

Agenda item 8

For information – Update on the Frome Town Hall

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Summary

This report provides an update on Town Hall occupancy, information on upkeep and servicing of the building and a summary of marketing initiatives.

Update on Town Hall occupancy

The tenants currently occupying the building are Fair Frome in the Elliot Building; Frome FM who have now finished their studio build; Active and in Touch and Fair Housing for Frome who are in the Parlour; and Frome Learning Partnership who are in room 3 (beside the reception desk). WHY are embedded into their offices upstairs and just about to vacate Room 2. I am in negotiations with another CIC about occupation of that room from the 1st July.

As reported last time, the occupancy of the ground floor rooms has put a little pressure on room availability. The Baby Café have moved upstairs as they have outgrown the café space. The café currently houses WILD co-working on Tuesdays, Wednesday and Thursdays, leaving it free for hotdesking and other meetings on Monday and Friday and other functions at weekends. We continue to offer free community group use for two hours, at a week's notice, when the room is not let - although this is not taken up very often.

Room 1, the café, as well as the Council Chamber, are our current bookable meeting spaces. Occupation rates are increasing. Both the Somerset Drug and Alcohol Service and the Probation Service are now regular bookings as is the Discovery Group.

Currently we are comfortably meeting Meeting room demand by using the Council Chamber as overflow. In addition to the tenants and external meetings, FTC staff and Councillors have used the meeting rooms or the Council Chamber for scheduled meeting 66 times since 1st April.

Licenses

The wedding license process which stalled following a health and safety inspection is now being revisited. Positive discussions have resumed around Frome Town Hall being offered to the registry service to provide an alternative and cheaper wedding offer to residents in the town. We are currently negotiating terms.

Marketing

The work to provide a professional brochure to showcase the Town Hall as a multi-use facility is on hold to include our wedding offer and will represent our entry into the private customer market. This has been the continuing strategy and is in line with our wider comms strategy. We look to be open, presentable and be able to answer with full and frank answers. A programme of Google ads and banners is ready to go. This will sit alongside a press campaign, the brochure and other cross channel media. In the meantime, we continue to be used by

charities, businesses and local government and this year we will see our first foray as a venue for a play at the Frome Festival.

Budget & income to date for the Town Hall. Projected figures to follow.

	Actual to 21 May 2019 (£)	Budgeted at 31/3/2020 (£)
Café	605	2000
Chamber	465	15000
Equipment hire	145	500
Events	24	0
Meeting room hire	2030	5000
Tenants	4419	31992
Total	7688	54,492

The forecast budgeted income currently indicates a small short fall. A number of initiatives such as pop up food events are being examined to improve this figure, including income from events such as refreshments.

Looking After the Town Hall

This financial year we have improved the servicing of the Council Chamber by moving from contract cleaners to employing staff members. This has meant that our beautiful Town Hall is getting the attention that it deserves. There has also been a marked improvement in both standards and care but also in capacity which has freed up the Town Hall Steward to focus on the maintenance schedule.

We are working with a chartered building surveyor to fully investigate water leaks around the roof and chimney at the rear of the building. This will result in a set of recommendations for this part of the roof and repairs completed by a roofing company over the summer.

A panel in the door to the downstairs toilets has had an inset window and we are investigating something similar with the door to the upstairs toilets as well. We're also going to be contacting local painters to obtain quotes for some internal decoration this financial year. This will include the Council Chamber if schedules marry up.

We have also employed a bank of 10 Support Stewards who are trained to be council representatives at meetings and events. This has removed the burden from existing staff, will cut down time off in lieu and spread the burden of evening and weekend events.

Conclusions

The Town Hall continues to be well used but the budgeted income is a risk to the budget this year. We have every reason to be positive as we look forward to hosting ever more interesting and varied events at the Town Hall.