

# **THE TOWN HALL AND TEMPERANCE HALL**

## **BEST VALUE SERVICE REVIEW**

**2002/03**

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# CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL

## SUMMARY OF BEST VALUE SERVICE REVIEW

### THE TOWN HALL AND TEMPERANCE HALL

## THE TOWN HALL

### 1. What is the Town Hall?

The Town Hall, which opened in September 1998, is a building combining an office suite for the Town Clerk and the administration staff, a chamber for Council Meetings and three rooms for community use. The following rooms are available for hire:

- The Council Chamber
- Community Hall
- Lowndes Room
- Members/Staff Room

These rooms replaced the facilities previously available in the Council's former community building known as 'The Malt House'. The Town Council provides this service to satisfy its mission statement, which is 'To improve the quality of life of the residents of Chesham'.

### 2. What is Best Value?

Best Value is driven by the 4 C's. Compare, Consult, Compete and Challenge.

## CHALLENGE

### (i) Why is the Service provided?

The Town Hall was built through monies provided by Sainsbury's to be an administrative centre for the Town Council and to offer local people the opportunity to hire a range of community rooms at a rate deemed to be affordable to the residents of Chesham.

### (ii) What is provided and by whom?

The Town Hall is a two-storey building situated in a 'pay and display' car park (the car park is managed by Chiltern District Council and covered by CCTV). There is an office suite (2 rooms) used by the staff of the Town Council and four rooms suitable for hire by members of the public, local groups, businesses, etc. There are cloakrooms on both floors including disabled facilities, a full sized kitchen on the ground floor and stairway and lift to the first floor. A loop system is available at the reception for the hard of hearing.

The building is modern and less than five years old and provides an excellent opportunity to serve the local people who require to hire a room(s).

Apart from Catlings Car Park (59 spaces), nearby are Star Yard (153 spaces) and Water Meadow (179 spaces) Car Parks.

As the staff of the Town Council are based in the Town Hall, they are therefore in an excellent position to take telephone enquiries and to advise and show around personal callers of the facilities available. A diary for recording bookings is held in the General Office of the Town Council.

The caretaking staff support bookings by providing the hirers' requirements in terms of layout of furniture, the OHP, screen, flipchart, crockery, cutlery, etc. They also clean all parts of the premises to a high standard to offer a pleasant visit for hirers.

At the present time there are two caretakers with the duties split between daytime and evenings/weekends and both posts are part time. This is not a full cover as the evening caretaker is only employed to lock up following the last booking.

The balance at present between numbers of lettings and the ability to service them is at a good level and to increase the hirings would require more caretaking/cleaning time.

The four rooms available for hire are as follows:

- Council Chamber – (suitable for board meetings 25-30 people), seminars/public meetings (up to 100 people). Supporting refreshment facility is available in the adjacent Members/Staff room.

The Council Chamber is also licensed to hold civil marriages every other Saturday. The Members/Staff room adjacent is used as an office for the Registrar.

- Lowndes Room – used for parties/receptions, meetings, classes and holds approximately 50-60 people. Has a small, integral kitchen.
- Members/Staff Room – a small room that is suitable for one-to-one interviews or up to 6/7 people. Has tea/coffee making facility.
- Community Hall – large uncarpeted room suitable for parties/receptions, meetings, classes (i.e. Bridge/Dancing), etc. Up to 80 people seated at tables, or 120 people seated theatre style.

Charges are hourly and payments are currently accepted by cash or cheque only. Invoices are sent on request.

The running of the Town Hall is also supported by the Parks & Premises Section which provides manpower to:

- place posters for hirers on the community notice boards
- small repairs, e.g. leaking radiator
- collection and transportation of goods.

"*How Can We Serve You Better*" forms are available in the foyer for visitors to comment / complain / compliment / ask a question. Any questions are answered if a name and address is included, but forms can be submitted anonymously.

We are fortunate to receive many compliments regarding the facilities used by hirers and any criticisms or comments are corrected where possible, for example a request for contact details of keyholders to be printed in larger type for the visually impaired and choice of chairs to suit hirers' colour scheme, on request.

There is a weakness in the service whereby there is no contact on the premises once the office area is closed. There is no duty caretaker to take over outside of office hours, except to lock up at the end of the latest booking. At the weekends there is some cover but only dependent upon the timing of bookings or if cleaning is taking place.

