

## **Agenda item 6**

### **For decision and discussion - Update on Frome Town Hall**

Author: Paul Wynne, Town Clerk

The purpose of this report is to:

- a. bring Cllrs and others up to speed on how this project is developing
- b. recommend that FTC opts to tax income and expenditure
- c. invite discussion as to how to use the flexible space not required for permanent council offices. The flexible space provides an amenity for the town and community groups and the intention is that it also generates income – through sub-letting/hot desking/meeting room hire etc.

### ***Background***

The Town Hall offices were acquired from the County Council in late 2014 for £275,000 when they were vacated by Social Services. Refurbishment is in the last stages of planning and the intention is that they will be available for use in January 2017. Over the past 18 months, we have had numerous discussions with local community groups about what facilities they need and whether they would be interested in renting meeting rooms or offices. These discussions heavily influenced the Design Brief that our architects have been using throughout the project to date. Understandably, no one has been able to formally commit to moving to the Town Hall with us, although We Here You (aka PAC) remain enthusiastic, while Citizens Advice Bureau has had to stay put in the current offices. It is therefore, a good time to brainstorm and garner ideas as to uses of the spaces including the café – both as an amenity and as income generation.

### ***Outside and the exterior of the building***

All the exterior windows have been restored and repainted, various walls and pillars have been repointed and some lead work on the roof has been completed. The Environment Team have planted up and are maintaining the grounds around the building and have removed the dense vegetation obscuring the front, making way for the ramp to the left of the front door. The notice board is being really well used and we will be pinning project updates on it through the rest of the calendar year. The removal of some small scale asbestos will be completed before the start of the main refurbishment contract in July.

### ***Refurbishing the interior of the building***

The main cost item on this project will be the internal refurbishment. Given that this building will become a core part of the community and must not look or feel like a “Council building”, we have come up with a scheme which will meet the needs of the community. I’ve had only positive feedback from Cllrs and the community on our plans and colour schemes.

We have followed our Financial Regulations about tendering and Colin Cobb (project sponsor) and I are meeting with our quantity surveyor (QS) and architects on 10 June to decide which tender to accept. I will be able to provide a verbal update at the meeting on

this.

### *Ethical decisions*

We recruited the architects with help from the Ethical Decision Making matrix and have been using it in the process to recruit the main contractor. We have re-used furniture wherever possible, and will be using the Protomax board for external notice boards and in internal offices. All lighting will be LED.

### **Next steps**

Work will begin on site in July and finish in mid-January 2017. The whole of the site including the Elliot Building and car park will be closed and under the responsibility of the contractor (except for two spaces which we will keep open for the car club cars). We will inform local residents who currently use the car park about this soon.

### *Marketing, maintaining and managing the building*

In January, Council agreed the staff budget and organisation chart which included two new posts – a full time marketing/communications/town hall manager and a part time caretaker.

At this stage, these posts need firming up and this will be a priority for me in the coming weeks.

### *Establishment of a Trust to run the building*

This is an area that we will need to take expert advice on and, again, once the main contract is let I will progress this and return to the committee with proposals.

### *VAT*

We have taken professional advice regarding reclaiming from HMRC the total VAT incurred on the renovation works on the Town Hall. This advice is to apply to HMRC to Opt to Tax the Town Hall. Opting to Tax means the Council can reclaim the VAT on the renovation works but will have to include VAT on the amount charged on income streams such as room rental.

The advice is not to include the Elliot building in the option to tax as no renovation work is being done and therefore there will be no VAT expenditure to be reclaimed. This will allow us to not to charge VAT on rental income from the Elliot Building.

### **Recommendations**

1. Note the report above
2. Apply to HM Revenue and Customs notifying of an option to tax Frome Town Hall and land excluding the Elliot building

### **Discussion**

We'd like to get your views as to how to make the space 'work' for us and community groups. The available space will be shown on the Town Hall plans, pallet boards and model at the meeting.

Council Co – ordination Committee  
15 June 2016

Questions:

1. What kind of space would people 'rent'?  
(Hot desks/meeting rooms/office space/other)
2. Can you think of people/organisations we should contact to explore interest or seek further ideas?
3. What other amenities do you think the space would require making it of most use and of flexible use?