

**Notes of a Meeting of the Assembly Hall Working Group  
held on Thursday 22 March 2018**

Present:

Geoff Mitcham; Adrienne Westbrook; Richard Wiltshire; Mike Sankey; Tim Cross; Jean Harris; Steve Gray

**1. Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Terri Welch.

**2. Financial Overview**

JH provided a detailed income and expenditure breakdown as at 22 March and talked to the report highlighting the areas showing adverse variances. As regards lettings, whilst the report showed a variance of £10,249, JH pointed out that debtors represented some £6k of this figure and the year-end outcome was likely to be closer to budget than the figures currently suggest.

As regards the bar takings, it was acknowledged that the loss of football and rugby club functions (including lucrative sportsmen's dinners and award nights) to the new Oakfields stadium had impacted heavily on wet sales. In addition, it was suggested that drinking habits were changing and it was perceived that patrons were electing to purchase alcohol from supermarkets and alternative venues before attending entertainment events.

In terms of the salaries overspend, JH pointed that this included the appointment of an Apprentice which had hitherto not been regarded as an establishment position; whilst the Maintenance Equipment figures included necessary expenditure incurred in replacing an oven door and replacing a cine equipment projector bulb which were both significant items of spend.

As regards the Marketing overspend this had been fully discussed at the previous meeting and the way forward agreed for the remainder of this financial year. AW pointed out that personally she had strong reservations about the benefits of advertising with the Newsquest Group and requested that definitive evidence be obtained to illustrate the cost-benefits that would justify ongoing spend via this media in the forthcoming financial year. It was noted that Council had agreed that TC should provide a regular report as a standing item at Town Council meetings to illustrate that marketing spend was remaining on track within budgeted parameters.

JH stated that she would produce a breakdown of marketing expenditure which may aid understanding of the various forms of media used to advertise forthcoming events and activities in the Assembly Hall.

**3. Recent Events Review**

TC provided a schedule detailing the financial impact of the shows staged at the Assembly Hall during this financial year to date. It revealed that of the 39 events staged, only 5 had been loss making. Detailed analysis of shows staged during the calendar year to date revealed that all shows had generated positive returns including Forbidden Nights (£5,000); Dire Straits UK (£1,469); Shades of the Sixties (£731); Bourne Again Shadows (£860); and Kast Off Kinks (£715).

Members agreed that the fact that only five shows in the last twelve months had generated a loss in overall terms was particularly meritorious and congratulated TC on the achievement.

**4. Forthcoming Live Events and Financial Exposure**

TC reported that that advanced ticket sales for all forthcoming shows were progressing satisfactorily with the exception of the Super Sonic 70's Legends and the Kate Bush tribute shows. TC added that there were on average 3 shows/month booked in for the remainder of the year though July and August were inevitably quiet months for live entertainment.

## **5. Cinema Update**

TC stated that there had been some encouraging attendances at recent cinema screenings with the Great Showman attracting an audience of c.150 and Paddington 2 attracting an audience of c.60.

TC added that future screenings had been scheduled including The Darkest Hour which, it was perceived, would appeal to a Melksham audience, and Coco which was a child orientated film which would be screened on a Saturday morning. TC explained that as part of the attempts to ensure that the Movies at Melksham offering was made available to a wide demographic, the screening of That Good Night (John Hurt's last film) had been scheduled for a Monday afternoon which, it was hoped, might prove attractive to a more senior audience who were reluctant to venture out at night.

In response to questions about alternative content presentations it was pointed out that National Theatre, Royal Ballet and Royal Shakespeare Company typically dictated that participating cinemas subscribed to a whole season, and that history had shown that not every screening would appeal to a Melksham audience. It was acknowledged that alternative content screenings at the Assembly Hall such as Andre Rieu and Carmen on the Lake had been well received and it was confirmed that opportunities would continue to be taken to take alternative screenings if they were perceived to be commercially viable.

## **6. Councillor Suggestions**

- 6.1 GM asked if a further 'Northern Soul' themed night could be arranged. GM pointed out that the Northern Soul event staged in May 2016 had proved extremely popular and suggested that this popularity might be repeated again some two years on. TC undertook to explore the viability of staging a future Northern Soul themed event.
- 6.2 MS asked how drinks prices in the bar compared with other licensed premises in the locality. TC explained that the Assembly Hall's bar tariff was broadly comparable within the locality and was typically pitched below pub prices and above members' club prices. TC pointed out that the latest stocktaker's report (January 2018) had revealed a GP achieved of 63.7% which was encouraging. GM pointed out that from a user's perspective, based on his knowledge of patrons attending regular Rock n Roll events in the Hall, bar prices were considered to be fair.
- 6.3 MS asked if Cascade drinks, as suppliers of alcoholic products to the Assembly Hall, were as price competitive as other drinks suppliers such as Matthew Clark. TC replied that Matthew Clark were typically much more expensive but that other suppliers, such as Bookers, were used where it was evident that their prices were more advantageous.
- 6.4 AW pointed out that the Town Council had recently committed to reduce its use of single use plastic wherever possible. AW requested that this policy should be actively promoted within the Assembly Hall albeit recognising that current stock should be used up rather than disposed of where it was economically sensible to do so. TC confirmed that the Facilities and Hospitality team were happy to progress this initiative but pointed out that there were occasions where performers' riders sometimes insisted on plastic receptacles being used to minimise the risk of glasses being thrown. In the first instance TC committed to undertake an audit of all single use plastic in the Assembly Hall as a precursor to assessing how the current stock can be disposed of, run down and replaced with more environmentally friendly product.

## **7. Any Other Business**

There were no matters members wished to raise under any other business.