

# WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

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

Cultural Committee: 29 November 2021

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### Subject: Weekend opening of Clydebank Town Hall

#### 1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to respond to a request from the Cultural Committee to examine the possibility of weekend opening at the Clydebank Town Hall, and include any potential revenue implications.

#### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1. It is recommended that the Committee:

- notes this report;
- agrees to retain the existing opening hours of the Town Hall at this time; and
- agrees that a report comes back to Committee on this issue six months after the reopening of the refurbished Clydebank Town Hall. This would detail the visitor levels and coffee shop performance on Saturdays in the intervening period, and on this basis consider the case for Sunday opening.

#### 3. Background

- 3.1 At the Special Cultural Committee on 7 October 2021 Elected Members agreed a motion that called for a report to be brought back to the next Cultural Committee meeting detailing options and recommendations for weekend opening hours at Clydebank Town Hall.
- 3.2 The B-listed Clydebank Town Hall incorporates elected member and office accommodation, a museum, gallery and coffee shop as well as providing bespoke space for a range of corporate, civic and cultural events.
- 3.3 The building is currently closed following the national lockdown. Prior to this, 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.
- 3.4 A £3.6m restoration and renovation project was undertaken jointly by the Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise and West Dunbartonshire Council in 2011 to 2013 based on a proposal to change the Town Hall into a commercially-focused venue for the Council and local area, creating the Clydebank Museum and Gallery, the Garden Gallery and garden and the coffee shop. Despite these additions, the venue has subsequently struggled to attract visitors in significant numbers and to generate income from those who do attend. As a result, in the

years leading up to the pandemic officers focussed on event bookings in order to attract revenue and achieve income targets.

- 3.5** The report to Cultural Committee in November 2019 on the Town Hall refurbishment outlined a number of issues behind this lack of footfall. These included the small size of the museum and gallery which inhibited the ability to attract prestigious exhibitions on a regular basis. This meant the exhibitions that were displayed tended to be more modest and less able to attract visitors from across West Dunbartonshire and beyond. Footfall was on average less than 10 people per day and the numbers differed very little between weekdays and weekends.
- 3.6** This low footfall undermined the business case for the coffee shop which was predicated on a regular flow of visitors to the museum and gallery. With only a handful of daily customers and takings of as little as £11 per day this provided an unsustainable performance level. Staffing costs and food waste mean this represents an inefficient use of resources.
- 3.7** In addition the original Coffee Shop location between the existing Museum and Lesser Hall suffered from a lack of natural light and no view making it an ill-defined venue. This contributed to the failure to attract regular non-museum customers.
- 3.8** Committee agreed to resolve these issues in November 2019 and February 2021 by removing the coffee shop from its existing location to allow for the creation of an expanded and upgraded gallery space. This larger and more modern facility could attract more prestigious exhibitions, and in turn, higher levels of footfall to the Town Hall. In addition the coffee shop would have become a self-service facility in the more attractive garden gallery with views and easy access to the re-landscaped Town Hall garden.
- 3.9** In August and October 2021 the Cultural Committee agreed motions which changed the plans for the Town Hall. These included not accepting the concept design for the new gallery area as previously agreed, and instead proceeding with an amended design of the booth area to create a partitioned space. This partitioned space is not supported by climate control technology – as is the case in the original gallery spaces - making it unsuitable for the display of high-quality artwork. In addition the Cultural Committee and the Town Hall Working Group have also indicated that they wish to maintain largely static art exhibitions in the current Gallery 1, 2 and 4. These are to include a display of the Council's Scottish Colourist collection, the soon-to-be-purchased 20<sup>th</sup> Century Women's Artists, and a new Children's Museum. While these are undoubtedly quality displays, it is the view of officers that there is a risk that visitor numbers will fall in the medium and long-term because once an individual has seen these static exhibitions once or twice they are unlikely to return on a regular basis. Once climate control measures have been installed in the Garden Gallery, it may be possible in future to attract touring exhibitions to this space. This will not be an option in 2022/23 as there are a number of wedding bookings in the Garden Gallery throughout the year which would need to be fulfilled. With this in mind, and based on performance levels outlined at 3.5, officers would expect to see

around 10 additional visitors per week by opening on a Sunday in the next financial year.

