

# **WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**

## **Report by Chief Officer – Citizen, Culture & Facilities**

**Cultural Committee: 29 June 2022**

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### **Subject: Previous decisions of Cultural Committee**

#### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide committee with an overview of decisions of Cultural Committee during 2021/2022 which have a cost implication for the Council.

#### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1.** It is recommended that the Committee, in relation to Clydebank Town Hall, agrees to:
- remove the current restrictions limiting bookings which is creating a recurring £80,000 revenue pressure due to lost income
  - proceed with the previously agreed self-service catering option negating the additional revenue cost of re-opening the coffee shop (included in £80,000 above)
  - revert to pre-Covid six day a week opening and not progress with seven day opening this removing an additional £25,000 revenue pressure
  - maintain the Garden Gallery in its current form and not proceed with works to create additional display space therefore removing £23,500 of capital costs
  - utilise existing channels to promote the area and cultural offering and not proceed with the development of a standalone website thus removing estimated net revenue costs of up to £100,000 and up to £103,000 of capital costs.
  - note that the Blitz is a significant and important element of Clydebank's history which will be recognised in the new museum space being developed in the town's library with a permanent display of objects and ephemera, including a space for reflection and a Roll of Honour naming all those who lost their lives.

#### **3. Background**

- 3.1** A number of decisions were taken at meetings of the Cultural Committee during the financial year 2021/22 most notably in relation to Clydebank Town Hall and the operating model for the building which have a cost implication for the Council.

A summary of these decisions is outlined below:

#### **Clydebank Town Hall**

- 3.2** The B-listed Clydebank Town Hall incorporates elected member and office accommodation, a museum, gallery and coffee shop and provides bespoke space for a range of corporate, civic and cultural events.

In August 2021 Elected Members agreed a motion that called for a report to be brought back to a future Cultural Committee meeting outlining options and recommendations for:

- the Town Hall moving away from being a commercial venue
- seven day opening of the building
- revising options for the planned provision of hot drinks and snacks.

### **Coffee Shop**

- 3.3** A Special Cultural Committee on 7 October 2021 agreed to re-introduce a staffed coffee shop at the Town Hall instead of the previously agreed option to introduce a self-service option.

### **Operating model**

- 3.4** At a meeting on 29 November 2021 Cultural Committee agreed:

*To proceed with Option 2 – operate as a civic centre in similar way to Municipal Buildings - Ceremony Room exclusively used for wedding ceremonies and protected for this purpose, all event dressing external, cease all package bookings hold 10 limited wedding receptions and all contained in the Main Hall only, a small number of dance shows and the biannual Clydebank Musical Society performances. This approach would have an £80,000 revenue impact on the Council for 2022/23.*

- 3.5** Further to this, in January 2022, Town Hall Working Group agreed to restrict the point at which bookings could be taken to a maximum of six months in advance with discretion to extend this to nine months where the event was of significance.

### **Weekend opening**

- 3.6** Following a request to bring forward a report outlining a six month pilot of weekend opening, in December 2021 officers presented a report outlining two options for opening on Saturdays and Sundays, however recommended retaining the existing Monday to Saturday opening hours. The Cultural Committee did not approve the recommendation and agreed a motion to open the building, inclusive of the museum and coffee shop, from Wednesday through to Sunday and to close the building to the public on Mondays and Tuesdays. Elected Members and Elected Member Support Services access to the building Monday to Friday would be maintained and therefore the building would be operational seven days a week.
- 3.7** At a meeting of the Cultural Committee on 24 January 2022, it was confirmed there would be no change to contracts to accommodate Sunday opening; that the building would be open seven days a week for a trial period during 2022/23

to support Covid recovery. It was advised that the Chief Officer would have discretion to make adjustments, as necessary, in order to take this forward.

### **Website development**

- 3.8** On 7 March 2022 Cultural Committee agreed to earmark the remainder of the Cultural Capital Fund (£103,650) to finance the development and implementation of a visit West Dunbartonshire website with officers requested *to bring a report to the relevant committee of the next Council with proposals to deliver on this ambition.*

### **Permanent Blitz exhibition**

- 3.10** On 28 March 2022 the Cultural Committee agreed that officers explore the options for hosting a permanent Clydebank Blitz exhibition and bring back a report on this to a future meeting of the Cultural Committee.

### **Suspension of Standing Orders**

- 3.11** In order to consider aspects of this report, it will be necessary to suspend Standing Orders to allow re-consideration of some of the decisions within a six month period of their being agreed (Standing Order 20).

## **4. Main Issues**

### **Town Hall Coffee Shop**

- 4.1** In the years prior to closure as the result of Covid lockdown, footfall and takings at the Coffee Shop were exceptionally low and could be as little as £20 per week. As a result the facility operated at a significant loss. As part of an overall redevelopment of the Town Hall, the Cultural Committee agreed to move away from the staffed Coffee Shop and introduce self-service bean to cup coffee machines and pre-packaged biscuits, cakes and snacks. However on 7 October 2021 a Special Cultural Committee agreed a motion to re-introduce a staffed coffee shop at the Town Hall instead of the self-service option. Adding these staffing and food costs back into the Town Hall budget created a £40,000 additional revenue cost.
- 4.2** Previous decisions of the Cultural Committee have both decreased the size of the Coffee Shop by creating a gallery space within the former booth seating area and also limited opportunities to attract further visitors to the Town Hall by creating static museum displays which are unlikely to attract return visits. It should be noted the Coffee Shop has not yet been reopened due to vacancies within the service.

