

27 March 2015

Asset & Enterprise Committee

Town Hall – Community Use Charge

Report of: *John R Parling, Strategic Asset Manager*

Wards Affected: *Brentwood South*

This report is: *Public*

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Town Hall meeting rooms are used for a variety of purposes for Council business and also used by external organisations from the commercial, voluntary and community sectors. Currently the Council only charges commercial organisations for the use of the rooms and any support provided e.g. refreshments.
- 1.2 Over the next Quarter room bookings for external organisations (non Commercial) exceeds 100.
- 1.3 It is proposed that the Council should introduce a charging regime for non commercial organisations to bring it in line with other providers and also to assist in defraying the cost of providing the facilities.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That a charging regime is introduced with immediate effect to charge non commercial organisations in accordance with the proposed charging regime as set out in section 4. of this Report.**

3. Introduction and Background

- 3.1 In 2013 Officers undertook a review of the level of support that it gave to voluntary and community organisations which was estimated at over £600,000 annually. It was then examined to determine whether this support was fit for purpose i.e. what governance was in place; how the organisation supports the Council's priorities and consider a more strategic approach to future funding.

- 3.1** It was agreed at 18 June Overview and Scrutiny Committee (min. ref 40) look at the four areas of support, Parish Council Grants, Discretionary Rate Relief, Partnership/Community Funding and in kind support.
- 3.2** The In Kind Support Policy covers four key areas; Printing, Parking Permits, Room Hire at the Town Hall and community lease arrangements.
- 3.3** The Council needs to ensure that there is a fair and transparent process in place where it gives additional support to voluntary sector organisations, rather than the ad hoc arrangements that are currently in place. While the current situation supports very worthy organisations, it is not a fair process which is accessible to any voluntary organisation.
- 3.4** As the Council is under increasing monetary pressures to rationalise its spending then it is proposed to adopt a cost recovery model for these strands.
- 3.5** This report relates to Room Hire at the Town Hall only.

4 Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

4.1 Town Hall Room Hire

- 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 is 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 rooms etc. after the meeting. The proposed room booking charges would contribute to these costs as well as the other associated costs such as the heating, lighting and general wear and tear of the room.
- 4.3** It is proposed that where meetings are taking place by external voluntary and community organisations a set fee is charged to the organisation for the room hire. The meeting times will also be restricted to 8.30am until 7pm Monday to Friday. At present the rooms that will be available to hire with the current configuration of rooms in the Town Hall is the Council Chamber, Committee Room 1 and 2 and Meeting Room 1.

4.4 If the meetings finish after 7pm then additional overtime staff costs we added to this rate, at approximately £20 per hour. In addition any additional services provided will be charged at cost including the provision of refreshments.

4.5 The current commercial charge and proposed community rate is set out in the table below.

Room	Current Commercial rate	Proposed Community Rate
Council Chamber	£200 half day	£100 half day
Council Chamber	£400 full day	£200 full day
Committee Rooms 1 & 2	£100 half day	£50 half day
Committee Rooms 1 & 2	£200 full day	£100 full day
Meeting Room 1	£50 half day	£25 half day
Meeting Room 1	£100 full day	£50 full day

4.6 The room availability may need to be reviewed with the implementation of the Town Hall Delivery Project.

5 Reasons for Recommendation

5.1 The Council needs to rationalise its support to the voluntary and community sector, so the support needs to be targeted to those organisations that support the Council's priorities and support our most vulnerable residents.

5.2 The Council also need to ensure that the processes that it puts in place are fair, consistent and transparent to all organisations.

6 Consultation

6.1 The draft Funding Strategy went out to consultation on 21 June 2013. The consultation was sent via email and was available on the Council's website. The consultation included local community groups, voluntary sector organisations, Brentwood Council for Voluntary Services, Brentwood Health and Wellbeing Board, Clinical Commissioning Group for Brentwood and Basildon, members of the public, local schools, local councillors, Parish Councils, Brentwood and Ongar MP and other partners organisations. Any feedback was presented at Strategy and

Policy Board in November 2013 as part of the report. In addition there were face to face meetings with each of those organisations which are currently in receipt of direct grant funding. In summary the majority of organisations were in support of the new approach to funding that the Council is taking in respect of the Community and voluntary sector, ensuring that funding is targeted to support the community more effectively. There was caution around any disproportionate reduction in funding to the voluntary sector in relation to the Council's other spending. There were also a number of new initiatives that could be introduced to support the development of a Community Hub as part of the Town Hall development project.

- 6.2** An Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group also focussed on the In Kind support as one of the key areas of support to the voluntary and support.

7 References to Corporate Priorities

- 7.1** The In Kind Policy will ensure that the support for the Voluntary and Community Sector is both targeted, supports the Council's priorities and provides effective support for the local community.

8 Implications

8.1 Financial Implications

Name & Title: Christopher Leslie, Financial Service Manager (S151 Officer)

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The current cost of maintaining the Town Hall is met from the General Fund and there is limited revenue from other occupiers/external users.

8.2 Legal Implications

Name & Title: Philip Cunliffe-Jones, Solicitor

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Any existing legal commitments that the Council has entered into with regard to any voluntary or community organisation, will need to be examined before any changes could be implemented. The effect of the In Kind Policy also needs assessment.

8.3 Equality and Diversity implications –

The In Kind Policy will target support to voluntary and community organisations that best support the Brentwood community regardless of age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race religion and sexual orientation.

9 Background Papers

Funding Strategy 2013-16 as agreed at 21 November 2013 Strategy and Policy Board

10 Appendices to this report

None

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