

QUESTION BY COUNCILLOR

Question submitted by: Councillor Mrs Terri Beer

To Cabinet Member: Councillor Chris Penberthy

Question:

Please can you explain to me why the project of refurbishment of the Cities Guildhall has gone over budget and why we have no idea when completion is likely to take place? Once again this is a clear example of the Council allowing an open end cheque book to contractors. At home if I am quoted for a job that is what I will pay so why is this repeatedly happening in Plymouth?

Response: (for completion by City Council officers and Cabinet Members)

Thank you for this question. As, under the Leader's Scheme of Delegation, corporate estate, facilities management and procurement fall within my portfolio I am answering rather than Cllr Dann to whom you addressed this.

As you are aware, I updated the Lord Mayor on the current situation with the Guildhall restoration and refurbishment at the last meeting of Council. My announcement read:

"The Guildhall was built between 1870 and 1874. It was reduced to a shell during bombing in 1941. The Council voted, by one vote, to save it in 1951 and it reopened in 1959.

It is a Grade 2 listed building, with the listing reflecting both the original shell and the 1950s insert. Effectively it is two buildings in one, both of which are old. There are no detailed drawings of the post war works. As anyone who has done any renovation work knows this can lead to all sorts of unknowns being discovered.

The project to undertake internal renovations began as a component of the proposal for the University to use part of the Civic Centre. The Guildhall would have supported a conferencing and events programme as well as public access. Since then, the plans for the Civic have changed and the Guildhall is not part of the requirement for Further Education uses.

Since 1959 there have been changes to building standards and fire safety requirements. When work began on the interior parts, the 1950s walls and panelling were removed for the first time since construction to allow for insertion of new ducting and wiring. A large void stretching from the foundation to the roof apex was found at one end of the Great Hall effectively acting as potential chimney and route for fire to spread. Further examination identified other voids within the construction. Other areas

of work being undertaken uncovered other structural issues that were not part of the recently undertaken external works.

We need to make sure that our Guildhall is structurally sound and meets current building, fire and health and safety standards. We have found this is not the case. As a result of this, I have asked for further investigation to be undertaken in order that all necessary work is bought into scope aligned with a review of the overall project definition and vision. At the same time, we are undertaking other surveys to have a clear understanding of any future works that we can bring into consideration at the same time for purposes of cost effectiveness.

Given the change in usage plans and the broader environment I have also asked for a review of the business plan and business case to be undertaken in order that we deliver a Guildhall that will be fit for purpose for the next seventy years.

Lord Mayor, I am making this statement to ensure that it is clear to everyone that the current speculation about delays being contractual or about contractor issues are groundless. In fact, those who are spreading this are sharing misinformation, which is an irresponsible thing to do.

Lord Mayor, I look forward to being able to update you further in the early part of next year.

To make it clear. The procured works are within the agreed budget envelope. There are no concerns with our excellent local contractors, who do not have an open-ended cheque book. I will make announcements in due course about how we will be taking the project forward.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Pook', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dated: 17th December 2025