

POLICY, FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

23 JANUARY 2013

REPORT OF HEAD OF CENTRAL SERVICES

PARKSIDE CIVIC SUITE - EXTERNAL BOOKING CHARGES AND SERVICE DELIVERY

1.0 THE PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to submit a request for approval of this Committee to adopt a new set of fees and charges that are simpler to administer, to adjust the existing concession arrangement and to authorise officers to investigate options for enhancing future service delivery.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Approve the fees and charges recommendations set out in Appendix A of the report.**
- 2.2 Agree to the removal of the concession system for Civic Suite Rooms 1 & 2.**
- 2.3 Instruct officers to investigate the options for future service delivery as set out in paragraph 3.3. and report back to this committee**

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1** Members have expressed unease regarding the relatively high level of charges currently set for the Civic Suite; the civic suite is not yet being used to its full benefit by external organisations and by reducing the hire fee rates this will encourage increased usage.

The current charges and concession system has resulted in the majority of users being granted substantially reduced fees through the concession system whilst still expecting a high level of service. The new fees are loosely based on the rates actually paid after concessions have been granted, this means that some existing users will have to pay slightly more; the proposed rates are attached at Appendix A.

- 3.2** The new proposals involve removal of the concession system for the civic suites Room 1 and 2. The impact on small community groups and organisations will be mitigated by the fact that they can use the Ferneley room for free. This has the capacity for meetings of up to 20 people. The Head of Central Services and/or the Corporate Property Officer, in consultation with a member of Corporate Management Team will have the ability to approve a concession in exceptional circumstances. There is still access to a wide range of other rooms outside of the Civic suite area for example Egerton and Warwick rooms on the ground floor.
- 3.3** There is no dedicated resource to manage the civic suite lettings service at present. The service levels are crucially important to ensure repeat business and the relevant skills need to be resourced. As such 3 options have been put forward for investigation for the running of the external lettings function. Subject to member approval officers will investigate the following options:

Options 1 - Events/Business student (2nd to 3rd year) on an apprenticeship scheme.

Option 2 - Paid post possibly a Student Force Graduate.

Option 3- Bursary/Grant to run a Business with a profit sharing arrangement.

Each option will be costed and a business case will be prepared as appropriate for future consideration.

4.0 POLICY & CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Corporate use of these rooms is unlikely to be affected by the Amended Fee Proposal. The Corporate use of the rooms will benefit from any increased service level and skill resource that is approved in the future.

5.0 FINANCIAL & OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Community organisations will have to pay more than at present and by removing the concession and reducing the standard fee the income for civic suite should increase from its current level of circa £2700 for 16 separate lettings over a 9 month period.

The anticipated cost of any resource would be expected to be covered by an increase in letting income from the civic suite. This would be shown in any future business case.

It should be noted that it is proposed that the Ferneley Room (20 chairs) is available for FREE for community organisations between 9am and 18:00 Monday to Friday and in the evenings if there is a Council/Civic meeting in the Civic Rooms.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS

6.1 The Local Government Act 2003 gave local authorities the general power to charge for discretionary services which are not covered by any other legislation with the following restrictions:

- the income from charges for a service should not exceed the cost of providing that service (over a “reasonable” but unspecified period, e.g. 3 years);
 - the recipient of the service must have agreed to its provision and to pay for it;
 - authorities may provide discretionary services for free if they so decide;
- different people may be charged different amounts

7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY

7.1 There do not appear to be any community safety issues.

8.0 EQUALITIES

8.1 The fee proposals set out clearly a set of charges that are available to all external parties and it removes the existing concession request system that currently operates but reflects the amounts currently being paid.

9.0 RISKS

9.1 The proposed charges are higher than those currently being actually paid and as such may upset some of the community organisations that currently use the room.

10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

10.1 Any decisions related to this report will have a minimal impact on climate change.

11.0 **CONSULTATION**

11.1 The external users have not been consulted as they each currently benefit from differing discounts.

11.2 The Management Team have been consulted on the charges.

12.0 **WARDS AFFECTED**

12.1 All wards are affected.

Contact Officer: Jane Galilee

Date: 9th January 2013

Appendices: Appendix A – Current and Proposed Charges

Background Papers: None

Reference: X: C'tee, Council & Sub-C'tees/PFA/2012-13/