

HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

Date: 29th June 2020
Title: Public Halls – Covid-19 Lockdown
Contact Officer: Office Manager – Adam Clapton

Current Situation

Burwell Hall and the Corn Exchange remain closed to the public in line with Covid-19 guidance. The re-opening of the halls is a key target but can only take place once an announcement has been made by the Government, and when the Council has the necessary measures in place to protect staff and customers. At the time of writing, this is anticipated to be the end of July/beginning of August.

A comprehensive risk assessment on how this can be achieved safely has been undertaken by the Compliance and Environment Officer, while the Venue Manager is working through a process of engagement with our hirers and has drawn up a plan to facilitate their return.

Community Use

For several weeks at the beginning of lockdown, Burwell Hall was utilised by Witney Land Army to prepare food parcels for delivery and in recent weeks Witney Community Fridge, assisted by the WLA has been working from the Corn Exchange due to social distancing concerns at their previous premises. It has been made clear that this is only a temporary arrangement until the Council is permitted to start re-admitting hirers and these actions were only allowed to take place following risk assessments and consultation with officers. This, along with Blood Donor sessions, were the only permissible uses of public buildings during lockdown in line with government guidelines.

Operational Update

The Bookings Office has remained open throughout the lockdown via phone and email, covered by the Bookings Administrator and Venue Manager. The opportunity has been taken to undertake online training, plan future events, compile business plans etc, update charges and assist in chasing sales ledger debts etc.

The Town Clerk has provided a report to the Personnel Sub-Committee on the implications on staffing levels during lockdown, however given that the public halls service was closed where possible Caretakers carried out periodic building checks and some small maintenance works. One of the Caretakers was also redeployed to assist the works team with the daily play area checks ensuring they remained secure with the necessary signage in place.

The Corn Exchange Bar project

Members will receive a verbal update from the Venue Manager following the Corn Exchange Working Party meeting held before this meeting.

Environmental impact

Members are asked to have due regard for the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regards to its facilities and services it operates.

Risk

The Council must keep the safety of its staff and customers as its primary concern moving forward but must also recognise the amount of income lost due to the pandemic. Officers will continue to try to balance these two things but in doing so may have to make difficult short-term decisions in terms of the number of hire sessions in a day and maximum numbers which may not be popular.

Financial implications

The loss of income from cancelled bookings (only) at both Burwell Hall and the Corn Exchange between 15th March and 31st June totals £27,578.42. This does not include probable ad-hoc booking income such as party's which could equate up to approximately a further £2,000.00.

The only income received during this time was from the Blood Donors who used the hall on two occasions, providing an essential NHS service.

In addition to the loss of income, Members should also be mindful of the fixed overheads and running costs incurred as well as the costs of implementing the COVID-19 safety measures going forward. The Town Clerk will hopefully be able to provide a comprehensive report and budget update to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee in due course.

Recommendations

Member are invited to note the report.