

Agenda item 7

For decision: Update on Frome Town Hall restoration project and to sell the Palmer Street offices

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Summary

This short report brings Cllrs up to date with the project, informs Council of the recruitment of the Market and Town Hall Manager and requests permission to proceed with the sale of the Palmer Street offices in order to help fund the project.

If any Cllrs would like a tour of the work in progress or any questions of detail, please let me know.

Project progress

Hammonds, the main contractor, is still on target to complete the project by the end of January. All the redundant wiring has been removed and much of the new wiring is in place. All the heavy work such as building walls and knocking down others has been done. The extent of the beautiful mosaic on the ground floor has been revealed and sub-contractors are about to start on cleaning and restoring it. The lift and the escape stairs from the Council Chamber are going to be installed in the next few weeks. The decorators will be starting soon.

Project Sponsor, Colin Cobb, is working closely with the project architects so that the acoustics of the Council Chamber are as good as possible. Originally, the plan was to have the floor of the Council Chamber carpeted. However, on further thought it was agreed a wooden floor would be easier to keep clean and increases the range of uses. When the carpet was lifted it revealed pine floorboards in reasonable condition and the project team is now assessing whether to clean them up or lay an engineered wooden floor on top.

The project remains on budget. Indeed, it is expected to come in under budget a little. This means that additional items such as furniture, signage and audio video equipment might be able to be provided for from the project budget.

Marketing and management of the Town Hall

The Marketing and Town Hall Manager has been recruited and Meg Mosely starts at the beginning of October. While this role will be responsible for corporate marketing and communication, initially, her priority is to launch the Town Hall and fill as many rooms as possible.

Sale of Palmer Street offices

In order to supplement existing funds for the Town Hall project, proceeds from the sale of Palmer Street are required and have been budgeted for. Property prices have fluctuated as a result of the Brexit vote but in Frome it is understood that they remain robust. When we built the FTC budget for 2016/17, we budgeted for £230k but it will not be certain until it goes on the market and is sold. It is now time to begin the process of putting this property on the market and Council is recommended that this is done.

Change of name?

There has been some discussion about whether to change the name of this building from Frome Town Hall back to Frome's Public Offices, as it appears on the front of the building. Cllrs are asked to consider whether to make this change.

Recommendations

1. Note that the project remains on time and on budget and that the Marketing and Town Hall Manager starts at the beginning of October.
2. Delegate to the Town Clerk in consultation with Colin Cobb, to sell the council offices on Palmer Street.
3. Consider whether to change the name to Frome's Public Offices