

**Report of: Facilities Management Business Manager**

**To: Executive Board**

**Date: 17 July 2006**

**Item No:**

**Title of Report : Town Hall Fees & Events Policy**



### Summary and Recommendations



**Purpose of report:** To inform Executive Board of the current Town Hall fees charges policy and recommend a variation to that policy. The decision and changes proposed will enable the Town Hall to work towards achieving the increased income target by making Sunday charges more affordable and enable more people to use the Town Hall.

**Key decision:** No

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Alan Armitage



**Scrutiny Responsibility:** Finance Scrutiny Committee

**Ward(s) affected:** All

#### **Report Approved by:**



Councillor Alan Armitage - Portfolio Holder  
Mark Luntley – Strategic Director, Finance & Corporate Services



Ben Liddar- Legal Services  
Emma Burson - Financial Services



#### **Policy Framework:**



Corporate Plan  
Ensuring better and more effective service.

#### **Recommendation(s):**

1. To approve:



a. Changes in the charging policy to enable Sunday bookings between 00 and 14:00 hours to be charged with no Sunday supplement.



b. The proposal to work with other agencies to maximise visitor numbers to the Town Hall at weekends.

2. To note that the Council will look at the opportunities to increase the discount offered to community clients and other groups at the end of the current financial year.

### **Current Policy:**

- 3 The last review of the Town Hall charges was agreed by the Executive Board in 2002 when free evening use of the meeting rooms was restricted to Tuesday and Thursday evenings.
- 4 Prior to that current policy was set in 1999 as a result of the Town Hall Best Value review. The review identified that the Town Hall cost over £600k a year to run and that, in line with other Town Halls, it needed to increase its use and facilities to encourage use from a wider audience.

### **Charging Policy**

5. At the present time room hire charges are based on three criteria. Full details of each category are given at Appendix 1. For the financial year 2005/2006 there were 4157 room reservations including the following categories of users as well as Council and Business Unit usage. Approximately 42% of the actual usage of the Town Hall was for non-council business.

- Standard Rate
- Concessionary Rate
- Free Use

6. I have been asked to review the concessionary discount with a view to increasing the discount allowed to community and charitable groups. The Executive Board set this at 50% in 2002. The discount is acknowledged by many entitled groups as substantial and well above most other similar locations in the region. I propose that the discount rate be reviewed at the end of this financial year and any changes be dependant on my ability to achieve the increased income target for this and future years.

### **Income Generated from Town Hall hire and Target for 2006/2007**

7. Over the last few years' income targets for room hire have increased by both the rate of inflation and the need to provide more income from the use of the public rooms. As a result hourly hire fees were introduced and the concessionary discount reduced from 66.7% to 50%. These changes have not reduced the demand for use of the premises; indeed the number of concessionary and free users has

increased. The income targets and income achieved over the last three years have been:

- 2003/2004 Target £157,893 Actual income £178,616
- 2004/2005 Target £192,382 Actual income £235,769
- 2005/2006 Target £162,389 Actual income £190,893

8. The income target for 2006/2007 has been set at £257,318 plus £49,364 from the new catering arrangements. This figure is a 58% increase on the 2005/2006-income target. Whilst the actual income for 2004/2005 exceeded £235k the clients that helped achieve that figure are now located in their own premises and unlikely to return to the Town Hall.
9. A substantial amount of potential income is waived in concessionary and other discounts and free use of the accommodation. For 2004/2005 £83K and for 2005/2006 £109k. This does not include discounts on fees given as part of the Cultural Grant.

### **Proposals to achieve the Income Target for 2006/2007**

10. **Opening Hours.** We are currently advertising two part time posts to enable the Town Hall to be opened Saturdays and Sundays 08:00 to 18:00 hours and 10:00 to 16:00 hours respectively. Currently the Town Hall is open on those days for confirmed bookings only. This would allow for the public rooms to be available for hire over a longer period at the weekends and opening on weekends leading up to Bank Holidays. In addition this would allow disabled access to the Museum and for the café to open on Sundays. I am hoping to be in a position to open on Sundays from Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> August 2006.
11. **Sunday opening fees.** Sunday reservations are charged at the standard fee plus 25% with no concessionary discounts. I propose that, from 1 August 2006, for reservations during the proposed opening times (10:00 to 16:00 hours) the standard weekday fees apply (see Appendix 1 para 8). Sunday use of the premises outside the above hours would continue to be liable to a 25% supplement with no concessionary discounts. This change in charging would financially benefit Sunday concerts where they have daytime rehearsals and other events such as the Oxford Folk Festival.
12. On current Sunday bookings this change would result in a loss of income of £615. However against this other reservations currently turned away because they would not bring a sufficient income to justify opening would be accepted during the above hours. These would include civil ceremonies, gallery exhibitions available for weekend viewing and trade events e.g. three Sunday civil ceremonies throughout the year would bring an income of £750.

