

**INFRASTRUCTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE
13 December 2001**

IOS.16/01 – ASSEMBLY ROOM – OLD TOWN HALL

Further to Minute IOS.8/01(a)(iii) the Head of Economic Development submitted report EDU.43/01 on the usage of the Assembly Room at The Old Town Hall.

The Tourism Manager attended the meeting and presented the report commenting that the Economic Development Sub-Committee had identified usage of the Assembly Room as an issue which required further investigation. This had led to the preparation of three outline schemes which would increase income and usage, whilst maintaining the integrity of the building and continuing its use for community groups. The cost of each of these schemes was approximately £40,000. They were all basically a refurbishment of equipment with the addition of an interpretative facility which would allow a small fee to be charged for people wishing to see the display in the room. The schemes allowed the continuing use of the Room by community groups.

Councillor Firth, the Portfolio Holder for Economic Prosperity, attended the meeting and commented that the Assembly Room was currently used more predominantly as a community facility by community groups and that its current use had little to do with economic development or tourism. The proposals which had been set out as a result of the request by the old Economic Development Sub-Committee had attempted to address this by building in a tourism or economic development element through the displays.

The costs of the refurbishment had been the subject of a bid in last year's budget but the proposal was not supported. It was also a bid for the forthcoming budget but it had been assigned a low priority.

The Director of Environment and Development added that the Best Value Review on property management had indicated a need for a more corporate asset strategy, where investment decisions are judged as part of that strategy and a corporate portfolio managed, rather than making decisions on an individual basis. Members recognised the importance of managing assets corporately and expressed concern that putting a great deal of expense into what may be a quick fix solution would not address the overall problem.

In response to Members' questions the Tourism Manager and Councillor Firth commented that although grants may be available to help finance works to the Assembly Room, the Council would have to sort out what it wanted to do with the room in terms of its overall use before applying for any grants.

Members recognised the importance of managing assets corporately and commented that it might be best to wait for the outcome and finalisation of actions as a result of the Best Value Property Review. However, they suggested that there may be short term improvements at relatively low cost which could be undertaken to encourage visitors into the Assembly Room. They suggested that display boards could be installed and brochures placed in the room promoting Carlisle and the surrounding area, and that Officers could investigate other ways of increasing the usage of and footfall through the room through marketing.

RESOLVED – (1) That the importance of considering usage of the Assembly Rooms as a corporate asset and within a corporate framework be recognised, and therefore the final outcome of the Corporate Property Best Value Review be awaited before this Committee makes any further comments in relation to the Assembly Room.

(2) That the Committee express its wish to be consulted as part of any future considerations in relation to the Assembly Room.

(3) That in the interim, the Head of Economic Development and the Tourism Manager look at ways of increasing usage of the Assembly Rooms, both through increased marketing of the room amongst existing users, and by installing display boards and making brochures available in the room to attract people in from the Tourist Information Centre.