
Date: Monday 16th September 2024

Title: Public Halls Report

Contact Officer: Venue & Events Officer

Background

The halls will be welcoming back groups after their summer term break as well as increasing the number of events as we enter the traditionally busier autumn season. There are a number of areas that can be improved on in the halls which are detailed below.

Halls Feedback

Please see appendix for updated Halls Feedback report.

Corn Exchange Gallery Room Conferencing Equipment

The conferencing equipment will be installed by Cloudy IT in the Gallery Room on September 23rd. This updated and professional system will add another great reason for potential hirers to book the Corn Exchange. The system comprises a state-of-the-art rally bar which houses the 15 x optical zoom digital camera as well as the speakers to broadcast meeting attendees into the room. The camera can be set up with programmable settings to allow for close ups on people speaking at the touch of a button as well as allowing public to be focussed on if they are intending to speak during the allocated participation.



Supplementing the rally bar will be four microphone pods which will be neatly set up under the tables and daisy chained together. Not all meeting will require four pods and it's possible to use any number to suit the individual hirers needs

Officers can confirm that the best option for clarity of microphone is to use wired microphones, so these have been chosen. A full report on the installation and functionality of the new system will be provided to Council once Officers have been trained on the use and capability of the new system.

The new projector and screen have been installed by the works team and will be calibrated by Cloudy IT when on site to complete the installation.

Corn Exchange Website

Events Officers are struggling to maximise usage of the Corn Exchange website which was created and now hosted by Rumbi Ltd. It has been used for the past 4 years and currently works fine for basic event updates. Officers feel that it is currently limiting their ability to make the aesthetic changes which would enhance and improve the accessibility and feel of the site.

There are currently limits to what can be created, and simple tasks like page layout changes must be requested to the provider which we are then charged for.

The Venue & Events Officer would like to explore the different options and costings available for a new website provider which would allow for more autonomy for the in-house team.

Flags

Along the side of the Corn Exchange are 4 x flagpole holders that are currently only used for hanging baskets, when they come down in autumn/winter the alleyway looks bare.

The Venue & Events Officer would like to explore the possibility of having custom angled wall flags to hang which would help both visibility and help advertise the Corn Exchange throughout the year.

These flags could be interchanged with specific events, which could be purchased by a hirer and WTC could put flags up for a surcharge. This is a practise already used in different arts centres and would be in keeping with the look of the building. As the flagpole bases are already installed Officers feel it would be beneficial to get them used with the only expense being the flags themselves. The Venue & Events Officer could get full costings if members were keen to progress this idea, and present at the next HC&A meeting. Flags are approximately £75+VAT for durable all-season flags.



Example flag and Corn Exchange Newbury

Digital Notice Boards

The Venue & Events Officer would like to explore the possibility of installing digital notice boards at the front of the Corn Exchange where there are currently two wooden notice boards. The idea would be to house the digital boards in the existing frames to preserve the look of the front of the building. These would allow hirers to send digital copies of their event posters which could then cycle through until a set time, reduce the need to print and enhance the look of the hall with this modern twist on an existing feature.

The Venue & Events Officer can get full costings if members would like to consider this option, with initial research showing boards to cost in the region of £280.00 each.

Outsourcing Marketing

Officers would like to investigate the possibility of bringing in an external company to advise and give guidance on the best possible way to market the halls moving forward. Officers do spend time marketing using usual methods including social media and physical advertising, however the input from a third party might provide a solution and insight for a wider scoping marketing programme which could enhance the reach and demographic of possible attendees.

Internal Notice Board

The noticeboard located in the lobby area (opposite disabled toilet) is old fashioned and out of step with the current direction of the Corn Exchange refurbishments. The Venue & Events Officer would like to remove the current board (look to repurpose at another location) and replace with a board more in keeping with the modernisation of the hall. If in favour all costs and choices can be presented at the next HC&A meeting.



Example 'baroque' notice board

1863 kitchen Facilities

The café and bar are growing in daily footfall and the Café Manager would like to explore the possibility of renovating and upgrading the kitchen facilities in both the small kitchen behind the bar and the larger kitchen which leads into the hall. Mainly the refurbishment of

the larger kitchen in the Corn Exchange to make it easier to prep food, keep clean and modernise. Currently the kitchen has been adapted from before there was a café, but demand now requires an update. Stainless steel work surfaces, redesign of layout and functionality as well as additional cupboard space. This would allow the café to be more dynamic in its offer as well as satisfying the FSA when they inspect the business.

