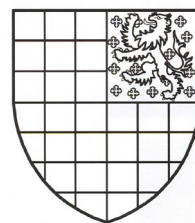


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**LEWES
TOWN
COUNCIL**

MINUTES

of the meeting of the **Malling Community Centre (MCC) Steering Group** held on **Thursday 30th September 2021**, online via Zoom meetings, at **3:00pm**.

PRESENT Cllrs Dr J Baah; M Bird; S Catlin; G Earl; J Lamb; M Milner; S Sains; K Wood, and (*not appointed to the Steering Group*) I Makepeace

In attendance: S Brigden (*Town Clerk [TC]*); Ms Laura Chrysostomou (*TC Designate*); Ms H Roxx (*MCC Manager*); Ms F Willis (*MCC Asst Manager*).

MCCSG2021/10 **QUESTIONS:** Mr James Gardiner asked whether the Council had considered creation of a Community Interest Company (CIC), for catering or to operate the Centre. The Chair explained that Parish Councils, by their nature represented the principles of a CIC, and that, after considering other options, the decision had been to directly manage the Centre with the Council's own staff. With regard to the operation of catering: this was currently under review, and as parish Councils tended to favour non-profit and local enterprises for many things, such a model was not discounted. Mr Gardiner had, of his own accord, circulated a proposal to Members prior to the meeting regarding CIC operations and sought a wider conversation with the Council regarding several fundamental aspects such as hire policies. He was encouraged to discuss this with the Town Clerk/Town Clerk Designate.

MCCSG2021/11 **APOLOGIES for ABSENCE:** There were none.

MCCSG2021/12 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** There were none

MCCSG2021/13 **REMIT of the STEERING GROUP:** Members noted the remit of the Group which was set by Council as:

The Malling Community Centre Steering Group is tasked with general strategic oversight of that Centre's operations, meeting ad hoc and formulating recommendations for Council or other committees, functional panels, or working parties as appropriate. This may include scrutiny of current, future and proposed business plans; staff structure and costs; profit and loss; contracting-out; income and expenditure reporting as well as review of booking, operations issues and management plans

MCCSG2021/14 **BUSINESS OF THE MEETING:**

The Group addressed matters as:

1 *General overview:* TC briefly reviewed the current position, in that there were a few 'snagging' issues still outstanding but these were in-hand with sub-contractors as required and should be completed soon. Equipping the Centre continued, with tables and chairs now delivered and items such as window blinds installed. The building license for public entertainment; sale of alcohol *etc* were expected to be approved shortly by the Licensing Authority. Bookings were increasing, and the Centre Manager expounded upon these. Regular weekly bookings for evenings and mornings were rapidly filling the diary, and there were provisional bookings for single events in 2022. There were questions as to how these would operate under the proposed model of a catering licensee, and this would be dependent upon Council's requirements being met when tenders were offered to the professional market, if that were the model chosen. Most hirers seemed very open to a range of possibilities and excited about the future prospects. The majority of hirers were local groups, and most of the 'original' users had returned and expressed themselves very happy with the new building. One exception was the Scout Group, who were

unhappy that they would be unable to offer some of their previous activities (indoor ball games and use of the kitchen for cookery skills training) and other dissatisfactions, including the charges. The Scout's traditional booking times remained open to them, but they were insistent that they must have exclusive use of the whole building. Other 'divisions' of the movement, such as Beavers and Cubs had returned and were very happy. Councillors expressed surprise that these younger age-groups did not have similar exclusivity requirements, and it had been explained that they simply chaperoned any young member who needed to use facilities elsewhere in the building. Members were sympathetic to some of the Scout leader's points, although recognized that it would not be practical or advisable to agree some of the requirements. Discussions would continue, and any Members who wished to assist in finding a resolution were reminded that they must scrupulously observe the distinction between assisting a constituent, and operational management matters.

It was recognized that a new profile of use would emerge once operations commenced, and Ms Roxx explained that there was much interest in the ultimate vision of a fully-operational Centre with the bar/café operating normally. This was attractive to many who used the halls, although some users sought a bar that they could operate themselves as a fund-raising opportunity, as in the past. There had been early discussions with other children's classes and family groups, and a relationship was building with the adjacent County Council's Children's Centre and a local adoption agency/group had expressed interest in regular use of the smallest hall. There followed a series of general questions from Members and discussion on several aspects of the building and prospective operations, including such things as users 'migrating' from other buildings/facilities in the area (a Wellbeing group were understood to have moved from elsewhere); bicycle stands (purchased – exact siting under consideration), and basic equipment for use by hirers. A 'gala' opening event would be planned in due course. A "Festival of Malling" was suggested as a theme, although it was acknowledged that the facility was intended to serve a wider community than the immediate local area.

There was interest in the effectiveness of staff coverage for the operating hours that were becoming established. It was explained that these were being managed, and a number of other elements were in place to allow the Council flexibility in future *ie* the recruitment of three staff on fixed-term contracts at the All Saints Centre had covered the current establishment vacancy (Venue Assistant) and the maternity leave of the Manager and Assistant Manager. These would be reviewed in due course and there may be scope to redeploy one of these staff, although there were other factors to consider such as the eligibility for retirement of all operational staff at the Town Hall between mid-2023 and early 2024.

Other matters discussed covered online booking systems; 'What's On?' guides; customer feedback opportunities *etc*, and it was acknowledged that there was scope for review by the new Communications Officer, collaborating with other working parties.

2 *Catering:* Further to the Group's earlier decision draft Heads of Terms (HoT) outlining details and the vision for the café/bar had been given to the Council's solicitor, and a draft lease was available for discussion. There followed a lengthy dissection of various elements of this, notably the opportunities for Council to influence or control hours of operation; locality of operator; use of local produce; sustainability of operations *etc*. All these aspects could be addressed by an interview process once a shortlist of credible/viable operators had been found through the tender process.

At this point the Chair moved, and **it was resolved that:**

MCCSG2021/14.1 In view of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted during the remainder of the meeting, pursuant to the Public Bodies

(Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 *etc.* any members of the press or public present be excluded and instructed to withdraw. The nature of that business is to consider commercially-sensitive detail related to proposed works and contracts.

Those affected duly complied.

There were several questions regarding such aspects as the retention of the commercial agent, and their fee; the likelihood of attracting suitable operators with no current equipment available and no established clientele; opportunity to model flexibly for use as a community café *etc.* and it was explained that preliminary advice from the industry specialists indicated that the venue was an attractive proposition.

The contract offered would specify requirements for any aspects unique to the Council's policies and overall management of the building, and when a contract was offered to the market, it should be possible to require a presentation by bidders before a tender was accepted, to assess compatibility with the Council's outlook.

Cllr Bird argued that the HoT draft was rather prescriptive, and opportunities must remain open for local community operators. He was asked to provide suggestions for alternative text and undertook to provide this to TC after the meeting, for review and forwarding to the solicitor.

MCCSG2021/15

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS:

Members wished to record their appreciation of the work of the staff in bringing the Centre to the present level of operation so quickly and providing such a friendly and well-received service to customers.

It was agreed that council should be asked to note the considerations of the Group and endorse its decisions.

MCCSG2021/16

There being no other business, the Chair declared the meeting closed and thanked everyone for their contribution. *The meeting closed at 5:00pm*

Signed dated