

Civic Hall Management Committee
Wednesday 23rd October 2019 at 7.30pm
Northbourne Room, Didcot Civic Hall



Minutes

Note: These minutes are subject to approval as a true and correct record by the next meeting of this Committee.

Present:

Councillors:

Dr P Siggers (Chair)
Mr A Thompson
Mr P Giesberg

Mrs E Hards (Vice Chair)
Mr M McNeill

Officer:

Mrs J Wheeler - Town Clerk
Mr A Silva - Civic Hall Manager

Cllr V Haval in the audience.

20. Apologies

There were no apologies.

21. Declarations of interests

None.

22. To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 30th September 2019

It was RESOLVED to accept and sign the minutes as a true record. Cllr E Hards mentioned that Minute 14 should clarify that the potential increased discount was only for charities and not-for-profit organisations.

There were no questions regarding these Minutes.

23. To review any advice received from Steve Parkinson regarding any unpaid VAT sums

The Town Clerk gave a verbal report regarding his calculations. It is hoped that we will only have a bill of approximately £60,000 to £65,000 which is significantly lower than first thought. The Town Clerk also spoke of the need to bring the future running of the Civic Hall to Council and whether Councillors want to run the Civic Hall as a charitable organisation or as a commercial organisation where we would opt to tax. If we opt to tax – this would cancel out any future VAT payments and save the Council more money. It is hoped to have an item on the Full Council agenda for 4th November 2019.

24. Civic Hall Manager's report

The CHM has recorded in his report some of the regular bookings and the discounts applied. The Chair queried whether some of these customers have a contract for regular use – the CHM confirmed that some hirers do have an agreement. The discount is adjusted depending on the number of regular bookings. The CHM acknowledged that information had been requested from the booking system but the Officers have to be careful not to breach GDPR.

Cllr P Giesberg is keen to have a breakdown of the bookings and the prices we charge to allow proper analysis of the figures. Cllr E Hards would like to know the percentage of time for commercial bookings compared to the charities and not-for-profit. CHM estimated that around 70% of the bookings were from commercial companies.

The events planned for 2020 were revised from the last meeting:

- Outdoor Movie (Rocketman Sing-a-long) on 6th June 2020
- Culture and Community Day on 25th July 2020
- Fun Dog Show on 4th October 2020

The CHM is still working on quotes to hold the Christmas Market and ice skating. These are subject to budgetary provision from F&GP Committee.

The ideal of installing a coffee shop would be addressed in the new year with a business plan. The CHM had already carried out an online survey which showed that most people felt it was a good idea and would use it.

The decorating of the Civic Hall would continue on a rolling programme to keep the hall looking good. The Northbourne Room is almost finished. The All Saints Room will be decorated in the new year but the carpet will remain in this room.

We have had a general risk assessment carried out and we are awaiting the report. The coverage of the CCTV cameras in our car park was discussed. The Councillors felt it was important to have 100% coverage.

The social media reports were circulated and Cllr P Giesberg wanted to know whether the figures resulted in increased bookings. The CHM felt that there was a clear link between the increased numbers of people viewing directions to the Civic Centre added to increased awareness and interaction. The CHM also spoke of the

recent award – Oxford Prestige Award for Venue of the Year – significant achievement.

Unauthorised use of the car park was also discussed and in particular the use of the car park as an unofficial coach pick up. For health and safety reasons, this could result in an accident with pedestrians and cars and no appropriate signage. It was AGREED that the option of installing a height restriction should be considered.

Green Tourism initiative

The Green Tourism initiative is a network of like-minded businesses who wish to run their businesses in a more sustainable manner. The network provide specialist training and support to help with a bespoke action plan to improve and reduce operating costs. The initiative covers three main areas:

People = ethical sourcing; green awareness; communication; accessibility and eco monitoring.

Places = Local sourcing; Green destination; healthy eating; building conservation; nature and biodiversity.

Planet = water saving; waste; carbon management; renewables; energy and chemical free.

Membership costs £300 per year and an Award is made according to the assessment of our building and the improvements that are logged.

It was RESOLVED that this would be an appropriate initiative to join (at least for the first year) and see how this would help the Civic Hall (and the Town Council) to review and re-state its current policies. This item would go to the next meeting of the Finance Committee for noting.

25. To review the draft budget for the Civic Hall 2020 – 2021

Cllr E Hards brought the totals to the attention of the Committee – the first draft budget had a deficit of £114,600. It was AGREED that this figure needed to be reduced and the CHM had already trimmed some figures which he presented to the meeting.

Cllr A Thompson left the meeting.

Cllr P Giesberg felt that there was scope to increase the income to more than £213,200 and he wanted this properly considered. When he went through the potential usage of the rooms he came to a much higher income figure of around £500,000 – but he needed more information.

The CHM went through his budget savings:

4001 – Salaries – bring down from £145,000 to £135,000.

4012 – Water Charges – bring down from £10,000 to £8,000

4014 – Light and heat – bring down from £25,000 to £24,000

4024 – Event Costs – bring down from £15,000 to £10,000 – the Committee voted to keep this at £9,000

4027 – Advertising/Marketing – bring down from £6,000 to £4,000 – more generic advertising for the Civic Centre rather than specific community events.

4044 – Maintenance Contracts – bring down from £18,000 to £15,000

There was a discussion of hall costs if the Council opt to tax in the future running of the Civic Hall. It was felt that the commercial bookings could help with this as they are already VAT registered and may be able to ease the increase for community bookings.

It was noted that the Millbrook Room is a new room which will bring in a new income stream.

These savings resulted in £21,000 of savings. The deficit will now be £93,600. The new figures will be circulated to everyone in the Committee.

It was proposed by Councillor E Hards; seconded by Councillor P Siggers to approve the current budget in principle and ask the F&GP Committee to carry out further due diligence on the figures. Councillor P Giesberg abstained from the voting because he wanted more detail on how the figures were arrived at.

The CHM and the Town Clerk would continue to review the budget figures to see if they could identify more information to aid the understanding of the Councillors.

26. To decide whether to recommend to F&GP the virement of any Civic Hall cost centres.

It was AGREED to defer this to the next meeting.

27. To consider whether the Town Council wishes to take an advertisement in the Didcot Street Fair programme

After much discussion it was AGREED in principle to approve this advertisement at a cost of £295 plus vat. The advertisement would not only support the Didcot Street Fair event but would go to around 18,000 homes in Didcot. The Town Clerk would look for the cost centre that was used last year. The Chair voted in favour – the rest of the Committee abstained so the motion was carried.

The meeting closed at 9:15pm.

Signed _____ Chairman Date _____