Advertising has always been limited and usually takes the form of an advertisement in the Town Guide and/or Town Talk together with posters in our notice boards at the Town Hall and Station Road and leaflets on display in the foyer.

### **(iii) Alternative Provider**

If the facility was not provided in-house difficulties would arise. An agent or alternative company to provide an equal service would need:

- A member of staff on site to advise and show around personal visitors wishing to view the rooms and a telephone and/or computer for taking bookings by telephone or on-line.

*Enquiries are not made on any recognisable regular basis, therefore a member of staff would need alternative occupation on the premises for part of the time.*

- Office space.

*Desk space in the General Office could be rented together with support services of photocopier, fax, telephone, etc.*

- Caretaking/cleaning service.

*The Town Council's staff could be approached for assistance, space rented for equipment and supplies, or the use of outside contractors.*

Letters have been sent to Chiltern Leisure Trust and the White Hill Centre inviting them to comment on whether they would be interested in managing the Town Hall including the hiring out of the rooms and servicing the bookings, as an alternative to the Town Council.

**The Chief Executive of Chiltern Leisure Trust has responded positively and a meeting to discuss the possibilities will be taking place shortly.**

#### **(iv) Service Provision in the Future**

If there is still a need to provide rooms for hire for local people in the future, there is no reason why this cannot continue to be made available.

#### **(v) Alternative Use**

If the service of hiring of rooms is receiving little support and is deemed no longer required there is scope for converting some space to office use and offering for rent. To support this, valuations have been carried out by a local estate agent to assess the potential of letting the rooms on a commercial basis and his report is **appended** to this review.

This would obviously have a high initial cost, requiring:

- investigation of planning requirements
- division of the present rooms
- marketing and advertising the space
- obtaining tenants
- drawing up leases, etc.

The Community Hall, Lowndes Room and Members/Staff Room could all be converted into office space and rented out, subject to compliance with any planning or fire service requirements, possibly with support from the Town Council staff/facilities in terms of use of kitchen, photocopier, fax, messages, cleaning, etc.

The Council Chamber will need to be retained for Council Meetings and civil marriages but could still be hired out when not otherwise in use.

The loss of the Community Hall and Lowndes Room would no longer allow a follow through booking for wedding receptions for couples marrying on the premises.

#### **(vi) External Challengers**

Arts Consultants, Jacky Scott and Roy Nevitt, carried out a challenge to the Town Council's best value service review of the community buildings based on desk research using documents present by the Town Council.

#### **(a) Usage**

The challengers confirmed that the average size of group attending was 30 – 50 persons, with the majority using the Community Hall (capacity 120) and Lowndes Room (capacity 60) being used consistently across the entire range of community services.

Also that the User Survey demonstrates that facilities are good (97% of users viewed them as excellent or very good); the community clearly values this as a local utility (19.17% chose it because it was close to home/easy to get to) and the majority of booking enquiries are made by personal visit, demonstrating accessibility. The location is clearly one of the Town Hall's strengths.

#### **(b) Accounting**

The Challengers questioned the principles of the way costs are apportioned between the civic functions and the lettings as they had not been separated.

### **ACTIONS AND TIMESCALES**

- 1. Full time caretaking is not currently considered cost-effective and recruiting for the unsocial hours has also proven difficult. Provision of an on-site caretaker at all times which would assist with the security of the building as well as provide a contact for hirers or, in fact, to deal with evening and weekend enquiries regarding hire of the rooms to be considered.*

**Action - to produce a cost / benefit analysis of employing a full time caretaker in the next twelve months to work at the Town Hall and The Elgiva.**

The overall situation will be monitored in conjunction with increasing the hirings to maximum capacity over the next twelve months.

II. *Consideration to be given to an on-line booking facility and a computerised diary system.*

**Action - to be installed within three years if considered financially viable.**

The consideration of other methods of payment to include credit/debit cards if desirable within five years time, following consultation with visitors to establish need.

