Current booking system phase out and the introduction of an online booking system (Hallmaster):

The existing Online Booking System is now coming to end of life as the old server will be phased out in February, alongside this the popularity of the Council Chambers as a facility to hire is increasing weekly.

Western Web (the Town Council's current website provider) designs and runs websites for a large number of Town and Parish Councils and several of these have already switched to the online booking system 'Hallmaster'. https://www.hallmaster.co.uk/

A strong example of how the calendar would look embedded on the website is Okehampton Town Council, once Hallmaster is up and running the existing Facilities for Hire section on the website will be changed to comprise one page in a layout similar to https://www.okehampton.gov.uk/facilitiesforhire.php , the page would include an editable section, documents upload section for the terms and conditions and printable copy of the booking form, photo gallery with new photos of the chambers and their facilities, hire charges and the write up for each room. The cost set up for the web page by Western Web will be in the region of £120.00 plus VAT. The Town Council would have their own Hallmaster URL which can then also be used to promote on social media.

An in-depth, one to one, online demonstration via teams was attended by the Town Council Support Officer and this session was used to clarify key point and questions. This system also links with Xero accounting software to increase the ease of invoicing and decrease booking admin time. It will also be beneficial to regular hirers who will be able to view and manage their own booking dates and times i.e if they are only running a single session on one day or are absent one evening due to sickness, this ability will help to avoid overcharging or mis-invoicing.

The online system would still be run overall by the Support Officer and bookings made online will be provisional only and still have to be confirmed manually, booking forms can be filled in online and the system even has a tick box option to read and accept the hiring terms and conditions upon booking. All display settings on the online calendar can be changed, for example Pilates classes can be shown with contact details for the class provider and even a logo if they wish and then private parties can be shown purely as 'private function' with no details on display. From the admin view the council will have access to all information for all bookings. Hallmaster does not allow booking clashes whereas the current system will allow several functions to be booked at the same time on the same day. The ability to 'bulk book' throughout the year is also greatly improved.

Paper schedules can still be printed for the caretaking team but there is also the option to create 'view only' accounts where each staff member could have their own log-in to view all bookings and hiring requirements but not be able to see sensitive information or edit/change any bookings. This fits in well with the climate emergency action plan as the regular printing of paper schedules would be drastically decreased.

Payment terms will be included on the invoicing and hirers will still be able to pay by bank transfer, cheque or cash in the office. The system also allows online payments using a button directly from the invoice via the Stripe online payment system, the Town Council would need to sign up for this service, it is similar to SumUp and used by most leading online restaurant reservation systems, there is more information on Stripe in the LTA information below.

One interesting feature is Hallmaster's reporting capabilities, or 'Reporting Matrix', reports are able to be generated used a wide variety of specific data, revenue can be viewed by room, or by hour, or by hiring group etc which would be really useful for annual budget setting and generally having an accessible overview of how the Council Chambers is being used on a weekly/ monthly basis.

The Town Council will always offer the option of booking via email, over the phone or in person in the office for anyone who does not feel comfortable using the online booking system. The idea is to update the current booking system in line with up-to-date technology and the higher level of usage of the Chambers by the community but not to alienate those who are already hiring regularly and familiar with the current process.

Hallmaster provides a 90-day free trial, this is access to all of the live software including the link to Xero. Once the free trial is activated the switch over period can begin, the back of house system can be customised to suit the Town Council's needs and bookings can be entered into the system before the live calendar is shown on the website.

The annual charge for Hallmaster with the Xero integration feature is £244 +VAT per year. This also includes a free online personal support package with unlimited free personalised Zoom tutorials and a bank of user guides and 'how to' videos.

LTA tennis website, booking system and Stripe payments:

A Zoom meeting was held with a representative from the Lawn Tennis Association to explain how to set up and manage the online booking website and app for the newly refurbished tennis courts through a system called Club Spark. The Support Officer was advised to look at the current website for the Stratford Park tennis courts, Stroud, for reference as to what The Town Council should be aiming for in terms of the Torpoint booking site.
https://clubspark.lta.org.uk/StratfordParkTennisCourts

There is a large amount of work involved for the Town Council Officers leading up to the opening of the new courts and the LTA will be on hand to assist with all aspects of the set up to ensure that it is done correctly and all features are utilised and understood. The building of the website both on the surface and back of house involves the calibration of the booking system to ensure the courts are managed correctly, effectively and that the system is presented clearly to the public. The set up involves building the website from the back of house system with images, summary information and booking schedule information. Once the courts are active this will involve managing user accounts, subscriptions, bookings and queries etc. Booking confirmation emails can be edited by the Town Council to include information about upcoming events in the town as a way of further promoting to those who may not be reached by the usual engagement methods.

A condition of the LTA app/website booking system is that the Town Council must sign up to the Stripe online payments system as this is the system that Club Spark use to take all payments and store user payment information securely. Stripe is a similar system to SumUp which is already used in the Library and Community Hub café and there would be scope for discussion in the future for changing the SumUp system in the library to Stripe also for the sake of continuity. The payment fees for stripe are currently 1.5% +20p. Please see website for more details. https://stripe.com/gb.

Town Council Support Officer – January 2024