
Agenda Item: Public Halls Report
Meeting Date: 11 November 2024
Contact Officer: Venue & Events Officer

The purpose of this report is an update to the Committee on activities of the Council's Public Halls

Background

The Public Halls move into the traditionally busier period in the run up to Christmas, no works are scheduled in either hall for the remainder of the financial year. Officers have been working on projects to enhance the visibility and standard of the halls, while keeping any improvement in line with the existing business plans.

Current Situation

Corn Exchange Gallery Room Conferencing Equipment

The conferencing equipment has been installed in the Gallery Room by Cloudy IT, this includes the Logitech Rally bar which is mounted on the wall, 4 x microphone pods and 6 months full back-office support. Additionally, WTC has purchased a new projector and screen which are installed and linked allowing for virtual meeting to be conducted, Council meetings to be recorded and allows independent hirers to just use the projector while utilising the Rally bar as a speaker for training, films, or background music if required.



As mentioned in the previous HC&A report, the new projector and screen have been installed and calibrated by the works team and halls officers. Halls officers and caretakers will be trained to set up the conferencing system which will make the experience user friendly and accessible for anybody wishing to hire the room and its facilities.

Corn Exchange Website

Officers have been researching the possibility of a new website host for the Corn Exchange as not currently happy with the autonomy permitted with the current provider Rumbi Ltd, with simple tasks including page layout and colour changes having to be requested to the provider which we are then charged for.

WTC have had to pay the annual website hosting charge of £480 ex VAT (£40 per month) but the Venue and Events Officer can confirm that we are able to cancel our contract at any point due to being out of a fixed term contract, and now on a rolling monthly term. Any outstanding amount of the annual hosting fee would be refunded to the Council if the contract was cancelled.

The options for a different website do vary with a primary concern being the amount of time officers can spend on actual website work. The main tasks required is managing the diary of events, ensuring all links to ticketing engines are correct and a professional level of content is updated and managed.

To build a new website from scratch via a provider like 'WIX' or 'GoDaddy' would potentially take weeks of dedicated work to get the site to a standard to maintain reputation as well as maximising the potential the site can provide, average costs listed below.

Website Options	Domain Hosting Fee	Monthly Cost	Time to build/test
IONOS	£15	£15	1 month
WIX	£15	£25	1 month

After researching **ionos** or **Wix** would be the simplest way to bring the website in house and allow officers to manage, update and design the best-looking website for the halls. The monthly cost is cheaper than sticking with Rumbi Ltd, however there is more initial work associated for officers with the design and maintenance of the site.

The costs associated with employing an entirely new website developer differ between local suppliers with costs ranging from £500 - £1000 for the initial build and launch. This doesn't include additional monthly hosting. This option would allow officers to be certain that they would choose the correct provider to allow them to work on the website with as much freedom as required.

Flags

Along the side of the Corn Exchange are 4 x flagpole holders that are used for hanging baskets and currently for Christmas Trees when they come down the alleyway looks bare.

The Venue & Events Officer has explored the costs associated with angled building flags and can confirm that the price for angled building flags to suit is **£76.00** each (**inc VAT**). Four flagpoles to suit would cost **£50.00** each (**inc VAT**).

The recommendation is to purchase four flags and four flagpoles with the Corn Exchange Logo on them to be a visual promotion of the hall. The flags could then be changed to showcase different events happening in and around the hall.

A good example would be for the Arts week flags or the Witney Music Festival flags to be hung leading up to the events, it would add visibility of the event for the hirer and be instantly recognisable for people looking at the hall from the market square. Building up the visibility and presence on the high street is of the highest importance, with the addition of these flags, the Corn Exchange would look professional and allow for additional advertising in a manner which is low impact but still powerful.



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 will be discussed and presented at the next HC&A meeting. This is a practise already used in different arts centres and would be in keeping with the look and use of the building. The flags purchased by WTC would be all weather durable and easily flown from the building with support from two members of staff.

Digital Notice Boards

The Venue & Events Officer has researched the most practical digital display options available to mount inside the existing notice board frames at the front of the Corn Exchange. The main benefit of these boards is that there will be no need for any paper posters or flyers for any upcoming events in the hall.

The boards would be able to be updated with all the different groups posters, internal shows or café menus and the boards can display them in a slideshow, or simply keep changing at a preset time interval. Officers would be able to use them for WTC official communication as well as advertising all the event coming into the hall. Timers can be set so that the displays switch off at a predetermined time in the evening and come on at a predetermined time in the morning.

The best option that has been found is a slimline board that would fit into the frame, at a cost of **£343 ex VAT**. The preference would be to purchase two of these boards, however one would be sufficient to start displaying the upcoming events with the additional board added at a later date.



This picture is for visual reference only to show intended location for digital display boards.