III. *Hirer facilities need to be identified for improvements to the Town Hall (and Elgiva) from any capital available in the future, should a decision be taken to realise the capital value of the Temperance Hall.*

**Action - 'Wish list' to be compiled in six months.**

IV. *The question was put by the External Challengers as to other services/facilities that could be offered and to generate income, i.e. internet café, photocopying service. An internet café would clearly require considerable funding to provide and service and a photocopying service already exists but not promoted because it would be too interruptive of the daily office duties as the photocopier is in the general office and not accessible for the public to serve themselves.*

**Action - No action be taken at the present time.**

V. *We will be reviewing the marketing of the premises for the future but this is pending a decision on the future of the Temperance Hall. If the Temperance Hall was to be sold the lettings could be split between the Town Hall and the Elgiva depending upon their types.*

**Action - Further consideration after the Temperance Hall lease has been determined by October 2004.**

Examination over the next twelve months will be given to how the two categories of civic functions and Town Hall lettings can be split. Also clarity will be given in the financial reports to show discounts offered to groups/businesses.

## COMPARE

Comparisons with the Town Hall and five local venues offering the same or similar service, in terms of types of rooms available, costs to the hirer and associated servicing of the lettings has taken place.

This indicated that most other venues in the survey had a lower hourly rate and two offered a staffed bar. The Town Council is unable to offer a permanent bar but is happy to permit hirers to book outside bars to run a service for them, subject to their holding the appropriate licence. The Town Council's charging may be influenced by the provision of a more modern and well appointed building.

(i) **Twenty seven surveys were returned from Councils with a similar sized venue, which resulted as follows:**

<b>Receiving Bookings</b>	All had the highest percentage of hirers booking by telephone or personal visit
<b>Recording bookings</b>	All used a hand-written diary
<b>Payment of bookings</b>	In general all Councils handled payment both in advance and in arrears.
<b>Invoiced bookings</b>	Only Chesham Town Council did not invoice <u>all</u> bookings
<b>Cancellation Fee</b>	Majority charge a fee of varying percentage
<b>Provisional Bookings</b>	3 Councils set a specific limit, 1 dependent upon circumstance and Chesham holds bookings indefinitely unless required by another customer

(ii) **Types and Numbers of Bookings**

Detailed below is a sample of usage of the four rooms available for hire:

Dancing, aerobics, keep fit, bridge club, club meetings (W.I. etc), celebration parties, jumble sales, Christmas bazaars, receptions, seminars, training days, slimming clubs, ante-natal classes, child clinics, business meetings, Council meetings, marriage ceremonies, teaching English classes, beetle drives, wine tasting, polling station, beer festival, psychic fayre, lacemaking class, quiz night.

A total of 1,415 bookings have taken place covering all the above categories during the year 2002/03.

### Action Plan

Comparisons between other Local Authorities and venues in and around the town will be monitored in the future in order to fulfill the Council's Mission Statement "*to improve the quality and life of the residents of Chesham*".

## CONSULTATION

### (i) Survey

The results of the Town Hall users' surveys indicate as follows:

•	<b>Use in previous 12 months</b>	Once – over 50.72% ; 5 or more – 25.64%
•	<b>Highest use</b>	Lowndes Room 44.71%
•	<b>Importance of having rooms to hire at the Town Hall</b>	Very important – 42.03% ; unimportant – 1.44%
•	<b>Influence of choice</b>	Near and easy access – 19.1% Cost – 16.17% Ease of booking – 15.79% Quality of service – 13.53%
•	<b>Rate of overall facilities</b>	Excellent – 42.03% Very Good – 55.07% Fair – 2.90% Poor – 0.00%
•	<b>Average ratings where 1 = Excellent and 5 = Poor</b>	Helpfulness of staff - 1.34 Cleanliness - 1.38 Toilets - 1.49 Admin & booking process - 1.58 Presentation of room - 1.67 Facilities for the disabled - 1.75 Car parking facilities - 1.76 Comfort - 1.76 Kitchen facilities - 1.84 Cost of hire - 2.07
•	<b>Charging</b>	About right - 54.29% Good value - 32.86% Too expensive - 12.85% Too low - 0.00%
•	<b>Types of function</b>	Social / party - 26.39% Business meeting - 19.44% Conference / seminar - 16.67% Other - 15.28% Group activity (dancing/bridge) - 13.89% Fundraising event - 8.33%
•	<b>Nos. attending</b>	up to 10 17.39% 10 – 30 37.68% 30 – 50 28.99% 50 – 100 5.80%

		Over 100	10.14%
•	<b>Used by Chesham residents</b>	62.32%	
•	<b>Non Chesham residents</b>	37.68%	

**(ii) Users' Meeting**

A meeting took place on 11 September 2002 of Town Hall users. Two user representatives were invited to join the Panel but were unable to accept, and 144 hirers were invited to attend the meeting. Five Councillors attended together with six users of the Town Hall.

