

15 September 2015

Policy, Finance and Resources Committee

Town Hall Meeting Room Charges

Report of: *Adrian J Tidbury, Estates and Valuation Surveyor*

Wards Affected: *Brentwood South*

This report is: *Public*

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report considers the proposal for a scheme of charges for the hire of meeting rooms within the Town Hall by commercial organisations.
- 1.2 The Town Hall meeting rooms are used for a variety of purposes for Council business and a variety of external organisations, from the commercial and voluntary sectors.
- 1.3 External bookings have exceeded 100 per quarter and it is proposed that the Council should introduce a charging regime for commercial organisations to bring it into line with other providers.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That a charging regime be introduced with immediate effect to charge commercial organisations and wedding parties in accordance with the charging regime as set out in the appendix to this report.**
- 2.2 That no charge be introduced for community groups directly benefiting the Borough of Brentwood in accordance with the appendix to this report but that details be published of community room bookings and use and the fee that could have been charged to ensure transparency for the benefits given to community groups using the Town Hall meeting rooms.**
- 2.3 Charges to come in effect from 1st November 2015.**

3. Introduction and Background

- 3.1 The Council receives over 100 external bookings for the Town Hall each quarter but at the moment the Council does not have clear guidance on charging for room hire to voluntary and commercial organisations. Understandably the issue of charging voluntary organisations for using Town Hall meeting rooms has been contentious. In 2013 Officers undertook a review of the level of support that it gave to voluntary and community organisations. It was agreed at the 18 June Overview and Scrutiny Committee (MIN REF 40) to look at four areas of support including Partnership/Community Funding and in kind support.
- 3.2 In kind support policy covers four key areas printing, parking permits, room hire and community lease arrangements.
- 3.3 The Council is having to grapple with budget constraints and generating income as well as ensuring that it continues to support the voluntary and community sector directly benefiting the town. It also needs to ensure a fair and transparent process is in place where it gives in kind support to voluntary sector organisations and groups who deliver in line with the Council's key priorities.

4. Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

- 4.1 Currently the Council's meeting rooms are used by a number of outside organisations both during working hours and out of normal working hours.
- 4.2 There are staff costs associated with these room bookings such as the administration to book the room, the set up of the rooms, security of the building and the cleaning of the rooms after a meeting. The proposed room booking charges would contribute to these costs as well as heating, lighting and general wear and tear etc.
- 4.3 Options available to the Council include:

Option	Benefits	Costs
Charge all organisations	Income Generation	Deter use of the town hall especially by community groups; alienate community groups.
Make use of the	Widespread use of	Adverse impact on

Town Hall meeting rooms free to all organizations wishing to use them	the Town Hall meeting rooms.	commercial venues especially if commercial bookings are displaced to the Town Hall. Loss of potential income from commercial lettings.
Charge all organizations but hypothecate the notional in kind subsidy to community groups from available community grant.	Open and Transparent. General fund income.	Reducing already scarce resources available through community grant by hypothecating. Administration cost.
Charge commercial organisations and weddings but make no charge to community groups directly benefiting Brentwood.	Reaffirms the Town Hall at the heart of the community. Income generation from commercial organizations.	Ensuring transparency in any in kind subsidy to community groups using the Town Hall.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 To create a scheme of charges for the hire of meeting rooms within the Town Hall by commercial organisations

6. Consultation

- 6.1 No formal consultation has been undertaken or is required

7. References to Corporate Plan

- 7.1 Value for Money: policies that invest in key services to create opportunity for all, provide better value for Brentwood's taxpayers and enhance the Borough's infrastructure whilst modernising and transforming Brentwood Borough Council. We will re-prioritise and focus our resources and be innovative in our approach.
- 7.2 Our Borough: Policies which promote our environment, support sustainable growth, and safeguard our high quality environment including heritage and countryside. We will provide responsive, accessible and forward thinking services for vulnerable residents, supporting people back into work and providing good quality housing making Brentwood our residents' Borough of Choice.

8. Implications

Financial Implications

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- 8.1 Charging for room hire will provide additional resources to the Council.

Legal Implications

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- 8.2 None directly arising from this report except to note that the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 is intended to ensure 'that local people are able to scrutinise how well their local authority manages its assets...'. By the Council requiring information as to the usage of community organisations to be given, the public can see what financial support in kind is being provided by the Council at the public expense and greater transparency is given.

Other Implications (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Equality and Diversity, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

9. **Background Papers** (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright)

None

10. **Appendices to this report**

Appendix A - Proposed Room Hire Charges

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