

Council Chamber improvements Report

1.1 Background

The Council Chamber and Mayors Parlour Working Group last met on 15th November 2019 with the aim of formulating a proposal of improvements to the Chamber and Parlour which could then be presented to the January 2020 Facilities Committee for consideration in the 2020/21 Facilities budget setting.

In brief, the Working Group proposed the installation of a new visual display system in the Council Chamber, based on an NEC 'MultiPresenter' system of Wi-Fi presentation broadcast, linked to three flat screen displays (1 x 55" and 2 x 43") It was also proposed that additional power outlets would be provided to allow Members to power devices such as laptops and iPads.

The benefit of the NEC system is that, in addition to displaying presentations and information on the display screens, it would also be possible for Members to simultaneously view the presentation directly on their own devices. A budget of £5k was proposed for these items.

The second proposal was regarding the Mayors Parlour and Members room. This proposal was to remove the partition wall between the two rooms to create a larger, more functional single room, which could be used for Civic receptions, internal meetings and as an income generating letting room. The budget for these works was also proposed as £5k

The 14th January Facilities Committee discussed the two proposals and approved an overall budget of £10k for the combined projects. However, there was concern that a system of three display screens in the Council Chamber may be excessive and that one slightly larger screen would be more acceptable. In addition, it was felt by members of the Committee that the removal of the raised platform or dais, together with the long top bench, would improve the usefulness of the room and make meetings more inclusive by being all on one level.

The approval of the £10k combined budget remained but with an additional request that the concerns over the display screens and the removal of the dais was to be reconsidered and a new proposal put to Full Council on 28th January 2020.

1.2 Chamber display screens

By way of comparison, the current projector screen allows for an image equivalent to a 66" flat panel monitor. Initially a 55" monitor was proposed to be sited above the current Mayors position in the Chamber with two further 43" monitors either side of the room in the location of the Chamber Clock. As this number of monitors was perceived to be unnecessary it is now suggested the a single 75" screen be used to replace the earlier proposal of a 55" one. Screens larger than 70" are available but the cost becomes prohibitive, which is partly why the earlier proposal was for three smaller screens.

1.3 Removal of Dais and Bench

The current Chamber layout allows for 14 seating places around the main Chamber table plus, along the Bench, places for the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Town Clerk and Mayors Chaplain.

Removing the Bench and Dais would still allow for the four positions along the top of the table but, to keep a reasonable spacing between chairs, could mean a reduction of Members seats around the main table to 12 or possibly 13.

It is also suggested that the two smaller tables to the rear of the Chamber be removed to give more space for public seating. In addition, small square tables, similar to the ones in the other rooms, could be added which could be used to assist with Clerks papers and information as well as being put together in a block for and used for smaller informal meetings etc.

1.4 Costings

1.4 (a) Mayors Parlour / Members Room

A budget of £5k still stand for this work, subject to final specification of fixtures and fittings.

1.4 (b) Council Chamber

1 off NEC “MultiPresenter” hardware & guest USB token

1 off 75” Display Screen

Installation and set-up, including brackets, hardware etc. £2,499

Electricals – new table sockets and power supply to monitors £500

Removal of Dais and making good material (excl. staff labour) £200

Making good existing flooring – infill carpet tiles £100

8 off small square tables (to match existing) £800

TOTAL £4099 + VAT

Notes for consideration:

- Removing Dais will leave a difference in level around the small cupboard and skirting board – allowance has been made only to make this good – not full lowering of the skirting boards.
- The Chamber decoration is in need of a refresh – not allowed for in this budget.
- Removing the main Bench means the Mayor (or Chairperson) will sit in front of a joint between the two top tables, with table legs.
- Removing the Dais will reduce the visibility of the Chairperson for the public seating
- Smaller tables to the rear of the Chamber to be disposed of – possible value?
- Additional display screens can be added later if required.
- No allowance has been made for staff time to carry out works.

RECOMMENDATION: That Council CONFIRMS the total budget for the combined projects, as APPROVED by the Facilities Committee, at £10,000 and APPROVES the final specification for the Council Chamber element as outlined in 1.4 (b) above.