

Agenda item 4

For information - Frome Town Hall

Author: Rachel Griffin, Marketing & Communications Manager

Summary

This report provides an update on Town Hall occupancy of the Town Hall, a year end income forecast and a summary of our marketing initiatives.

Update on Town Hall occupancy

Active and in Touch moved from the room behind reception to office (called the Parlour) at the back of the building. They will soon be joined by Fair Housing for Frome. We are in discussion with another tenant who wants to move in to the office behind reception (Room three). If this falls through we plan to let the room to a private sector business who are very interested. It would not be appropriate to say who the organisations are at this stage.

Hourly rental of desk space in the café continues but has had limited uptake. The flexibility this space is evident, however, as it being used as a baby café on one morning a week and by Spark as a hot desk. We are looking to attract more groups to use it in this way and are also exploring opportunities for smaller pop-up events. When we have the necessary licenses in place, we are confident that it will well used as a space to complement the Council Chamber.

We are currently letting Room two (to the left as you come in from the front door) to WHY on a three month trial basis. If both parties are happy this arrangement can be made more permanent.

This will leave Room 1 and the café, as well as the Council Chamber, as available bookable meeting spaces. At the present time, this provision of meeting spaces can accommodate demand.

In addition to the tenants and external meetings, FTC staff and councilors have used the meeting rooms over 150 times in the last six months. We have hosted the very successful Plastic free events, parking consultations, council meetings and of course our own conference earlier in April.

The café will offer free community group use for two hours, at a week's notice, when room three is let. In reality, at the moment it is only WHY, Frome FM and the civic society who make use of this offer.

Income and projected forecast for the Town Hall

The table below compares the budgeted income with the forecast income. We are making slow progress on getting the necessary licences in place so that we can market the Town Hall as an event venue. This is very frustrating to everyone and we are doing our best. When we

get the licences we are confident that the Town Hall will be popular place for the community to hold events. For example, we now have 25 couples on our waiting list who want to hold their wedding in the Town Hall.

Please note that forecast income from tenants is already slightly higher than budget and this might well increase if we end up letting one or more rooms to the private sector because at present the community group tenants receive a substantial discount on market rental value. Clearly, it is not proposed that this policy changes.

Not wishing to raise false expectations, the forecast column below indicates a worse case scenario – a year end income deficit of just over £32k. It will dramatically improve once we are able to offer events in the Council Chamber and we expect the next report to this committee to be much brighter, so long as the licences are in place.

	Actual up to end of Apr 2018 (£)	Budgeted at 31/3/2019 (£)	Forecast income as at 31/3/2019 (£)
Tenants WHY, FF, FFM, Active & In Touch	1596	18720	19185
Meeting room	750	17230	11533
Chamber	454	25790	1140
Café	120	3750	1235
Total	2920.49	65490	33093.75

Licenses

Receiving the necessary change of use permissions and licences for selling alcohol and performing wedding ceremonies continues to be the Achilles heel of the Town Hall project. We continue to be frustrated at every stage by a system that seems determined to try and stop us offering the community a range of services that everyone seems to want. Not only are we experiencing delays, but the cost of ever more surveys and assessments, alongside the need to install air conditioning (because we are not allowed to open windows because of the possible noise disturbance) continues to increase. We see no alternative than to proceed doggedly through this quagmire. Pulling out at this stage, rewriting our business plan and not offering the services that the community so clearly wanted when we consulted them on our plan, seems foolhardy at the moment.

The good news is that the Town Hall Travel Plan has now been accepted and so we now have Change of Use permission subject to conditions. Those conditions are that, contrary to previous advice from MDC, a Noise Impact Assessment is now required. We have been told that this will assess the need for some form of control on any sound system brought in to the building and will also assess whether the Council Chamber windows need double glazing to reduce noise. We still have a way to go.

This also means that the alcohol licence remains on hold. However, it does leave the way clear for a wedding licence which has been submitted and we are now waiting on a visit from Somerset Council County Registry Service who will issue us with the license if approved. Once

we have the wedding licence we can also reopen discuss with the registrars to make weddings at the Town Hall a standard fixture.

Marketing

Not having licences in place continues to limit how we market the Town Hall. However, the marketing collateral is now being prepared and we have commissioned a set of images which will reflect our intended uses of the building. Once we have the licences we will be implementing an active campaign to include digital, print and outdoor marketing.

Our 'An everyday special day' campaign will seek to see the Town Hall as an inclusive special occasion building where everyone is welcome for their important events - residents, community groups and businesses alike. We are coupling that with developing brochures that are fitting for the building.

Our material will be aimed at the community for events, meetings and weddings and the commercial sector focusing on meetings and conferences. Enquiries confirm that there will be a strong demand in these sectors: as we said earlier, we have a list of over 25 couples wanting to be married here.

Conclusion

The building continues to be well used and the opportunities are plenty. These include being a venue central to town events as well as the many opportunities that a wedding license will afford. The challenge is to get the necessary licences place and then ensure the opportunities we have are taken and that this transform into a busy community resources and a reasonable income.