

IVYBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of The Watermark Committee meeting held at The Town Hall on Tuesday 27 September 2022 at 6 pm

Present: Cllr Dredge (In the Chair)
Cllr A Rea
Cllr K Reville

In Attendance: Mr J Parsons (Town Clerk)
Mrs J Gilbert (Assistant Town Clerk)

WM22/13 **APOLOGIES:** Apologies were received from Cllr Munro and Cllr Parsons.

WM22/14 **INTERESTS TO BE DECLARED:** No interests were declared.

WM22/15 **TRADING INFORMATION:** Members considered the income and expenditure information for month 5 of 2022-23 (report previously circulated).

Cllr Dredge informed Members that achieving this year's budget was going to be even more problematic than the previous year.

The Town Clerk advised that previously Information Centre purchases were mainly done on sale or return and there were fewer lines now, but he would liaise with the Senior Finance Officer of the value of a monthly stock check.

Room hire is currently below budget. The Town Clerk advised that Barclays is proving popular and may increase visits from every other Thursday to weekly.

Cinema net result is in line with the budget, however it can be affected by advanced ticket purchases.

A break-even situation is anticipated from live artists. The Town Clerk advised that the better-known artists are expensive and profits are marginal. The previous Watermark Manager had suggested looking at cheaper events with a good attendance draw.

The catering has made a loss. Food costs are rocketing and people's ability to spend is going down. The Catering Manager looks at ways of improving sales and provides specials every week. Prices usually increase every April, but they were increased mid-year and may increase again before Christmas.

The bar is dependent on other functions and the profit is satisfactory as a result to date.

The Watermark buildings will receive the bulk of its income in month 12 and to date is in line with the budget. The Chair advised that £85k will need to be made to break even but predicted that this will not happen.

The Town Clerk advised that The Watermark is not eligible for grants and it is not clear what the impact of the energy price cap will be. The Town Council's current supplier is managed through Kent County Council and the unit price is currently 15.9p which is very low. He predicted that the energy costs are likely to go up by a third. Cllr Dredge advised that there are salary savings at the moment due to there being no manager. The Town Clerk confirmed that the Watermark is currently being run by a management team of four, and when down by one person the 25% reduction has an impact. However, the team would rather wait for the right person to be appointed. The recent recruitment process did not provide a sufficient quantity of suitable applicants to compare against therefore the process is being re-evaluated.

As there is a deficit of £24k Cllr Reville enquired if there are any Reserves. The Town Clerk confirmed that the Town Council's Reserves top this up. The Chair advised that the building is getting older with more maintenance needed as a consequence. The Town Clerk highlighted that the coffee machine has just been replaced after fourteen years at a cost of £4.5k. He reminded Members that the Coffee Shop is not only there to provide an income, but also as a community facility where the staff provide a social role as part of their work.

It was **RESOLVED** to receive the trading information.

WM22/16

TOWN CLERK REPORT: The Committee considered the Town Clerk's report (copy previously circulated). The Town Clerk informed Members that maintenance is still ongoing following recent issues with the lift and broken window. He had obtained a second opinion for the original lift quote of £2,800 which turned out to be a loose cable, thus making a saving of over £2k. Some very positive news is that the lights are undergoing an upgrade to LED. This will save on contractors required to change bulbs each time they fail, and a third will be saved in energy costs. The work is being done by a local contractor and will take a maximum of six weeks with disruption kept to a minimum.

The Watermark has been busy with events including a breakfast meeting for 150 people, a few weddings and some lovely feedback was received following a 60th birthday party. The Chair confirmed that the wake he had recently held there had been excellent, and he thanked the Assistant Town Clerk and her colleagues for organising this.

Cllr Rea enquired if the events facility is advertised. The Town Clerk responded that people tend to compare The Watermark to village halls and find it too expensive, however regulars who know The Watermark realise the good value on offer as they do everything.

Cllr Reville enquired about the anti-social behaviour mentioned in the report. The Town Clerk confirmed that this had quietened down, but had been very unpleasant for staff. They encourage people to use the Coffee Shop area for free in the evenings in order to have an adult presence to hopefully deter this.

The Town Clerk advised that there had been a problem with the satellite for cinema and live cinema events had to be cancelled, and then a comedy gig was cancelled due to the death of the Queen. This created a lot of work for the team to reorganise these events.

Cllr Reville enquired about the regular breakfast meetings that used to be held. The Chair replied that these had not started again after the pandemic. The Town Clerk added that 2020-21, the first year after Covid was the most challenging. The Covid grants have now dried up and customers are slow to come back. Cllr Dredge enquired if the number of coffees sold can be shown. The Town Clerk confirmed that he could provide this data, and even show the types of coffees sold if he would like to see this information.

The Town Clerk advised that the current situation is challenging, however the staff are coping until a suitable manager can be found. They manage bookings to accommodate staffing levels and are spreading events across the week. If they had a manager they could manage additional larger events.

Cllr Rea stated that the biggest cost appears to be Buildings. If the building is deteriorating year on year that is a concern. The Town Clerk advised that for the previous two years the building was shut down and no maintenance was required, and grants went into the buildings central cost. Everyone works to minimise costs, and only necessary maintenance for safety reasons is done. The exterior building could do with being cleaned however this is not currently considered essential. The Library are contractually obliged to pay around 40% of building costs and pay a management fee.

It was **RESOLVED** to

- (i) note and receive the report;
- (ii) to provide data on the quantity and types of coffee sold.

The meeting closed at 6.40pm.

Signed: Dated:
Chair