

Town Clerk's Report to The Watermark Committee

May 2021

Financial results 2020-2021

The end of year results reflects the benefits of the grants and flexibility of all concerned and represents an excellent result in such a crisis period. The figures show that we only received around half of the budgeted income (including grants), but we also managed to nearly halve the expenditure as well.

The final net figure of -£32k was £25k worse than the original pre-Covid budget, however, this is far better than our initial Covid predictions back in July 2021 of about -£140k.

This principal of flexibility and caution will continue in the current financial year as the challenges continue.

Month 1 2021-2022

The early months of the financial year are never good indicators, however this year doubly so. The Recovery Grant mentioned below will help in the initial months of reopening and will hopefully see us through to more normal levels of income. We will continue to minimise expenditure to match the income whenever possible and take advantage of any grants available to us.

Current Situation

The Coffee Shop reopened on 12 April for outdoor service and takeaway. As expected take up was limited, as can be seen from the Month 1 results. However, it was regularly used by individuals from our community that have missed the service, many of whom live alone and are susceptible to the issues of loneliness.

From 17 May indoors opened as well. This is more challenging ensuring correct Covid restrictions are followed by the public, who are often challenging or unwilling to comply. We have been clear on our expectations and the Government messages are a little clearer than they were last year. This means that the team feel safe and comfortable coming to work and customers reassured that guidelines are being adhered to.

Room hirers are now starting to plan to recommence activity in our rooms and firming up possible dates to start back. Many are looking towards late summer or autumn and so this area of the business may be slower to return to some form of normal. It is still difficult to predict what the normal level of use for the rooms will be.

All activity is being based around use of Flexi Furlough and demand to ensure we do not open too quickly and incur more costs than needed in order to protect The Watermark from financial strain in a year which external financial support is already diminishing. We hope to receive our Restart Grants from SHDC soon, which should be £16,000 (TBC) however after this, apart from Furlough grants and temporary VAT reduction, there is not much Covid support money on the horizon.

Future plans

There will be family cinema during half term to test demand and our systems for booking socially distant audiences into the seating. These will be daytime showings to minimise costs. We will refine

any arrangements as needed and have weekly cinema showings from early June, building back up to full time as cinema releases and demand allows.

Indoor live entertainment events seem to be a way off still, as in our case would require 100% capacity crowds, so the focus will be on room hire for community events and organised meetings, plus the coffee shop and cinema.

The situation and guidance will be monitored and a business based decision on reopening will be made by the Town Clerk due to the ever-changing situation.

Staffing

One team member is on Maternity Leave. All other team members are working on a Flexi-Furlough basis.

The Personnel committee will discuss on 24/05/2021 the recruitment of a new 'The Watermark Manager' and changes to accommodate that. An update on their decision will be presented at this meeting.

Jonathan Parsons

Town Clerk