

Town Clerk's Report to The Watermark Committee

July 2021

Month 3 2021-2022

Sadly, SHDC have not been able to award us the Restart Grant that they asked me to apply for, as the Government rules on the grant brings back an old rule that the grant cannot be awarded to a 'precepting authority'.

The net loss to the end of month 3 (June) is £12,857. The Town Clerk and Senior Finance Officer will be doing some work with our accountancy advisor next week to review the projected years figures compared to budget.

Now that restrictions are lifting we anticipate trade to increase as detailed below. Hopefully this will begin to stem to deficit over the next few months.

Our use of the furlough scheme has reduced due to the operational need for staff to be at work. The proportion of wages paid for furloughed workers has also reduced unfortunately. This will continue to reduce over the next couple of months before the scheme finishes at the end of September.

Current Situation

Following the relaxation of rules on 19 July we have returned to counter service in the Coffee Shop. Customers can sit at any table which we have kept distanced for now.

We have asked customers to continue to wear masks inside until sat down, and keep a 1m+ distance. This is in tune with Devon Libraries too, who have returned to a near normal service. So far this requirement to wear masks has been appreciated by customers.

Day one showed some real positives with Coffee Shop sales being near normal, probably due to customers being at the counter encouraged them to buy a wider range of food items. The good weather inevitably helped. A verbal update on the first week of the latest changes will be provided at the meeting.

Many other sensible indoor Covid precautions are still in place. Cinema seating is still distanced, but we hope to relax this over the summer. We will take customer opinion and best practice in to account, along with the official guidance, which tends to be more 'relaxed' than our customers would like.

Future plans

We are returning to our usual summer cinema schedule during August.

We will be reviewing the 'Covid Passport' scheme and assessing if we need to use it for our sell out live events which are due to start in September.

We will continue to monitor the Covid guidance and keep a balance between customer confidence and 'returning to normal' considering the expectations of our customers and community.

Room bookings are picking up but we will be looking at how the rooms are used and, where customers are not returning, contact them to see if that is just a delay or a permanent change to

their way of working. There is a pent up demand for family party celebrations etc so hopefully they will take up the business booking slack. We will be looking at promoting this through the summer.

Staffing

One team member is on Maternity Leave.

We had two staff members 'pinged' to isolate for 10 days which put a strain on the small catering team.

All other team members were working near full time with some flexi-furloughing. Now that we have returned to counter service and are not required to have staff waiting tables and on the door for booking tables, this will reduce our staffing need for the coffee shop.

The two supervisors will therefore now be able to reopen the Information Desk for tourism and other local enquiries restarting this service to the community.

They will also be focussing on ticket sales for shows and events that are planned for September onwards.

The shortlisting for the Watermark Manager role will be complete by the time of the meeting and so a verbal update will be given. Interviews are to take place during the week after the meeting.

Jonathan Parsons

Town Clerk