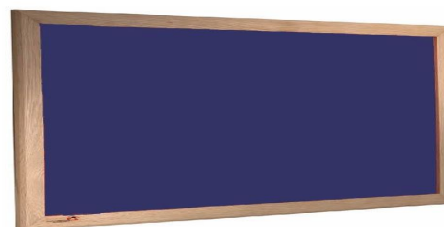
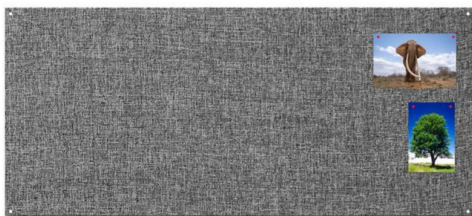
Outsourcing Marketing

Officers have decided to utilise in house experience of staff members to maximise the effect and reach of the marketing strategy implemented for the halls by the Town Council. With additional support from the WTC admin team, Officers feel there can be a concerted effort to push the marketing and visibility of the halls to better levels in and around West Oxfordshire.

Internal Notice Board

The Venue and Events Officer has researched the options and costs associated with changing the old internal noticeboard located at the bottom of the stairs opposite the disabled toilet.

If a lockable notice board was required, then options are limited, and the recommendation would be to stay with the existing board. However, the board is no longer in keeping with the rest of the Corn Exchange design and now looks old fashioned and out of place. The Venue and Events Officer would recommend that there is no need for a lockable board internally, and WTC could look to bring in a smart modern board, still in keeping with the hall aesthetic.



This style of board on the left costs **£131 ex VAT** and is approximately the same dimensions as the existing notice board, the style of board on the right features a wooden frame and is available in different colours and costs **£187 ex VAT**. The recommendation for either board to be grey to match the carpet on the stairs.

Corn Exchange 1863 kitchen Facilities

The Venue and Events Officer has investigated the costs of renovating and updating the larger kitchen in the Corn Exchange, for a complete refit the cost would be in the region between £12,000 & £19,000. Due to this, the recommendation is to continue using the current facilities and update and renew as and when required. It is worth nothing that, in the opinion of the Venue & Events Officer, the kitchens should look to be modernised and updated to reflect the higher usage now experienced. To satisfy FSA requirements, if we are to ever looking to expand our range of offer, we would have to make significant improvements to the existing set ups. Officers can look at the requirements and present a fully costed project plan with operational timeline if this was to be progressed further.

6 Month Review of Cancellation Policy

The new cancellation policy was agreed by the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee (Refer: Minute F161 -PG&F 25.03.2024) and has been in place for 6 months. In that time, there has been no feedback from hirers about the new policy (below in table). All existing hirers were informed before implementation and are now adhering to this policy. Primarily it is a deterrent to larger groups looking to cancel at short notice with the Council then looking at taking potential financial hit on staffing, room set up etc.

Venue Officers are happy to keep this new policy active and set up a review in a further 12 months.

Booking Type	Booking Deposit	50% Cancellation Fee	75% Cancellation Fee	100% Cancellation Fee
Standard Hall/Room Hire (Group1/2)	Zero	N/A	N/A	Less than 72 hours notice
Commercial and Sales (Group 3)	25% at point of booking	Less than 14 days notice	N/A	Less than 7 days notice
Party / Function	25% at point of booking	Less than 14 days notice	N/A	Less than 7 days notice
Show (group 4)	25% at point of booking	Less than 28 days notice	Less than 21 days notice	Less than 14 days notice
Weddings	25% at point of booking	Less than 2 months notice	Less than 1 month notice	Less than 14 days notice

Propeller Student Enterprise

We have been approached by Witney & Abingdon College asking if we would allow some of their students to run a charity table outside the Corn Exchange for one day. Propeller (name of the enterprise) supports adults with learning difficulties. These students make crafts and sell their own grown plants.

This is an important social opportunity for these individuals, and it has been suggested this will be well attended by parents and friends who in turn will be pointed in the direction of the café to purchase drinks, snacks etc. Profits go into the continued funding of the enterprise.

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 -
- b) Biodiversity -
- c) Crime & Disorder -
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency -

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.

- Risk of event sales due to website in development
- Risk of vandalism to the new digital notice boards
- Risk of missed business opportunity due to ineffective marketing strategy

Social Value

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

Financial implications

Members are invited to note the report and make a recommendation to Policy, Governance and Finance Committee for consideration in the 2025/26 budget setting for the purchase of:

- The different costs associated with changes to Website hosting.
- Four flags for the exterior of the building are purchased at a cost of £304
- Four flagpoles for the exterior of the building are purchased at a cost of £200
- Two digital notice boards for the front of the Corn Exchange are purchased at a cost of £683
- A replacement notice board for the lobby area of the Corn Exchange is purchased at a cost of between £131 and £187

Recommendations

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

1. Changes to the website hosting of the Corn Exchange website.
2. That four flags and poles are purchased to use on the exterior of the building
3. That new digital notice boards are purchased for the front of the Corn Exchange
4. That a replacement notice board is purchased for the lobby area of the Corn Exchange
5. That the option to update the kitchen in the Corn Exchange are explored and costed in detail
6. If the Committee is agreeable that the items above are referred to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee for consideration in the 2025/26 Budget.
7. That the cancellation policy be readopted after this review and considered again in 12 months