

Notes of a Meeting of the Assembly Hall Working Group

held on Thursday 21 September 2017

Present: Geoff Mitcham; Adrienne Westbrook; Mike Sankey; Terri Welch; Tim Cross; Steve Gray; Jean Harris.

1. Appointment of Chair

AW proposed that the meeting should be chaired by TC. This was unanimously agreed.

2. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Andy Hinchcliffe.

3. Terms of Reference

Members noted the Terms of Reference for the Working Group which had been ratified at the Town Council meeting held on 4 September 2017.

4. Financial Overview

JH reported that Assembly Hall financial performance was tracking below that of the corresponding period last year but that there was no immediate cause for alarm. TC provided a summary schedule of income which revealed that whilst the first three months of the financial year had resulted in negative year on year financial performance, both July and August had surpassed revenues generated last year, as had September which had already exceeded income generated in the corresponding month last year and still had one week to run.

TC added that it was pleasing to note that in excess of £5k had already been taken in advance ticket sales during September.

5. Recent Events Review

TC provided a schedule detailing the financial impact of the last 16 shows staged at the Assembly Hall. Cumulative totals revealed that, whilst a loss of £2.3k had been recorded in respect of ticket sales revenue, secondary spend in the sum of £11.6k had been generated which represented a net profit of £9.3k.

6. Forthcoming Live Events and Financial Exposure

TC explained that some of the scheduled forthcoming live events such as the Status Quo tribute were suffering from sluggish ticket sales whilst others, such as Jethro, were selling well. It was acknowledged that there is no exact science to predicting which shows would sell and which wouldn't, but that the key to the viability of the live entertainment offer is net financial performance including secondary spend. In addition, the fact that a variety and mix of entertainment is being provided for the community to enjoy is also an important consideration.

7. Room Hire Arrangements and Charging Structure

TC provided a draft schedule which illustrated a revised charging structure in respect of room hire. TC explained that the current charging structure was convoluted and not customer friendly, and he had therefore drafted a simplified and more streamlined revised structure for members' comments and observations. The revised structure sought to eliminate the (rarely used) differential between commercial and community rates and to adjust current rates to a more sensible rounded figure. TC was asked what the financial impact would be if this revised rate schedule were to be approved by Council and whether it would be cost neutral. TC undertook to carry out a comparator exercise over a representative reference period to determine the financial impact of the proposed rates relative to the current rate card.

It was acknowledged that any revisions to the room hire rate card should factor in any increases deemed appropriate by Town Council as part of its 2018/19 financial planning and budgeting arrangements, and that this would be considered by the Finance Working Group as part of its impending deliberations and subsequent recommendations.

8. Apprenticeship Experience

TC pointed out that the Apprenticeship arrangement involving Edie Stanford was thus far proving to be a positive experience. Edie was enjoying her time with the Town Council and since her appointment she had been heavily engaged in marketing initiatives which, TC pointed out, was generating positive outcomes as evidenced by the significant increase in recent ticket sales. TC added that Edie's involvement in other aspects of Assembly Hall management such as sound, lighting and front of house, would increase over time such that she would have a well rounded exposure to the entertainment and hospitality industry during her apprenticeship with the Town Council.

9. Councillor Suggestions

9.1 MS asked whether the concept of providing a cocktail bar on a Friday or Saturday evening had been considered. MS suggested that a venue providing cocktails might prove popular with patrons who wished to have an evening out or who wished to have an initial drink prior to moving on to an alternative venue. TC pointed out that cocktails had been provided at various events in the Assembly Hall where there was a perceived demand (e.g Ladies Nights) but questioned whether the Assembly Hall would attract this clientele without the added attraction of entertainment.

9.2 AW asked if craft workshops might be a viable proposition within the Assembly Hall. AW pointed out that the Civic at Trowbridge had hosted Scrapstore craft activities which suggested that it could work. TC pointed out that the Scrapstore event at Trowbridge had been a venue hire and confirmed that he would welcome an approach from a user group if they wished to hire the Assembly Hall for this purpose.

9.3 MS asked if the concept of a pop up skittles facility had been explored. Members pointed out that this activity was declining in popularity and whilst there had once been a vibrant skittles scene in the town, most of the pubs no longer offered the facility and it was primarily confined now to smaller social clubs.

10. Any Other Business

10.1 TC explained that the office till in the Assembly Hall had broken and whilst a repair could be attempted, this would cost c.£85 for a piece of equipment that was already 15 years old and liable to further breakdown. TC pointed out that a replacement till would cost c.£525. Members acknowledged that, given the reliance on an office till, TC and SG should determine the appropriate way forward without delay, and suggested that in the circumstances, the purchase of new equipment would be a more sensible option than attempting a repair.

10.2 TC explained that comments had been received about the standard of Christmas decorations last year and he was minded to purchase new decorations which could cost, in total, c£1k. It was acknowledged that Christmas decorations were an important element in creating a festive seasonal ambience in the Hall and it was felt that expenditure up to c.£1k in this regard was not unreasonable.

10.3 TC explained that Alex Goodhind had provided a stage projector for use at the Assembly Hall which he had indicated would be withdrawn unless the Council wished to buy it at a cost of c.£650 (a new projector was thought to cost some £1.7k). TC explained that a projector could be hired in when required at a cost of c.£60/occasion; that this cost could invariably be passed on to the hirer; and that instances of use were relatively infrequent. Given these circumstances, and recognising the impending planned redevelopment of the Assembly Hall, members suggested that ad hoc hire may be a more sensible approach in the short term.

10.4 TC explained that Wiltshire Council had decided to suspend the luncheon service for one week from 24th to 29th October. In these circumstances TC intended to use the opportunity to redecorate the Lounge area using in house resource, albeit there would be a cost implication in respect paint and decorating materials. Members welcomed TC's initiative in this regard and looked forward to seeing the redecorated lounge in due course.