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| Meeting      | Full Council                                  |
| Date         | 28 September 2022                             |
| Report Title | Audience Agency Proposal - Request for Budget |
| Author       | Beth O'Brien, Head of Venues                  |

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To seek Council approval for the purchase of off-the-shelf solutions from The Audience Agency in order to provide a deeper understanding of the current and potential audience of The Neeld and so inform and optimise the future use and service offer of The Neeld.

## **2.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 Following a report presented by the Chief Executive to the Strategy and Resources Committee on 09 December 2020 relating to an update of the Neeld Development Project at an initial estimate circa £1.5 million, it was agreed that a report would be brought back to ACL on the future uses of the Neeld and the wider Town Hall footprint, Museum and Yelde. It was noted that this report would require the input of a specialist consultant.
- 2.2 A further report was presented by the previous Head of Venues to the Amenities, Culture and Leisure committee on 02 June 2021 proposing that The Audience Agency undertake surveys to improve our understanding of The Neeld's current and potential audiences, to fulfil audience's needs and to optimise the Council's offer in terms of the use of existing and potential Arts and Heritage spaces.
- 2.3 At the ACL committee on 02 June 2021 Councillors resolved to review The Audience Agency's proposal, which consisted of two phases, in 12 months' time due to concerns about the overall cost of the survey and the timing, as venues were only just preparing to reopen following the Covid 19 pandemic.
- 2.4 At the ACL committee on 13 July 2022 Councillors resolved to use off-the-shelf solutions from The Audience Agency in place of undertaking Phase 1 of The Audience Agency's offer and to defer the decision to undertake Phase 2.
- 2.5 Depending on the packages chosen, The Audience Agency's off-the-shelf solutions could cost up to £2,600 + VAT.

## **3.0 AUDIENCE RESEARCH**

- 3.1 Research results would provide valuable data and information for the future development and marketing of the Neeld Community and Arts Centre and other Chippenham Town Council arts and heritage providers.

- 3.2 Phase 1 of The Audience Agency project aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the current and potential audience to inform the future use and service offer of The Neeld by understanding more about their current engagement habits and potential future engagement habits. In March 2021 Phase 1 was costed at £7,063 + VAT
- 3.2 The second phase of The Audience Agency project considers the position of The Neeld and the Town Council's heritage offer within the town and Wiltshire's wider cultural offer. Specifically, this proposal considers how a more joined up place-based approach to audience development and engagement could potentially reach more residents and visitors. This moves beyond understanding the competitor landscape and considers audiences in a more joined up partnership approach, building awareness with the full breadth of the offer across the town and county. The Audience Agency would work with the town council officers to scope the technical design of this work. In March 2021 Phase 2 was costed at £9,275 + VAT. There would be an additional cost for optional monitoring and evaluation i.e. bespoke audience surveys, focus groups etc at a cost of up to £5,400.00 plus VAT.
- 3.3 The off-the-shelf tools offered by The Audience Agency cover much of that offered in Phase 1. Depending on the packages chosen this option could cost up to £2,600 + VAT. Once these tools have been utilised, the decision on appointing The Audience Agency to complete Phase 2 could be revisited by ACL.
- 3.4 The Arts in Chippenham and all over the country were greatly affected by the Covid pandemic, resulting in audiences not enjoying their usual activities. Now we have returned to our normal operations, monitoring will enable us to gauge audience confidence in returning to entertainment and visitor venues.
- 3.5 Some consideration should be given to the audience current viewpoint as we encounter increasing costs of living and inflation.

#### **4.0 CONTRIBUTION TO CORPORATE PLAN PRIORITIES**

- 4.1 The audience research resulting from use of The Audience Agency's off-the-shelf solutions will contribute to the following corporate priorities;
- Provide and develop facilities and services that are accessible, inclusive and promote health and well-being.
  - Play an active role in the future development of the town through collaboration with partners, stakeholders, and our community.
  - Provide and develop facilities and services that promote Chippenham as an attractive and vibrant market town and celebrate its rich history, heritage, and culture.
  - Maintain effective and efficient governance and management of resources.

#### **5.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Using free and off-the-shelf solutions will have more of an impact on officer time than commissioning The Audience Agency to undertake this work.

#### **6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Buying off-the-shelf solutions from The Audience Agency will cost up to £2,600 + VAT depending on the packages chosen.

6.2 The costs for this work are currently unbudgeted and would need to be approved as an in year overspend by Full Council.

## 7.0 **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 There are no legal implications.

## 8.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

8.1 To approve an in year budget overspend of £2,600 for the purchase of off-the-shelf audience research solutions from The Audience Agency as recommended by the ACL Committee on 13 July 2022.