- 13. Guided Tours.** With the planned move of the City Plate to the ground floor level and regular weekend opening I propose introducing chargeable guided tours of the building using on duty Town Hall staff. The success of this will be dependant on the move of the City Plate and availability of the public rooms for viewing.
- 14. Long Room and Gallery.** Within the above income target an income target of £30k has been set for the use of these rooms. Both rooms are decorated and equipped to a high standard. In order to achieve the income target I propose to charge all clients, both internal and external, for use of these rooms.
- 15. Agency Fees.** I receive several inquiries from agencies looking for accommodation for clients. These agencies ask for a commission on the total invoice we would charge for use of the accommodation. I currently have no authority to pay such commission. I propose that, subject to negotiation, a maximum 12½% be paid to agencies bringing bookings to the Town Hall.
16. Reservations through agencies will be required to be paid for under our standard conditions for payment. The full fee being paid 14 days prior to the date booked.
- 17. Catering bookings.** In partnership with Fosters Events I expect to see an increase in catering events in the Town Hall especially in the area of wedding receptions, social events and seasonal parties. This would increase the income for room hire in support of such events. I do not anticipate a substantial increase in income for this financial year but would expect substantial income in this area of usage in future years.
- 18. Marketing.** In conjunction with Fosters Events there is a need to expand the marketing of the Town Hall. I now have a member of staff with marketing skills dealing with Internet information, publications, market research and 'telesales' as part of his administrative duties. However with an advertising budget of £537 this will have to be reviewed to enable support to any advertising campaigns in conjunction with Fosters Events.
- 19. Town Hall Sponsored Events.** I propose reviewing the practicality of sponsoring events at the Town Hall and taking an income from the events profits.
- 20. Summary.** All of these events will help the Town Hall to work to achieving the target as set. However I recognise that it is also important that existing users continue to find the Town Hall accommodating and helpful to enable them to use the building. The

proposals to change the charging policy will benefit a number of cultural and community groups.

### **Staffing Levels.**

21. Current staffing levels for opening the Town Hall are 6 Town Hall Keepers (including the Supervisor post). They are supported by 3 casual Assistant Town Hall Keepers and 1 Town Hall Assistant (part time) and an evening receptionist (part time). Admin staff also support them as required. Because of their flexible working contracts the Town Hall Keepers average a 41 hour week keeping the building open, on average, weekdays from 07:30 to 22:00 hours and as required at weekends. With the employment of weekend staff, see para 20 above, these hours should allow more flexibility for the full time staff to cover a wider range of opening hours.
22. To support the anticipated increase in accommodation use especially in the area of catered events it may be necessary to carry out a review of the working routine and level of Town Hall staffing. As with other Town Halls to achieve turn around times for back to back bookings contract cleaning services available on an as required basis may have to become part of the Town Hall operational routine.

### **Priority of Use & Other Issues**

23. With the substantial rise in income targets there is a clear need to increase non-Council fee paying use both in room hire and catering events in the Town Hall especially in the non-discounted commercial area of use. I estimate the need to increase fee-paying use by 30% bringing the non-Council use to the 70% bracket. It is appreciated that there is a need to provide accommodation to meet the needs of Members of Council, committees and business units however there are occasions where such use clashes with the needs of the fee paying client.
24. To achieve the income targets being set and support the caterers (which in turn will increase the Council income from the caterers) Council users will have to be more flexible in their use of Town Hall meeting rooms. Council users will have to be prepared to re-locate and if necessary reschedule reservations where such use would lose a fee-paying reservation.
25. **Museum support.** The regular Saturday and Sunday opening of the Town Hall will support the Museum weekend opening in several ways.
  - Museum visitors with mobility difficulties will have access to the museum via the chair lift in the Town Hall and provide level access to areas of the museum currently not accessible to such persons.
  - Allow visitors to the museum access to the Town Hall toilet facilities
  - Provide catering facilities in the Town Hall café.

## **Recommendations**

The Executive Board is requested to:

26. Approve the change in the Town Hall room charging policy for Sundays and to agree the proposals to achieve the increased income targets.
27. To note that the amount of the concessionary discount given at present will be reviewed at the end of the current financial year.

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Background papers: None

**Appendix 1 to  
Town Hall Fees & Events Policy**

**Charging Policy and Current Hire Fees.**

**1. Standard.** These fees are charged to all commercial clients and others not entitled to a concessionary discount or free use of the accommodation.

