

## FOR PUBLICATION

### ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INFORMATION AND BOOKING HUB (L000)

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MEETING:	COUNCIL
DATE:	30 JULY 2014
REPORT BY:	CULTURAL and VISITOR SERVICES MANAGER
WARD:	ALL
COMMUNITY ASSEMBLY:	ALL
KEY DECISION REFERENCE:	428

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#### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To recommend for approval the establishment of a hub combining the Theatres Box Office, Visitor Information Service, Arts Development, events, venue hire and promotions for Cultural and Visitor Services, located at the Visitor Information Centre.
- 1.2 To indentify the Council's funding for the capital works required for the development of a combined information and booking hub.

#### **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the creation of a hub combining the Theatres Box Office, Visitor Information Service, Arts Development, events, venue hire and promotions for Cultural and Visitor Services, located at the Visitor Information Centre, is approved.
- 2.2 That the Cabinet recommends the Council to approve:
  - 2.2.1 The inclusion of the development of a combined information and booking hub in the Capital Programme.
  - 2.2.2 That £23,000 from the Council's Invest to Save Fund is allocated for the necessary works to the Visitor Information Centre.

### 3.0 **BACKGROUND**

3.1 Although the net cost of operating the Pomegranate Theatre and Winding Wheel has reduced by £156,716 since 2011/12, this service operated with a deficit of £830,674 in 2013/14. Given the Council's current financial challenges, the cost of the service needs to be reduced further, if its future is to be sustainable. One of the key aims of the Corporate Plan is to find new ways to deliver services that improve efficiency, save money and generate income, whilst delivering a quality service.

3.2 Currently the Council is operating three buildings within 250 metres of each other: the Visitor Information Centre, the Winding Wheel and the Pomegranate Theatre. These buildings are open to the public, for the sale of tickets, the making of bookings and the provision of information, Monday to Friday during the day, with the Visitor Information Centre and Pomegranate Theatre also open on Saturdays.

#### 3.3 **Visitor Information Centre**

The public desk at the Visitor Information Centre currently has 4 workstations. The staff at the Centre provide a range of services, including booking of seats for Chesterfield Theatres, National Express ticketing, sale of event tickets, provision of local, regional and national information, sale of gifts and souvenirs, etc. This is normally operated by 2 members of staff, with the ability to call on a third member of staff at busy times. The downstairs back office is used by the Tourism, Museums & Events Manager, the Tourist Information Supervisor and one additional member of staff. All the administration for the centre takes place in this office, including cash reconciliation, data inputting and the maintenance of the tourism website. The upstairs office is used by the Cultural & Visitor Services Manager, with an adjoining store room.

#### 3.4 **Pomegranate Theatre**

The Box Office currently has two workstations on the counter and provides a booking service for both the Pomegranate Theatre and the Winding Wheel. The Box Office is normally operated by two members of staff in the morning and one in the afternoon and evening. At busy times (eg pantomime season and for two weeks after a new brochure launches), the Box Office is run by two members of staff throughout the opening period. Occasionally,

Sunday opening is required, particularly for sale of tickets on the door. The downstairs back offices are used by a member of the support services staff for cash reconciliation and the Box Office Co-ordinator for ticket sales during peak booking periods, group bookings and for updating the ticketing system. In addition the staff carry out other administration work. The upstairs offices in the adjoining Caretaker's House, are used by the Marketing and Business Development Manager, the Marketing Assistant and the Arts Officer.

### 3.5 **The Winding Wheel**

The staff in the administrative office provide a reception service for hiring the Venues (Winding Wheel, Pomegranate Theatre, Assembly Rooms and Hasland Village Hall). They also arrange room viewings, take bookings through the Artifax system, receive payments and prepare contracts. The staff also provide administrative support for the Theatres. This office also acts as the Box Office for the sale of tickets on the door for performances taking place in the Winding Wheel.

3.6 There are significant costs in opening all these facilities – both staff and utility costs. With the requirement to reduce the subsidy for the Venues and the Visitor Information Centre, it is proposed to rationalise the operation of the buildings to achieve savings, and improve the level of customer service.

3.7 The report will be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 29 July 2014 and its decision will be reported to Council.

## 4.0 **PROPOSAL**

4.1 In order to rationalise the operation, it is proposed that the Visitor Information Centre, in addition to continuing to deliver a tourist information service, becomes the main hub for all bookings for the Pomegranate Theatre, Winding Wheel, Market Hall Assembly Rooms and Hasland Village Hall. The building has the capacity to accommodate both the ICT requirements and the necessary office space. In addition it is centrally located and fully accessible for both members of the public and staff.

