

## **EXETER CITY COUNCIL**

### **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY 6 MARCH 2014**

#### **EXETER CORN EXCHANGE UPDATE**

##### **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To update Members on the performance of the Corn Exchange.

##### **2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Corn Exchange is part of the Facilities & Markets section of Economy. The section also encompasses the Matford Centre, Tourist Information Centre, Underground Passages, Quay House Visitor Centre, Red Coat Guides, Leisure Facilities Contract Management and Markets.
- 2.2 A staffing review of Economy undertaken in March 2013 brought these facilities together under the management of the Facilities & Markets Manager reporting to the Assistant Director, Economy.
- 2.3 Exeter Corn Exchange hosts a varied programme of events including music, comedy, dances, conferences and examinations. The venue's team organises and promotes some events and the venue is also available for hire by private and public organisations, community groups and charities.
- 2.4 The venue's permanent staffing establishment consists of fewer than five full-time equivalents. This team looks after all aspects of the venue's operation including programming, administration, event management, marketing, box office and cleaning & maintenance. They also cover front-of house duties and manage the bar/catering operation utilising casual staff as and when required to provide this service. Contractors are employed for some of the venue's technical requirements and cleaning.

##### **3 OVERALL PERFORMANCE**

- 3.1 The total income projection for the Corn Exchange in the current financial year is £660,000 compared with £594,000 in 2012/13. Total projected expenditure for the year is £715,000 compared with £660,000 in 2012/13. The total number of events staged at the venue in the current financial year will be around 350.
- 3.2 The venue receives no external funding and the current annual deficit of £55,000 (or £17,000 after internal Council costs and depreciation) compares very favourably with other venues in the City.

##### **4 EVENTS AT THE CORN EXCHANGE**

- 4.1 The Corn Exchange team organises a year round programme of entertainment events. These events are a mixture of in-house promotions and joint promotions with local or national partners. In the current financial year, music artists appearing at the venue have included The Blues Band, The Searchers, The Manfreds, The Zombies, From The Jam, Fairport Convention and Oysterband. Comedy shows have included Rich Hall, Andy Parsons, Jimmy Carr, Henning Wehn, Sarah Millican, Jeremy Hardy and Jon Richardson.

- 4.2 Other events in the programme this year have included a Bollywood & Bhangra Extravaganza, Vienna Festival Ballet's production of Sleeping Beauty and a performance by Circus of Horrors. The venue's team also organises Exeter Comedy Club, which is now in its 17th year and is one of the most successful comedy clubs in the country with almost every show selling out.
- 4.3 This events programme is analysed to compare the direct costs of staging the events to the income received to ensure that the resources employed are justified in financial terms. The results achieved continue to improve with a surplus of over £100,000 achieved in 2013. A full breakdown of income and direct expenditure is attached as an appendix.
- 4.4 Exeter's main professional pantomime has now been staged at the venue for four years. Ticket sales have increased by 12% over that period and box income has increased by 41%. Income to the City Council from the pantomime has increased by 50%.
- 4.5 Exeter Dance Festival also relocated to the Corn Exchange in 2013. The festival which covers all types of children's dance with competitions in several categories and two performance evenings, takes place over eight days in February.
- 4.6 The Corn Exchange is the Exeter base for Open University examinations as well as for the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants. The venue hosts general and local election counts, regular blood donor sessions, participation dance events at least twice a week and concerts by Exeter Children's Orchestra.
- 4.7 The total number of venue users in 2013 was 63,000 of which 27,000 purchased tickets for events. User stats for the venue from 2005 until 2013 are as follows:

Year	Total Number of Visitors	Ticket Sales
2013	62,886	27,110
2012	62,005	23,352
2011	61,752	20,003
2010	61,484	13,784
2009	53,814	8,314
2008	49,996	8,396
2007	51,098	7,398
2006	39,151	3,551
2005	44,535	5,335

## 5 VENUE MARKETING & CUSTOMER SERVICE

- 5.1 The venue's marketing budget is utilised for publicising the venue's entertainment programme. This has proved to be far more effective than the previous strategy of simply advertising the venue as being available for hire. The current marketing spend is around £14,000 pa.
- 5.2 A marketing check is undertaken when tickets are sold and by far the most effective methods of publicising events are (in order of effectiveness) the venue's brochure, the venue website and other websites.
- 5.3 The venue's brochure is produced twice a year with 20,000 copies printed and distributed including around 10,000 by direct mail to the venue's postal mailing list.
- 5.4 The venue's emailing list continues to grow and is now around 5,000. It is recognised that the main marketing emphasis will need to be switched from print to electronic marketing but this switch needs to be managed carefully to ensure that the venue does not lose the progress it has made in improving marketing over the last few years.

- 5.5 The venue's website, a sub-site of the main City Council site, currently attracts close to 50,000 page visits each month. In 2013, 11% of all page views for the City Council website were for the Corn Exchange pages. With 66,000 views, the venue's what's on page was the fourth highest figure for the Council behind only the ECC home page and pages featuring information on car parks, bin collections and public transport.
- 5.6 Every organisation/individual hiring the venue for a private event is sent a questionnaire after their event to seek their views on the service they received from the venue. Over the last year 60 surveys were sent out and the return rate was exactly 50%, with 30 surveys returned. The responses to questions measuring the quality of the venue and the service received were as follows:

<b>How do you rate the following?</b>	<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Very Poor</b>
The venue's location	19	10	1	0	0
Accessibility by car	11	6	11	1	0
Accessibility by public transport	19	9	1	0	0
Directional signage to venue	2	7	14	3	0
Ease of access for disabled/pushchairs etc	11	13	2	2	0
Décor in main hall	12	9	6	0	0
Décor in bar	12	13	4	0	0
Toilet facilities	20	9	1	0	0
Comfort within venue	17	11	2	0	0
Cleanliness	19	10	0	1	0
Level of staff service	27	2	0	0	0
Suitability of venue for your event	25	4	1	0	0
Bar facility	16	5	1	0	0
Catering facility	19	5	2	0	0
Handling of your initial enquiry	29	1	0	0	0
Arrangements prior to your event	29	1	0	0	0
Help received during your event	29	1	0	0	0
Invoicing, receipting etc	26	3	0	0	0
Help with special requests	29	1	0	0	0

Where the total number of responses does not add up to 30 this is explained by the client ignoring the question because it did not apply to their event or because they had no opinion.

## **6 ISSUES FACING THE VENUE**

- 6.1 The main weakness of the venue is the fact that the capacity is limited to 500. There is clear evidence that this restricts the number, and limits the quality, of events that can be staged at the venue. The venue's team are currently exploring ways to address this by identifying ways of increasing the venue capacity. An increased capacity would lead to higher profile shows being staged which would be positive not only for the venue but also the night time economy with restaurants and hotels benefitting from extra visitors to the city.
- 6.2 The venue's box office also needs improving. Although the current system is extremely cost effective it is struggling to cope with the increase in ticket sales and does not offer the functionality needed for a first class online option. The venue team is exploring ways of addressing this problem in conjunction with colleagues from the ICT service in the City Council.
- 6.3 The venue's team is also exploring the possibility of staging events at the Riverside Leisure Centre and a pilot event is scheduled for 3 May when the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain will perform in concert.

## **7 RECOMMENDED**

7.1 That Scrutiny Committee – Economy notes and comments on the content of the report.

**DAVID LEWIS, FACILITIES & MARKETS MANAGER**

**RICHARD BALL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR ECONOMY**

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)**

**Background papers used in compiling this report:-**

None