1863 Feedback (June – August)

Date Inputted	Service Rating	Ambience Rating	Food/Drink Rating	What did we do well today?	How could we improve?
04 June 2024	5	5	4	Polite greeting.	Change the music!
06 June 2024	5	3	4	Cake was lovely. Service was great.	
06 June 2024	5	5	4	The showing of the D-Day film was great; very poignant in view of today's date plus rations !!	More of the above @ £2 a go would tempt us over 60's in !!
07 June 2024	4	4	4	Always nice + friendly welcome, a nice calm oasis.	hmm - not sure you can :)
07 June 2024	5	5	5	Excellent service as ever - Thank you.	Keep doing what you are doing. Personal service - excellent.
07 June 2024	5	5	5	Lovely service with smiley faces. Coffees always great & cake selection always tempting!	N/A!
10 June 2024	5	5	5	Service is always great.	A few more tables for 2. Coming in on your own and sitting at a table for 4 is uncomfortable & means groups of 3 or 4 walk out if café is full. More choice of newspapers. Not everyone wants to read the Mail & there are several copies of it. Can we have a copy or two of the (Independent) as well please.
10 June 2024	5	4	5	Service was excellent. Daisy's art was fantastic.	Provide Stevia to sweeten drinks.
14 June 2024	5	5	5	Always a good service. Enjoy meeting friends here for a very good coffee and fruit tea.	We often wander into Witney centre on a Sunday and would love to have our drinks at The Corn Exchange rather than their competitors.
21 June 2024	3	5	5	EVERYTHING!! Smiles all round.	All Ok as it is!
22 June 2024	5	4	4	Good value, not overly expensive. A lovely space on the square.	Just doing what you are. My husband can get in with his wheelchair. Can be a bit noisy.
27 June 2024	5	5	5	Smile.	Keep smiling. Change Newspaper.
27 June 2024	5	5	5	Early opening time very useful.	Stop the music. It destroys the restful atmosphere and intrudes on conversation.
27 June 2024	5	5	5	Very well 10/10	
26 July 2024	5	N/A	N/A	Friendly Service.	Newspapers to be added.
26 July 2024	5	N/A	N/A	Service.	Newspapers are an absolute must
27th July 2024	5	5	5	Friendly service.	
30th July 2024	1	4	3	Coffe cake.	Always slow service. When you clear a table have a cloth to wipe the table.
31st July 2024	N/A	N/A	N/A		Why no newspapers.
31st July 2024	5	5	5	Same amazing.	Stay as good as you are.
31st July 2024	3	3	3	Service is good (table service). Very polite.	Table and chairs where the sofas are. Keep doing what you do.
31st July 2024	3	3	3	Everything.	Would it be viable to have a trial of 1 table for 2-3 people available to reserve? You get soo busy, especially in the winter.
31st July 2024	4	4	4		Newspapers needed.
31st July 2024	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	Female Manager at front of house. Would have been nice to have felt welcome but never, so walked out!
1st August 2024	5	5	5	Lovely drink and great service.	
2nd August 2024	5	5	5	I felt awkward sitting on a table for 4, but when I suggested to the café manager that I move to a smaller one which was then free, she said "Absolutely not - feel free. And then I was joined by a lady, same age as me, who obviously needed to talk. Shes had a lot of illnesses and difficult life situations. Actually, I'm driving her to a nice cafe outside of Witney this afternoon.	Cant really think of anything except maybe play some classic FM
5th August 2024	5	5	5	Everything.	
10th August 2024	5	5	5	Served us in a pleasant and courteous manner, even though they were busy.	Cant think of anything.
15th August 2024	4	4	4	Pleasant friendly staff.	Softer Seats. Only 2 tables have padded seats.
15th August 2024	5	5	N/A	Lovely service and coffee.	Bring back the newspapers please. Especially the Guardian.
15th August 2024	5	5	5	Happy smiley people.	Be more you.

Feedback is in the majority positive showing the levels of service are generally being adhered to, there will always be opportunities to improve, and any less positive work=ds will be taken as the constructive criticism they were intended to be. The Venue & Events Officer and the Café & Bar Manager hold weekly catch ups to continually look at ways we can improve our working practise.

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality – Improved marketing may improve communications to harder to reach groups
- b) Biodiversity – No impact
- c) Crime & Disorder – No impact
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – The change to digital advertising will help reduce the amount of paper used and make the Council more sustainable.

Risk

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

Financial risk – the Council must balance the needs of a growing hall against its running costs and social value provided. All items suggested will be included in the Corn Exchange Business Plan.

Advice will be sought from the Planning Authority regarding the flying of flags from the building.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

Benefits to the Community – the continued enhancement and expansion of the facilities at the Corn Exchange provides a social benefit to several sections of the community.

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

- The conferencing facilities have been delivered within the agreed budget
- All other costs are unknown, but if in favour of the suggestions, officers will report back to the next meeting in time for 2025/26 budget-setting.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. That Officers explore the possibility and cost of a new website provider.
2. That the possibility of digital notice boards is explored and fully costed.
3. That a new notice board is costed for the Corn Exchange lobby area.
4. That Officers explore the possibility of external flags to be hung down the alley on the side of the hall.
5. That the Café and Bar Manager, with support from the Venue & Events Officer, works on obtaining quotes to upgrade/update the existing kitchen in the Corn Exchange.