4.2 It is proposed that the four workstations at the Visitor Information Centre remain on the public desk but that one is allocated as a dedicated box office workstation, one is multifunctional for venue

hire, box office and general visitor information. The remaining two workstations will be dedicated to visitor information, but can also operate the box office booking system at peak times. The downstairs back office at the Information Centre will increase from three to five workstations and will accommodate the information staff, as well as the staff who provide administrative support from the venues.

- 4.3 In addition, it is proposed that the upstairs office is extended into the adjacent store room and it will then have the capacity for six workstations and will accommodate the Tourism, Museums & Events Manager, the Events & Promotions Officer, as well as the Venues Marketing and Business Development Manager, the Marketing Assistant, the Arts Officer and the Box Office Co-ordinator. A draft plan of the proposed layout is attached in Appendix A.
- 4.4 The layout of this office space and furniture used will be in accordance with the Council's developing policy on the Great Place Great Service model office
- 4.5 The proposed relocation of the Box Office, administration and marketing staff, from the Pomegranate Theatre and Winding Wheel, will allow both buildings to be closed to the public, except when there is a performance and/or an event scheduled. When a performance does take place at either venue a box office would still need to be open, 1½ hours prior to the start time, for door sales.
- 4.6 To facilitate the development of the proposed hub some structural work will be required in the upstairs office, including the removal of a partition wall and the installation of additional lighting and heating. Additional ICT would also need to be installed and the telephone system would need to be upgraded. Building Control, Kier and arvato have all been consulted on the proposed alterations and have indicated that there are no obvious barriers to the implementation of the proposed work.
- 4.7 It is anticipated that, if approved, the required work would take place in August/September 2014 and that Venues staff will move into the Information Centre in October/November 2014.

## 5.0 **BENEFITS**

- 5.1 One of the key outcomes of this proposal will be that the public will receive an improved customer service as there will be a pool of staff to handle the fluctuating demands for information, bookings and tickets.
- 5.2 Initially, it is anticipated that all the public facing and support staff within the Centre would retain their substantive roles, but the aim would be that, over time, an integrated team would develop where all staff could provide every aspect of the service making the service more resilient.
- 5.3 Combining staff responsible for the promotion of town centre events and entertainment in one location, will present opportunities for joint working, better co-ordination and collaboration, and, again, will help staff handle deadlines, peak workloads, etc in a managed way.
- 5.4 Co-locating the staff at the Information Centre and closing the Winding Wheel and Pomegranate Theatre buildings, when not in use, will result in savings due to a reduction in staff time and overheads. At this stage, it is difficult to be accurate but anticipated savings on staff costs should be approximately £7,000, with an additional saving on utility bills.
- 5.5 When the Programming Policy of the Winding Wheel and Pomegranate Theatre is reviewed by Members later in the year, there may be opportunities to make further savings on the Venues' overheads.

## 6.0 HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 As proposed in paragraph 5 of this report, all the public facing and support staff from both the Venues and the Visitor Information Centre will retain their substantive roles, but the aim would be that, over time, an integrated team would be developed where all staff could provide every aspect of the service, making it more resilient.
- 6.2 To achieve the savings resulting from the co-location there will be a reduction in the overall number of staff hours worked. This should not, however, result in any redundancies as there is currently a vacancy for a Tourist Information Assistant and there are a number of staff who are on variable hours contracts and their hours would be reduced accordingly.

## 7.0 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Both the staff and the unions have been consulted on the proposal to develop a bookings and information hub based at the Visitor Information Centre. The first staff meeting was held on 25 April 2014 when the rationale behind the proposal and the benefits to the service were explained. A consultation document was subsequently circulated to all staff and union representatives and comments were invited by 9 May 2014.
- 7.2 A number of responses were received from the staff and these can be summarised as follows:
- The Information Centre is not the most suitable building for the information and booking hub.
  - The business case is not robust enough, a potential saving of £7,000 per annum did not warrant the proposed expenditure.
  - Insufficient space to accommodate the number of staff who would be based in the building.
  - Concerns about working in an open plan office with relation to confidentiality and noise.
  - General operational issues such as security, storage space, post, deliveries, etc.
  - The perception that the Pomegranate Theatre and Winding Wheel were closed for business.
- 7.3 A joint response was also received from UNISON and GMB and their response can be summarised as follows:

- Unconvincing business case for change.
- Adversely affecting community groups such as the Theatre Friends, who may not be able to access the theatre during the day.
- Transfer of staff will lead to further disruption and lower staff morale.
- Limited desk space and a claustrophobic atmosphere.
- Better marketing of the services and programme would result in more income, which would reduce the subsidy, negating the need for the establishment of a hub.
- Safety concerns and the need to comply with regulation 10 of the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992.
- Co-location will result in the worsening of communications between operational and office staff when located in different buildings.
- Need assurances that jobs will be protected.

