



Town Hall | 61 Newland Street | Witham | CM8 2FE
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MINUTES

Meeting of: **Community Committee**

Date: **Tuesday, 22nd October 2019**

Present: Councillors J.C. Bayford (Vice Chairman in the Chair)
K.L. Atwill
P.R. Barlow
Miss C. Jay
M.C.M. Lager
Mrs S.C. Lager
T.A. Pleasance

J. Sheehy (Town Clerk)
Mrs G. Kennedy (Committee Clerk)
Mrs J. Furse (Information Centre Manager)

54. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R.P. Ramage, Miss M.L. Weeks and R. Williams who had previous engagements.

RESOLVED That the apologies be received and accepted.

55. MINUTES

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Community Committee held 30th September 2019 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

56. INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

57. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There was no member of the press or public present.

58. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

The Town Clerk had nothing to report.

59. INFORMATION CENTRE REFURBISHMENT

The Town Clerk detailed his presentation, explaining the necessity to make the centre fit for purpose for today's use and therefore he had moved away from the ideas originally presented in January on the basis that previous proposals were not justified with sufficient evidence. He explained that the new proposal was centred around a split design creating a new reception area on the left and a multi-purpose space to the right.

Mrs Furse, the Information Centre Manager, spoke of the challenges of day-to-day working in the Centre with a major problem being the doors which were imposing and uninviting. In the winter months it was too cold to keep them open and then her desk was not in an obvious position. All the leaflets were concentrated around her so there was no space to circulate whilst the other end of the centre is normally empty.

The Town Clerk proposed a glass door into the centre, which might require Listed Building consent although the plans did not require any external changes. The position of the reception desk could be easily seen in the new position facing the door and there would be space to circulate. New flooring in this area and colour of the walls would delineate the two spaces.

It was necessary to provide a separate, dedicated office space for the Events' Co-ordinator whilst still being accessible when she is required to assist at reception. He proposed a glass wall dividing the centre with double doors into the multi-purpose space. The existing boards could be used to split the office from this space which could be used for meetings, pop-up shops, exhibitions, etc.

It was proposed to have two screens, one for rolling information and the other as a standard TV screen showing the news station.

The Town Clerk said that the expensive element would be the reception desk which would need to be purpose built with either two screens or a swivel screen so the public can confirm bookings and seat reservations. There would be a EPOS system till which would stop the need for manual booking keeping.

The Town Clerk said that the cost to achieve all the proposals would be £24,000 which would require an additional sum of £9,000 on top of the earmarked reserves.

Members then had an opportunity to ask questions and comment on the scheme. Concern was expressed about the side window and the Town Clerk said that frosting to prevent over-looking was already being implemented and that there would be space, although less, available for Cards for Good Causes and other future hirers. Historical content for the multi-purpose space was suggested along with another screen detailing particular information about the history of Witham. It was thought that a security switch to obtain access to the rest of the Town Hall would not be appropriate with the Lunch Club using the Function Room.

Members expressed their concerns about accessibility but recognised the problems posed by a listed building within the Conservation Area. Steps would be taken to mitigate these problems so that disabled people felt welcomed. Members spoke about automatic doors and disabled entry pads to the glass doors. It was agreed that a bell at the front of the building to summons assistance should be included along with an appropriately worded sign. The Town Clerk said one way to improve access would be to include a new entrance from the back of the building when the existing toilets are upgraded so that visitors can walk directly through to the centre without the difficulties of manoeuvring through doorways and sharp bends.

A suggestion was made that access behind the reception desk should be prevented for security reasons and this would be included along with additional electrical points and charging units, a

public computer and free wi-fi. A suggestion was also made to explore options for franchise coffee machines or similar devices.

The Chairman asked whether it would be necessary to close the centre during the renovation work. The Town Clerk said that it would be necessary for safety reasons to close the centre and a limited service would be offered from the Function Room. He considered that the proposed work would take two weeks and all hall bookings at the Town Hall would be cancelled for the duration of the works to allow

Members agreed that it was a well thought out scheme and would transform the centre. Thought could be given later to a new name, publicity and the launch; and staff being easily identified by a scarf or uniform. The Town Clerk said he would make the necessary minor adjustments to include bell, reception desk adjustments, additional points, etc. and take to either the Community Committee or Town Council. Another £9,000 would be required to bring the figure for the proposed work to £24,000 and it was agreed that this should come General Reserves.

RESOLVED That the plans for the refurbishment of the centre be agreed and progress to the tender process.

RECOMMENDED TO TOWN COUNCIL That £9,000 be allocated from General Reserves to the existing £15,000 Earmarked Reserve.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the Meeting at 8.15 p.m.

Councillor _____
Chairman

JS/GK/23.10.2019