A copy of the notes of the Users Meeting is **appended** to this review.

**Action Plan**

To investigate a more pro-active approach by

- undertake greater research to find out who uses the facilities now and reasons why non-users do not within 2003/04;
- to issue an exit survey for all users in order to monitor requirements and satisfaction levels within twelve months;  
**sample appended**
- considering a 'Town Hall Open Day' (possibly on a Saturday afternoon) during 2003/04.

## COMPETE

### (i) Summary

Competition is limited as there are no premises of like size and offering like facilities. Other local premises are run on a charitable or non profit making basis and therefore the element of competition would be questionable.

There are no hotels and only four bed and breakfast guest houses in the area to attract people from a distance to use the venue and stay overnight.

#### **ACTION PLAN**

To look at the Town Hall's marketing strategy over the next twelve months and to continue benchmarking with the 41 Group.

To work with the District Council's Marketing Manager to promote the Town Hall as the premier venue for general hirings in 2003/04.

### **SUMMARY**

The Best Value Review Service Plan for the Town Hall has shown a high public satisfaction rating for the facility and the building is clearly used by all sections of the community. That is not to say improvements cannot be made as we strive for year on year continuous enhancement to the service. Key to the service will be competing with the Chiltern Leisure Trust to operate the service. Officers are confident in their ability in running the service more efficiently and effectively than outside operators and look forward to the challenge of competition. As we prepare for this, we are aware of our need to apportion costs between the hirings and the civic function as highlighted by the External Consultants.

# **THE TEMPERANCE HALL**

## **1. Definition of Service**

The Temperance Hall, built in 1852, was conveyed to the Chesham Urban District Council in 1961 and transferred to the Chesham Town Council on 1 April 1974 under the Provisions of the Local Government Act 1972.

Originally leased to the Chesham Old People's Welfare Committee in 1968, the Town Council subsequently leased the building in 1983 to the Temperance Hall Trustees for 21 years. The Trustees have improved the building's fabric, both internally and externally, and have built a new foyer, toilets, including a disabled toilet, and special roof trusses. The Trustees also plan further improvements to the building, including the installation of air-conditioning, relay felt roof, flooring and docking doors. The current lease expires on 17 October 2004.

## **2. What is the Service?**

The Temperance Hall is a two-storey building next to Lowndes Park. There is room for parking three vehicles by the side of the building. The Hall is accessible on foot from Church Street and provides the following rooms:

### Ground Floor

- Community Hall with raised stage and rear storage area
- kitchen
- male and female w.c. facilities
- side passage / storage area
- office (used for chiropody)
- disabled w.c.

### First Floor

- large storage space
- changing room
- single w.c.

## **3. What are the specific aims of the service?**

The specific aims of the service within the community are:

- (i) to provide a high standard, cost-effective service that helps to meet the needs and wishes of the residents;
- (ii) to ensure high quality social, recreational and cultural facilities are made available to all sections of the community.

**4. How is the service delivered?**

The Temperance Hall Trustees handle all applications for hire of the building in accordance with the terms of the lease.

**5. What does the service consist of?**

The Temperance Hall, referred to by the Temperance Hall Trustees as "The Little Theatre by the Park" is a small community theatre with a seating capacity of 90. Used predominantly by the Chesham Bois Catholic Players, it is also made available to other local theatre companies.

**6. Regular users of the venue**

In addition to the Chesham Bois Catholic Players, the Temperance Hall is used by the following:

- Mother and Toddler Music Group
- "Spirit Combat" two evenings per week
- Maggie Monk School of Dance
- Wedding receptions / parties
- Local amateur groups including Chesham Music Theatre Co. and Bootleg Theatre.

**7. Cost and Unit Data**

The Trustees are responsible for all outgoings, including external repairs and maintenance.

The current rent payable by the Trustees to the Town Council is £100. The Council's sole responsibility is to insure the building. This is currently an annual premium is £300 but the Trustees have offered to pay for the insurance themselves.