**2. Concessionary.** This is set as a percentage discount on the standard price and is available to registered charities, local community groups, Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council users (where charges would be applied).

**3. Free** use of Town Hall accommodation may be allocated as follows:

- Public Meetings to discuss an issue or issues directly affecting the residents of Oxford (regardless of whether it also has wider implications outside Oxford) are restricted to Tuesday or Thursday evening unless prior approval is given by the Town Hall manager. Public meetings are to be held in either the Main Hall, the Assembly Room, Old Library or Council Chamber and must be advertised as public meetings. There must be no admission charge or restriction as to access.
- Local community and charitable organisations may be allocated free weekday evening use of a meeting room on the following conditions.
  - Reservations are restricted to Tuesday and Thursday evenings and are to end by 21:30 hours. Only one free reservation per month is allowed and reservations are to be no more than three months in advance. Reservations on other evenings are charged at the standard rate less the concessionary discount.
  - All technical equipment and catering requirements will be charged for at the current rate plus VAT where applicable.
  - Free meetings may be moved to another room, postponed or the reservation cancelled if they are the only evening reservation or they would prevent a fee paying client use of the premises. Where postponement or cancellation was necessary every effort would be made to give the organiser a minimum of 14 days notice.
  - Where a free booking is cancelled on the day of the reservation, or the client fails to attend for the meeting a 'no show' fee (currently £30) may be charged and must be paid before further reservations are accepted.

**4. Members of Council** may have free use of a meeting room provided that use is for Council business. The Tuesday and Thursday evening rule also applies to Members of Council in respect of free evening reservations.

**5. Business Units** have free weekday use of meeting rooms including the Assembly Room and Old Library for Council business. Where a business unit reserves accommodation for an organisation that would normally be charged for that use then the business unit will be charged for use of the room at the appropriate rate, All evening and weekend use of the accommodation may be charged for at the concessionary rate. Reservations for the Main Hall, Long Room and Gallery may be charged for.

**6. Additional free use.** The Executive Board in 2002 approved the following organisations free daytime and evening Main Hall and meeting room use:

- Citizens Advice Bureau – 15 weekday meetings
- City of Oxford Charities – 26 weekday meetings
- Committee for Over 70's Tea Party – Tea dances and Parties
- Oxford Carer's Forum – 6 weekday meetings
- Oxford City Duke of Edinburgh's Awards -1 evening in March
- Oxford Gang Show – 1 Saturday in January
- Oxford International Women's Festival – 1 weekend in March
- Oxford Pensioners Action Group – 16 per annum
- City Twinning Associations – one fundraising event each

**7. Conditions for Hire** were revised in January 2006 to take into account the conditions of the Town Hall Premises Licence, the variation in our liquor license to a full licence for the sale and supply of alcohol and emergency evacuation requirements. These conditions cover a wide range of subjects, a copy of the conditions will be made available to members of the EB.

**8. Fees.** Room hire fees are charged on an hourly basis with a minimum 2-hour charge. Charges are compared regularly with commercial venues to ensure our charges are competitive. For the last two years our room hire fees have been increased by the rate of inflation. Currently the charges per hour are:

- |                             |         |
|-----------------------------|---------|
| • Main Hall                 | £145.00 |
| • Assembly Room/Old Library | £88.00  |
| • Long Room                 | £62.00  |
| • Gallery – per day         | £125.00 |
| • Gallery – per 5 days      | £500.00 |
| • Meeting Rooms             | £32.00  |



9. Where a reservation extends beyond 12 midnight a flat rate of £170 per hour is charged. No concessionary discounts are allowed on that figure.

**10. Social Events.** A special flat rate charge is applied for social events using the Main Hall, Assembly Room and Old Library. This charge covers preparation, the event, and clearance by the client and cleaning by staff. For the majority of this type of event the room is not suitable for other use the following day until after mid-day.

- Main Hall £1,800.00
- Assembly Room and/or Old Library £1,550.00

**11. Discounts.** The following discounts are allowed on the standard fees at para 8 above excluding the Gallery fees. Discounts are not accumulative.

- Concessionary meetings 50%
- Cultural Grant (to a max £1,500) 75%
- Preparation, Clearance or Rehearsal 50%
- 6 hour or more consecutive use 20%

**12. Audio Visual Equipment.** Business units are charged for the use of audiovisual equipment and the income is used to upgrade the equipment and fund other purchases of equipment and items for use in the public rooms. For example over the last 3 years this has included data/video projectors, portable monitors, Main Hall and Assembly room seating, furniture for the Judges and Clerks Room and the Old Library conference system.