### **Town Hall operating model**

- 4.3** The decisions to operate the Town Hall predominantly as a civic centre, limiting external bookings and limiting the period in advance at which bookings can be taken have significantly inhibited event bookings and consequently reduced income. There are currently over 100 live booking enquiries for 2023/24 and

2024/25 which cannot be progressed as they are for events more than six months in advance. As it stands there is a single event booking in the calendar for the venue in 2023/24. A reduced income target of £53,000 was introduced in line with the decision to limit bookings, however, it is unlikely this will be achieved in 2023/24 if the current approach is maintained.

It should be noted the Town Hall costs circa £260k to run per annum exclusive of employee costs. The previous model with a focus on attracting events including weddings, celebrations and funerals targeted a cost neutral position for the Council and it is the view of the management team this can be achieved in future should the current restrictions be removed.

### **Weekend opening**

- 4.4** Prior to Covid, the Town Hall was open from 8.45am to 5.30pm, Monday to Friday, and 10am to 4pm on Saturday. The museum and gallery were open 10am to 4pm, Tuesday to Saturday and the coffee shop was open 11am to 1pm, Monday to Friday. Currently as a result of vacancies, the building is open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.
- 4.5** Footfall at weekends has in the past been very limited and the changes to the museum spaces (including a move towards static displays) are likely to have little impact on visitor numbers. In January 2022, the Cultural Committee agreed that the building would be open seven days a week for a trial period during 2022/23 to support Covid recovery. It was advised that the Chief Officer would have discretion to make adjustments, as necessary, in order to take this forward. As a result of vacancies it has not yet been possible to open on Saturdays or begin the pilot Sunday opening.
- 4.6** During Covid a number of employees left the service and it is the intention once the full complement of staffing is in place to open on Saturdays and also to take forward a programme for the building which will attract residents, groups and visitors. Early discussions have taken place with the Health and Social Care Partnership with a view to maximising use of the building. It is the view of officers that once staffing is in place to enable Saturday opening, this should be monitored for a period of six months to ascertain demand. A further report would be presented on conclusion highlighting visitor numbers, costs and revenue to inform members and provide recommendations on the future approach and enable a decision to be made on whether to take forward the pilot Sunday opening.
- 4.7** The combined impact of reopening the Coffee Shop, operating predominantly as a civic centre, restricting external events limiting bookings and undertaking a six month pilot of weekend opening results in a £105,000 per annum cost to the Council.
- 4.8** Proceeding as recommended above including introducing a self-service option for the coffee shop, reverting to the previous operating model, removing booking restrictions and maintaining current opening hours would result in a £105,000 revenue saving.

## **Works to the Garden Gallery**

- 4.9** A number of works were taken forward in the building as a result of motions to Cultural Committee during 2021/22 including the creation of a gallery space within the former booth seating area of the coffee shop. The space does not meet the same sector standards as the pre-existing gallery spaces in terms of lighting or environmental controls and is therefore unsuitable for displaying works for any extended period of time. Further works were agreed by the Committee in January 2022 to the Garden Gallery to create additional display space at a cost of £23,500. The Garden Gallery is well utilised for weddings and events and redeveloping it as a gallery would prevent these bookings proceeding. In addition there are four existing purpose built gallery rooms in the Town Hall in addition to the recently created display area which provide ample space for exhibitions. It is recommended these works are therefore not taken forward and the £23,500 earmarked is made available for alternative capital projects.

## **Development of a Visit West Dunbartonshire website**

- 4.9** There are a number of considerations in the development of a new standalone website particularly where the website would be managed and maintained by the Council. The £103,000 capital would meet the initial development cost incorporating web design, hosting and mapping however, thereafter, the resource required for ongoing maintenance, design, marketing and sales of advertising would result in an ongoing revenue cost of around £100,000 per annum. It is extremely unlikely this could be generated from advertising on the site. Work has been undertaken previously to ascertain the income potential from advertising on the current Council website, and engagement was undertaken both with commercial operations and other councils to identify the income which could be realised annually. This estimated that the maximum income advertising could attract would be around £12,000 per annum. There is therefore a significant risk that the ongoing employee costs would not be met from the generation of advertising income.

As the website would be paid for and maintained by the Council it would need to comply with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018. This means that everything uploaded and contained on the website including pdfs, word, excel documents, all images, web coding and colour contrasts would require to be fully accessible. This is onerous and takes significant capacity. The whole site would be subject to monitoring by the website accessibility monitoring team at the Central Digital & Data Office, which is part of the Cabinet Office – our external website has already been audited.