- 3.10** In addition members agreed a motion to retain the coffee shop's existing location between the museum and gallery and the Lesser Hall, and to keep it staffed rather than self-service. This coffee shop layout will be smaller than the original and it is anticipated it will have a reduced seating capacity for customers. As a result officers believe there is a risk that the coffee shop performance will stay at previous levels.

#### **4. Main Issues**

- 4.1** In preparation of this report officers contacted 17 Town Halls across Scotland - including Glasgow City Halls, Greenock Town Hall, Milngavie Town Hall, and Ayr Town Hall. Of these only three were open to the public – except for event bookings - on a Saturday (Paisley Town Hall , Stornoway and Rutherglen). None were open to the public on a Sunday. Officers tried to contact a further 15 Town Halls but the venues did not answer the telephone and there was no information on their website.

- 4.2** In response to the request of Committee for officers to detail options and recommendations for weekend opening at Clydebank Town Hall, officers have settled on two possible options for consideration. It should be recognised that both would put significant pressure on the employees who would work on these Sundays. This is because on any Sunday morning after a large wedding or other event in the Main Hall there is likely to be a significant clean-up required in order to get the building ready for a public opening. Should there be any issues with the building then getting fast responses on a Sunday morning is going to be challenging and cause further anxiety for staff. This also could lead to dissatisfaction from members of the public who might visit the building and find it not at the standard they would usually expect. This hopefully illustrates the competing challenges of the building as officers attempt to provide an events space, a civic space, a museum gallery, a coffee shop, and accommodation for Elected Members and Members Services.

#### **Option 1 – Full Opening**

- 4.3** The Town Hall could move to a full 7-day-a-week operation in order that members of the public could visit the museum and gallery and the coffee shop on any given day.
- 4.4** Officers have recently finalised a new employee structure at the Town Hall. The intention was that this structure would include enough employees to cover the existing opening hours of the Town Hall. In response to a motion agreed at Cultural Committee for a staffed coffee shop, two part-time Catering Assistants will be added to the proposed structure and recruitment completed once Council has considered its budget for 2022/23 in March 2022.
- 4.5** If Elected Members wished to see a full 7-day operation then officers would need to recruit an additional number of employees to cover the extra hours, and

mitigate the risk of any complications with the Working Time Regulations 1998. In effect this would be the creation of a second operational team to work Fridays to Sundays and support the existing team. It is estimated that this would cost up to approximately £115,000 per year. There would also likely be some increase in property costs, such as utility bills. It is difficult to accurately estimate this, however, as an indicative figure the building currently costs around £200 daily for heating, lighting and electricity. As a result there would be an estimated £10,000 additional annual cost for utilities following this decision, with limited income to offset. As a result this option would require approximately £125,000 of additional costs to be added to the revenue budget being prepared for 2022/23.