## CHALLENGE

The decision to lease out the Temperance Hall to the Trustees was taken in the 1980s and a 21 year lease was signed between the Town Council and the Trustees. This lease is due to expire in October 2004.

The 'challenge' element is fundamental to the future to the Temperance Hall. Members need to decide in the financial year 2003/04 whether the facility is required and, if so, whether the lease should be renewed to the Trustees.

The External Consultants, who undertook the Community Buildings Best Value Review, have considered the Temperance Hall and its findings are appended to this review. The conclusions are not positive though this is to some degree due to the lack of information supplied by the Trustees. While accepting that '*Chesham Town Council's financial exposure through this building is very modest*', the Consultants highlight '*the building has a capital value on which very little return is being realised*'. A valuation undertaken in 2002 placed a value figure of **£400,000** for the property as an unencumbered freehold interest with full vacant possession and in view of current condition. The figure quoted for the sale of its freehold in the open market with permission for an alternative (e.g. residential) use would be around **£300,000**.

Members face the decision therefore of whether to renew the lease, take the facility back 'in-house' to let out or sell the building to re-invest in other Council facilities. If the latter option is taken, the Consultants emphasise that '*the interests of the present users would need to be protected*'

It should be stated that over the years the Trustees have invested a considerable sum of its finances into capital improvements at no cost to the Council. As a not for profit organisation running a Council facility, it is similar in concept to the Chess Valley Sports and Leisure Association managing the Swimming Pool and outdoor football pitches on behalf of the Council. Members may decide that continuing to use the Trust as operating managers is the most prudent way forward since it has been proved that the Trust has been able to service all capital improvements itself without recourse to public subsidy. It is recommended however that any lease is re-negotiated so the Council is represented on the Board of Trustees and that audited accounts are in future submitted to the Council.

Alternatively the Council could consider 'outsourcing' the management of the facility to another organisation. The Chiltern Leisure Trust has indicated that it would be interested in managing the Town Hall so could be invited to tender for the operation of the Temperance Hall.

## CONSULTATION

A residents survey conducted in 2000, of which 1,452 replies were received, showed the following results for the Temperance Hall as set out below:

	Every week	2-4 times a month	Less than once/month	Never	Not Answered	
<b>FREQUENCY OF VISITS</b>	2.0%	0.9%	10.7%	64.6%	21.8%	
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Bad	Not answered
<b>FACILITIES PROVIDED</b>	0.8%	7.10%	8.8%	2.10%	0.3 %	80.8%

The consultation exercise suggests a general lack of public awareness in regard to the facility. The Consultants describe the public's perception as '*mediocre*'. Clearly if Members decide to extend the lease to the Trustees, the facility needs to be aggressively marketed.

In October 2002, a meeting was held by the Town Council to receive views from the Temperance Hall Users' on the facility. (The minutes of the meeting are **appended**). The users praised the facility and its principal benefits were listed as intimacy and affordable hire prices. Users were of the view that, while the Elgiva had excellent facilities, it was too expensive for small theatre and other groups to hire. It was also noted that the kitchen facilities were deemed superior to those of the Town Hall.

## **COMPARE**

The issue of comparing can only be considered after determination of the lease

## **COMPETE**

The issue of competing can only be considered after determination of the lease

### **ACTION PLAN**

- **For Members to determine the future of the building by the end of 2003.**
- **Investigate the feasibility of accommodating existing Temperance Hall users elsewhere, including possible alternative facilities close to the Elgiva (see Elgiva Best Value Review).**
- **If the building is to be maintained by the Town Council, to devise a hiring and marketing strategy for the facility for the next five years including the option to contract the facility out to comply with Best Value requirements. By the end of March 2004**
- **If the Temperance Hall Trustees are given permission to continue managing the facility, to renegotiate the lease to ensure Town Council is represented on the Board and its financial dealings are reported back to this Council. By October 2004.**

### **SUMMARY**

The future of the Temperance Hall depends entirely on decisions concerning the lease due to expire in October 2004. The issues arising from the 'compete' and 'challenge' sections cannot be considered in detail until the lease is resolved. Should the Town Council decide to allow the current Trustees to continue to manage the facility, it is imperative that in future full sets of audited accounts are submitted and performance targets set for future monitoring in accordance with Best Value.

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