Post Covid, events programmes are being developed and delivered and work is underway to ensure we use our history and heritage to promote West

Dunbartonshire as a great place to live, work, learn, visit and invest. Officers would recommend a review of the existing website to ensure the area's visitor attractions, history and heritage are given due prominence. This work can be undertaken within existing resources therefore negating the requirement for the capital spend of £103,000.

### **Permanent Blitz exhibition**

- 4.10** West Dunbartonshire Council's museum service holds Accredited Museum status. Accreditation is the UK sector standard for museums and galleries – it defines good practice and identifies agreed standards that help guide museums in accountable and ethical decision making. In considering any addition to the museum collection – whether by purchase or donation – officers in the Arts and Heritage team undertake an assessment in line with the Council's Committee-approved Acquisitions, Disposal and Collections Development policy.
- 4.11** On 25 November 2019 the Cultural Committee approved plans to create a new, dedicated museum on Clydebank's history and heritage, to be installed in the renovated basement of Clydebank Library. Works to progress this museum have been tendered; the contract awarded; and the detailed designs have been approved with work on site currently scheduled to begin in late summer. A key element of the storytelling in this permanent museum space will bring focus to the Clydebank Blitz, including a Roll of Honour of all those killed as a result of the bombings.
- 4.12** This display has been designed to showcase relevant, appropriate artefacts that tell a broad and nuanced story of the Blitz. One of the key items in this storytelling will be a major art work by Tom McKendrick already owned by the Council that offers an impactful visual interpretation of the devastation wreaked by the Blitz on the town of Clydebank.
- 4.13** Whilst the Blitz exhibition as displayed in Clydebank Town Hall during March/April 2022 has relevance to the local area, commitment has already been made to creating a permanent museum display that tells the story of the Clydebank Blitz within Clydebank Library. The museum service holds sufficient high-quality artefacts to tell this story in an engaging and impactful manner. Any proposal to acquire a further Blitz exhibition for possible permanent display in the authority area would risk duplication – both in terms of content and expenditure of resources. Officers would further note the strong representation already in the museum collections – and the fine art collection in particular – of works that relate to the Blitz, including an important collection of works by local artist Tom McKendrick.

## **5 People Implications**

- 5.1** The previous two postholders within the Coffee Shop were previously advised of its closure and are currently redeployed to alternative roles in the Council, one permanently and the other temporarily. Recruitment will be undertaken over the summer period to fill the remaining vacant posts within the service.

## **6 Financial & Procurement Implications**

- 6.1** The decision to change the Town Hall model to operate predominantly as a civic centre, restrict bookings, reopen the Coffee Shop and open at weekends has an estimated additional revenue cost of £105,000 per year and this was built in to the 2022/23 budget.
- 6.2** The works on the Garden Gallery and website development would result in a capital spend of circa £123,500 with the latter resulting in an ongoing revenue spend of up to £100,000 depending on advertising income realised. This capital spend has been earmarked from the Cultural Capital Fund.
- 6.3** There are no procurement implications from this report.

### **Risk Analysis**

- 7.1** There is a risk that the additional revenue cost of weekend opening may not be matched by significantly increased visitor numbers. This could lead to concerns over the Best Value of such an approach.
- 7.2** There is a risk that if the current approach of operating predominantly as a civic centre is maintained, the income in 2023/24 will be less than the anticipated £50,000 per annum and therefore the revenue cost to the Council will be greater than the anticipated £105,000 per annum.
- 7.3** There is a risk that if the restriction on bookings is removed the income for 2023/24 remains impacted due to the fact the majority of wedding bookings are made 18 months to two years in advance.
- 7.3** There is a risk that adding revenue cost to the council at the same time as under-utilising an asset by reducing its commercial potential could be viewed as failing to deliver best value
- 7.4** There is a risk that the decision not to reintroduce a changing exhibition programme within the gallery spaces in Clydebanks Town Hall will limit the potential to attract new and repeat visitors to the building, whilst also failing to capitalise on the potential to share and grow new audiences in tandem with the new museum space currently under development in Clydebanks Library.

## **8 Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)**

- 8.1** An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken in preparation of the report on weekend opening and this highlighted that opening a public building seven days a week could be viewed as increasing access.
- 8.2** It was highlighted in a previous report to Committee in October 2021 on amending the operating model to become predominantly a civic centre could result in a reduced number of events and therefore provide fewer opportunities to access the building by the community. This could potentially have a negative impact, particularly on groups which are less likely to be digitally included and for

whom physical spaces are of greater importance, such as older or disabled people.

## **9 Consultation**

This report has been consulted on with Finance, Legal and HR

## **10 Strategic Assessment**

**10.1** The proposals within this report are linked to the following strategic priorities:

- Efficient and effective frontline services that improve the everyday lives of residents.

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**Date: 23 June 2022**

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**Appendix:**                **N/A**

**Background Papers:**    **Report to Cultural Committee 7 October 2021**  
                                 **Report to Cultural Committee 29 November 2021**  
                                 **Report to Cultural Committee 20 December 2021**  
                                 **Report to Cultural Committee 24 January 2022**  
                                 **Report to Cultural Committee 7 March 2022**  
                                 **Report to Cultural Committee 28 March 2022**

**Wards Affected:**        **All wards**