## **Option 2 – Changed Opening Hours**

- 4.6** The Town Hall Working Group has previously discussed the potential to close the building to the public on Mondays and Tuesdays in order to facilitate opening on Sundays. In considering this approach it needs to be remembered that the Town Hall provides office accommodation Monday to Friday for Elected Members and Elected Member Support Services. As a result even a closure to the public early in the week would still create a scenario where the building was operational 7-day-a-week. The full team would not be required at work when the building was closed to the public, but there would still need to be a Facilities Assistant as well as a Team Leader onsite. It is estimated that this expanded team would cost approximately £30,000 per year. In addition, closing on a Monday and Tuesday and opening on a Sunday would mean there was one less day per week than present to undertake events at the Town Hall. In addition, there would be one day less to meet event organisers on site for tours to secure future bookings. As a result there is likely to be an impact on future income targets. There would also be the previously mentioned increased property costs. In total, this option would create additional revenue costs of approximately £50,000 per year.
- 4.7** In Option 2 there would also be staffing implications as existing employees have contracts in place for Monday to Friday, and Monday to Saturday working. To move up to five employees to new work patterns would require a contractual change. It is possible that these employees may not wish to move to permanent weekend working and as such there could be employee relations issues. This might ultimately lead to employees being displaced onto the SWITCH policy to find alternative roles.
- 4.8** The background information in this report illustrates that it appears unlikely the Town Hall will see a significant sustained rise in visitor numbers following its re-opening after refurbishment. In addition, the coffee shop has been proven to incur costs which far outweigh its income and therefore any decision to extend its opening hours further would be a financial burden on the Council. As such it is recommended that the existing hours remain as these include access for the public on Saturdays to cater for residents and visitors who work during the week. Previous visiting patterns also show that there was no difference in visitor numbers on a weekday compared to a Saturday. This move would also not have any negative impact on the Council revenue budget.

**4.9** Officers acknowledge the interest from Elected Members in exploring Sunday opening at the Town Hall, and the aspiration for it to become a busy visitor destination. Towards this ambition, officers could bring a further report to Committee six months after the re-opening of the Town Hall following refurbishment. This could explore whether visitor levels had exceeded expectations in this period, and how the coffee shop was performing. This information would then allow Committee to be in a more informed position about the case for weekend opening.

## **5 People Implications**

**5.1** There are no people implications with the officer recommendation.

**5.2** If Committee wished to open on Sundays using either option outlined in the Main Issues then there would be an increased level of pressure on employees working Sunday mornings for the reasons outlined at 4.2.

**5.3** If Committee opted for Option 1 then there would be a recruitment process to appoint an additional part-time team to cover Friday to Sunday. This is likely to involve seven posts.

**5.4** If Committee opted for Option 2 then this would require a contractual change for up to five existing employees. The implication of this was outlined at 4.7. There would also be a recruitment process for two part-time posts to cover Monday to Wednesday operation at the Town Hall.

**5.5** If Committee opted for Option 1 or Option 2 then these changes would need to take effect in 2022/23 to allow for the contractual discussions with employees and parallel recruitment processes.

## **6 Financial & Procurement Implications**

**6.1** If Committee agrees with the recommendations of this report there will be no budget implication for the Council.

**6.2** If Committee agrees to progress with Option 1 (full opening) then there will be an estimated additional revenue cost of £125,000 per year.

**6.3** If Committee agrees to progress with Option 2 (public closure on Mon/Tue) then there will be an estimated additional revenue cost of £50,000 per year.

**6.4** The Cultural Committee has delegated powers to implement its functions, remit and responsibilities as detailed above. The additional revenue costs would need to be considered by Council when the 2022/23 budget is agreed in March 2022.

**6.5** There are no procurement implications from this report.

## **7 Risk Analysis**

**7.1** There is a risk that not opening on a Sunday reduces the opportunity for those who work during the week to visit the Museum and Gallery at the Town Hall. This is mitigated by the fact that the building is open to the public on Saturdays, with limited demand, and by the fact that visitor numbers have previously been broadly the same on weekdays and on Saturdays.

**7.2** 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.

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

**8.1** An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken and this highlighted that opening a public building seven days a week could be viewed as increasing access. However, opening an additional day would make only a marginal difference, given the building is already open six days and visitor numbers are limited. The equality impact has been examined and there is no impact from retaining the current position. There is a potential negative impact on one equality group, namely women, should committee move to seven day opening depending on which option is taken.

## **9 Consultation**

**9.1** This report has been consulted on with Finance, Legal and Procurement.

## **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.

**Malcolm Bennie**

**Strategic Lead – Communications, Culture, Communities & Facilities**

**Date: 25, October 2021**

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**Appendix:** **Equality Impact Assessment**

**Background Papers:**      **Business case for the redevelopment of Clydebank  
Town Hall – Cultural Committee November 2019**

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