7.4 Following on from this, individual meetings were held with the staff who submitted comments and the issues raised were discussed and explanations given. Staff were also advised that some of the operational issues raised needed to be addressed as a team, so that processes and procedures could to be reviewed and solutions found.

7.5 Further meetings took place with staff and unions on both 20 and 21 May 2014 when some of the issues raised were addressed and answers given, where known. Where there was no immediate answer/solution available, it was agreed that these would have to be dealt with collectively as a team. A document responding to the comments received as part of the consultation process was circulated to all staff and union representatives.

7.6 A number of staff implementation groups have now been set up to address outstanding concerns and to start to plan the proposed move towards the development of an information and booking hub at the Visitor Information Centre. These groups cover areas such as storage, box office systems, operations and administration.

7.7 A written response from the unions has subsequently been received, which stated that:

*UNISON has not agreed to these proposals which will no doubt affect staff and users of the venues. Unfortunately, our concerns seem to have been dismissed by management outright. Our belief is simple;*

*invest in the venues for conferencing and younger audiences, and move with the times to grow income rather than cutting staff and services. It is important to stress, however, that the venues are open for business, with both buildings currently undergoing major capital investment works, and with investments not being paid back for many years we can expect CBC is committed to keeping the venues operational for many years to come.*

## **8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 As stated earlier in the report, if approval is given for the establishment of an information and booking hub, based at the Visitor Information Centre, alterations need to be carried out, particularly to the first floor office space. In addition the ICT and telephone systems will need to be upgraded to accommodate the increase in the number of staff who will be operational in the building and to ensure that the quality of the service provided to the public is maintained at a high level.
- 8.2 Discussions have taken place with Building Control to ensure that the proposed alterations to the building comply with all health and safety and fire regulations. Arvato has assessed the future ICT and telephone requirements of the service and have estimated that they will cost £8,000. Kier has drawn up some draft plans for the office spaces, to ensure that they can accommodate the required number of staff, and have estimated that the necessary works would cost £13,000, giving a total cost of £21,000. In addition, a new safe would be required at an estimated cost of £2,000.
- 8.3 It is anticipated that delivering the booking and information service from a single location will result in savings in staff costs of £7,000 per annum and that there will be additional savings on utility costs. If Members agree to the establishment of a single information and booking hub, it is proposed that the cost of the necessary alterations (estimated to be £23,000) could be financed from the Council's Invest to Save Fund and will be paid back within four years.
- 8.4 It should be noted that all prices quoted are estimates and, if the establishment of a single hub is approved, all works and purchases would be subject to the Council's procurement procedures.



## 9.0 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 A preliminary EIA has been carried out on the proposed development of a single information and booking hub based at the Visitor Information Centre and, because there are no negative impacts on any of the equality groups, a full EIA is not necessary.

## 10.0 RISK MANAGEMENT

10.1 There are a number of risks identified with the proposed recommendations.

10.2 The table below outlines a number of risks for consideration.

Description of the Risk	Impact	Likelihood	Mitigating Action
Low staff morale and resistance to the relocation	High	Likely	Consult with staff and unions, keep staff engaged in the process and communicate the need for change.
Public unhappy with proposed hub	Medium	Possible	Make sure change is communicated to public well in advance. Provide quality service. Alternative online options available.
Visitor Information Centre not fit for purpose	High	Unlikely	Consulted with Building Control, Kier and arvato.
Securing funding for the cost of alterations	High	Possible	Business case made, showing savings.
Savings not achieved	Medium	Possible	Monitor staffing levels.

## 11.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED

11.1 There is the option of no change, leaving the booking and information service to be delivered over three separate locations.

This would not, however, address the challenges of reducing the Council's subsidy and securing a sustainable future for the Service.

- 11.2 Whilst the information and booking hub could be located in other buildings, the Visitor Information Centre is centrally located, fully accessible to both staff and members of the public and has both the ICT and office capacity to accommodate a centralised service.

