correspondence from Third Eye be noted and that the Town Clerk write to the hirer, explaining the outcome of the investigation, but as a goodwill gesture, refunding the additional hours at a cost of £72.00 inclusive if VAT;
3. that more flexibility is introduced in terms of the hire periods for the halls – four hour blocks should be maintained but not at set times;
4. that all types of bookings should be encouraged whilst acknowledging that the Council was awaiting advice on the maintenance of the floor;
5. that Mr Richards be permitted to run a cinema in the Corn Exchange under the same terms as all other hirers.

H520 **FINANCIAL REPORT**

Members received and considered the report from the RFO. The RFO highlighted the situation with regard to the Corn Exchange budgets.

She also requested Councillors give consideration to the budgets and projects for the forthcoming year. It was agreed that members would e-mail her.

**RECOMMENDED:**

1. that the report be noted;
2. that the original grant of £50,000 designated to the Trust for the Corn Exchange be vired to cost centre 104.

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The meeting closed at 7.02pm.

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Chairman