

Agenda item 12

Committee	Assets & Services
Month	February 2022
Report Title	Potential disposal of Council Chamber furniture
Report Author	Terry Frostick, Operations Manager
Attachments	None

Summary

As part of the general housekeeping and maintenance plan of the Operations Team, equipment kept in storage is periodically reviewed. This review includes looking at the viability of the equipment, whether it is of any current or future use, ultimately seeking to reduce the storage space and cost to the Council.

As part of this continuous review, it is appropriate to look at the continued storage of the large table (previously held in the Council Chamber) and the chairs. These are all currently stored at the works depot, taking up considerable space and therefore incurring a direct cost to the Council.

History

At the Full Council meeting in October 2019, Council agreed to consider the location and use of the large table, given that it actively inhibits public participation in meetings. When Councillors are sat around the table, the only public seating is around the edge of the room, resulting in Councillors sat with their backs to the public; this is not (and never has been) a positive means of engaging with residents. When the table was in situ, public attending the meeting had commented they found the room layout restrictive and uninviting due to the large table and the fact that Councillors were sat with their backs to the public gallery.

As part of the October 2019 review, Council agreed to consider the removal of the overbearing table and furniture to ensure compliance with new fire regulations. Subsequent to this and due to covid, the Council Chamber was not used for face-to-face meetings from March 2020 and thus the issue around public participation and engagement in the Council Chamber was temporarily suspended.

Fire risk

The table and chairs are thought to be non-compliant with modern fire regulations for furniture rules as they are old. It is believed that the Chairs are not covered in fire retardant material and thus safety certification would need to be obtained (if possible) before any reintroduction into the Town Hall could be considered.

Use of the Town Hall as Office Accommodation

In September 2020, Council considered the relocation of Town Council staff into the Town Hall, this included conversion of the Council Chamber and Committee Room into office space. This move was initiated given the rental agreement on office space at Emson Close was coming to a close and the Town Hall was closed to the public due to covid measures.

The following is recorded under Min Ref FC114-20, September 2020:

“Council received and noted the report as presented by Officers who spoke further to the report. Following clarification on some matters, it was Resolved:

- (a) To note that whilst the current premises at Emson Close have served the Council well, they are no longer appropriate facilities to house staff and that it is difficult to socially distance in the narrow corridors and shared spaces of this office accommodation*
- (b) To serve notice to the landlord of Emson Close*
- (c) That staff move into the Committee Room and Council Chamber of the Town Hall at the earliest opportunity, noting that these facilities are not currently being used due to Covid-19*
- (d) That the existing furniture in the Council Chamber be moved to the Town Council’s storage depot*
- (e) That the Clerk be authorised to incur costs of £5,000 towards the relocation costs (this will include costs for carpeting the Committee Room, cessation of utility services at Emson Close and commencement of same at the Town Hall). Any additional spend to be authorised as detailed within the report”*

Options

- (a) To continue storing the tables and chairs at the current depot recognising the annual cost of circa £1200 pa. The impact of this means there is less space for the storage of tools, equipment and necessary materials for the furtherance of Town Council work.
- (b) To relocate the furniture to an alternative storage depot. A preliminary review of storage space has found there are no suitable storage facilities in Saffron Walden with the nearest at Stansted charged at £1.10 per sqft, this would equate to a cost of approximately £250pcm or £3,000pa.
- (c) To sell the tables and chairs although previous initial enquiries with a local antiques firm are not especially encouraging. When asked if they would like to provide a quote on the value of the tables and chairs, the reply received was “We cannot do anything with them as we cannot sell them (the chairs) without a fire proof rating and the table is too big for anyone to use”. The furniture could potentially be sold on commercial selling sites although no further enquiries have taken place regarding this option (it is not known for example if the chairs must meet fire regulations if sold via ebay or the like).

Recommendation

Not to reintroduce the large Table and chairs back into the Council Chamber or the Town Hall and to agree the best method of disposal and authorise the Town Clerk to dispose of the furniture as appropriate.