

FULL COUNCIL

Date: Monday, 15 April 2024
Title: Corn Exchange Safety & Security
Contact Officer: Venue & Events Officer

Background

The purpose of this report is to demonstrate action that can be taken to provide improved security at the Corn Exchange for Witney Town Council staff and hirers of the Gallery Room and Main Hall. There is also the benefit of reducing the risk of damage and theft from the premises.

Current Situation

The Council has a duty of care to advise and assess risk for employees who work by themselves under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Whilst most employees work in pairs or teams, Caretaking staff within the public halls working outside of office hours are often lone working. In the Corn Exchange there are often periods where there are groups using either the Gallery Room or the Main Hall outside of office hours where there is no café staff or WTC Officers present.

There are instances where there is a need for a Caretaker to be on site to add security for the groups attending a booking in either the Main Hall or the Gallery Room. The security of the people hiring the hall is paramount, and there have been instances where public have entered the Corn Exchange that has ramifications when considering fire safety regulations as well as offering peace of mind to the groups hiring that the hall/room is a secure and safe space.

An example of the type of antisocial behaviour is where there have been several incidents in the Corn Exchange recently which involved three young people accessing both the ladies and gents' toilets and squirting hand soap on the floors, mirrors and wash basin. This resulted in the toilets having to be closed because it was a risk to hall users from slipping over as the floor had been made very slippery. This causes the Caretaker concern and stress as well as potentially upsetting people attending the hiring group.

Currently this results in a Caretaker being present on shift for the duration of hirers bookings to deter this antisocial behaviour and provide a point of contact for the groups. This is not an

ideal situation as this is not always the best use of a caretaker's time. Bookings last an average of four hours and the associated payroll cost for staff to be on site would be based on an approximate Town Council expense of £48.

The Project Officer and Venue and Events Officer have researched options and propose the installation of maglocks to be fitted on the front doors of the Corn Exchange. This in turn would provide the security to the building without the need for someone to wait downstairs until the booking has finished. The caretaker would still meet the group and return at the end of the booking and be contactable via mobile during this time. Note that when the Caretaker has left people will be able to exit the building through the main entrance door via a push button to release the lock, however, they would have to be let back into the building by the hirers.

The cost of the proposed mag lock system to the main Corn Exchange entrance door would be £1321.00 ex VAT. The mag lock would pay for itself within 37 bookings (a caretaker would still need to meet and greet and then return and lock up). The Corn Exchange regularly hosts a minimum of 4 evening bookings a week with more at different times, meaning that the new security mag lock system will have a payback period of just 10 weeks.

The funding for this would come out of the allocated 4038/104 budget line where the RFO has confirmed remains at £4k (2023/24).

An estimated saving on staff time of over £5,000 per annum is anticipated.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

As mentioned above, the Council does have a duty of care under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 for its employees. With an increase in these incidents occurring, measures need to be taken to mitigate any impact on staff wellbeing and interrupting meetings/hirings.

Financial implications

The cost of the purchase and installation of the mag lock system detailed in the quote found in Appendix 1.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and the situation around safety and security in the Corn Exchange and approve the installation of a mag lock security system to the main door entrance.