

POLICY GOVERNANCE & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Date: Monday 27th January 2020
Title: Health and Safety & Compliance Update
Contact Officer: Compliance and Environment Officer - Angus Whitburn

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this report is to update Councillors about the Health and Safety status across all of Witney Town council's facilities.

HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE

Internal annual fire risk assessments have been carried out for the Corn Exchange, Town Hall, and Burwell Hall. There were only two significant areas of concern, fire safety policy's and the evacuation of disabled users from the 1st floor of the Corn Exchange. Both points are detail in this report.

Health and safety documentation for the councils building has been significantly improved. This includes COSHH data sheets, risk assessments, compliance paperwork, fire safety drawings and emergency action plans.

Training for all staff is also underway including office safety, lone working and cash handling. Training needs to progress quickly for the maintenance team. Operation of heavy machinery, tools, chainsaws and any electrical works carried out is an area for concern.

Emergency Action Plans have been created for both the Corn Exchange, Town Hall and Burwell. These plans detail procedures to follow in the event of major incidents including fire, structural failure, gas leaks, bomb threats, lighting failures, lift failure and asbestos release. The plans also detail procedures to follow and advice on dealing with disorderly behaviour, robbery, missing children and overcrowding.

MAX USER OCCUPANCIES FOR THE CORN EXCHANGE

Much confusion has been left over the maximum occupancies of the Corn Exchange. As it is understood the maximum occupancy has been linked to the width of the fire exits. After reviewing, it is the size of the room and the amount of available fire exits which are the factors effecting the maximum occupancy.

- The maximum occupancy for the main hall is currently 215 persons, this is restricted by the fires exits.
- 215 would be the maximum occupancy with no staging or seating. For a seated event with a full stage the maximum occupancy is 154 this is restricted by the size of the room and required gangways.
- The maximum occupancy of the first floor is 60. This is restricted as there is only one available fire exit.

The only way to raise these numbers would be to introduce a third fire exit for the main hall and a second exit for the 1st floor. There is the possibility that a 3rd fire exit could be introduced leading through backstage. However, the distance needs to be calculated to see if it is a viable fire exit. For the 1st floor there is a fire exit leading onto the flat roof that could be reopened. The only issue lies with the angle between the two fire exits, if the angle is not over 45° then it cannot be counted as an alternative escape route.

EMERGENCY EVACUATION CHAIR

Currently the landing of the corn exchange is a refuge point for disabled users in the event of an emergency evacuation. As the facility offers access to the 1st floor via the lift a suitable procedure to evacuate disabled users must be developed. The current evac-chair is not designed to evacuate users to the ground floor. Its only purpose is to act as a basic wheelchair to aid in the evacuation or in medical emergencies.

A star lift evacuation chair uses tracks to safely carry users down the stairs and can be operated by one person. As fire marshals' staff will be required to assist in the evacuation of disabled users from the 1st floor.

HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICIES

Two policies have been created for Fire Safety and Fire Safety management (attached), each policy respectively defines procedures to follow in the event of a fire and responsible people for fire safety. Both Policies have been created in line with The Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order 2005 and Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

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.

Although there are no legal requirements to provide evacuation chairs suitable arrangements must be made for evacuation of disabled users. Government guidelines suggest that evacuation chairs are the preferred means of escape. Without implementation of a suitable evacuation chair the council is taking a significant risk and negating its liability.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no current budget for health and safety or for the purchase of an upgraded evac chair. Funds for any such works have previously been met from existing budget lines attached to the appropriate assets. i.e. property maintenance, Corn Exchange or general reserve as required.

The quotation supplied from evac chair is the cheapest of three requested (attached). The total cost is £785.00, this will be further reduced when the old evac chair is returned reduce the overall cost to £635.00. There is no legal requirement for ongoing servicing of the evacuation chair and can be regularly maintained and checked by Witney town council staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- Agreement of the Fire Safety Policy and Fire Safety Management Policy and schedule of period 3rd party assessment
- Consider the implications of extended seating and other improvements to the Corn Exchange on Fire Safety.
- Consider purchase of a stair lift evacuation chair.