## 12.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 12.1 That the creation of a hub combining the Theatres Box Office, Visitor Information Service, Arts Development, events, venue hire and promotions for Cultural and Visitor Services, located at the Visitor Information Centre, is approved.

- 12.2 That the Cabinet recommends the Council to approve:

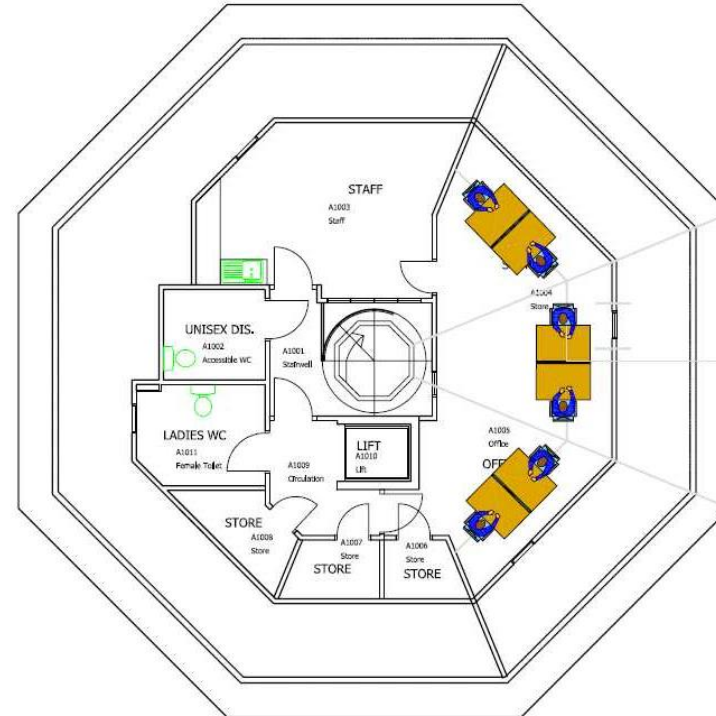
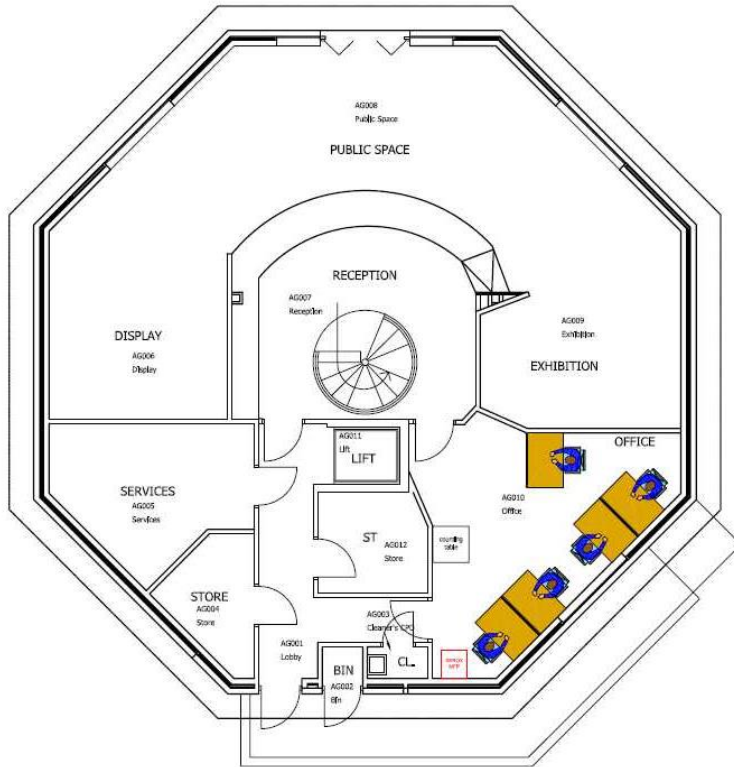
12.2.1 The inclusion of the development of a combined information and booking hub in the Capital Programme.

12.2.2 That £23,000 from the Council's Invest to Save Fund is allocated for the necessary works to the Visitor Information Centre.

## 13.0 **REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 13.1 To establish a combined booking and information hub, based at the Visitor Information Centre, which will reduce the costs of service delivery and retain a quality service to the public.

You can get more information about this report from Bernadette Wainwright (Tel: 01246 345779)



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