



Grounds and Environmental Services Committee

Date: 14th December 2020

Title: Fees and Charges

Purpose of the Report: To consider extending the temporary amendments to the previously agreed fee structure to support the re-introduction of community activities in Town Council pavilion buildings.

Contact Officers: Ian Haynes – Head of Grounds and Environmental Services
 Sarah Sandiford – Head of Democratic and Central Services/Deputy Town Clerk
 Mark Saccoccio – Town Clerk

Corporate Aim/s		
Implications:		
Financial	Yes	The proposal will see a continued temporary reduction in charges to regular hirers.
Human Resources	No	None
Operational/Service delivery	Yes	To ensure pavilions can safely re-open for community uses.
Procedural/Legal	Yes	To ensure adherence to Government COVID-19 safety guidelines.
Risk/Health and Safety	Yes	To minimise health risks relating to COVID-19.

1. RECOMMENDATION

Should Members be minded, to support the proposal to:-

- 1.2 To consider the continued temporary amendments to fees and charges for pavilion hire for the period 1st January – 31 March 2021 as set out in paragraph 4.2.**

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 In December 2019, following months of meetings of the Astral Park Task and Finish Group and detailed review of usage of all three Pavilion buildings, the following fees and charges for pavilion hire were approved by the Grounds and Environmental Services Committee:

Pages Park Pavilion £18.00 per hour
 £12.00 per hour off-peak (Mon-Fri 1pm-4pm)
 Play Café £18.00 per session

Linslade Memorial Pavilion £18.50 per hour
 £12.00 per hour off-peak (Mon-Fri 1pm-4pm)
 Mentmore Under Fives £18.50 per session

Astral Park Sports & Community Centre £28.00 per hour
 £18.50 per hour off-peak (Mon-Fri 1pm-4pm)

2.2 In addition to the above, a new initiative was agreed to support the use of facilities by charities, voluntary, community and other not-for-profit organisations:

*Organisations/groups which are not-for-profit may apply for a discount of 50% on **either standard rates or the discounted off-peak rate**, subject to the following:*

- *The group must be comprised mainly of Leighton-Linslade residents*
- *The group must be a not for profit organisation*
- *The group must be able to demonstrate a clear community benefit*
- *Each group may have a maximum of one discounted session per week, other than in exceptional circumstances*
- *A maximum of 2 discounted bookings **per week, per facility** will be permitted **outside of the specified off-peak sessions (1pm-4pm weekdays) which are unlimited.***
- *Bookings are subject to availability and on a first come, first served basis.*
- *The council reserves the right to cancel future bookings if the group breaches hire terms and conditions.*

2.3 The new fee structure was due to take effect from 1 April 2020.

2.4 Following the national lockdown from 23 March 2020, the Pavilion buildings were closed and following the second national lockdown from 5 November – 2 December were closed, having only just re-opened.

2.5 Budgeted income from pavilion hire for the financial year 2020/21 is £68,475 (average £5,706.25 per month). Loss of income from various income streams was the subject of the COVID-19 financial impact report presented to Council on 27 July 2020.

3 UPDATE

- 3.1 At its meeting held on 24 August 2020, Council approved the COVID-19 risk assessments for the three Pavilion buildings. These were based on Government guidance for mixed use community buildings.
- 3.2 Following this approval, it was agreed to contact previous regular hirers to seek their views on returning to the venue(s) to resume activities and meetings.
- 3.3 To ensure that COVID-19 secure guidelines could be met, it was decided to restrict bookings initially to regular and long-term hirers, with the potential to introduce venue hire to new and ad-hoc hirers from October 2020.
- 3.4 Feedback from discussions with regular hirers has identified that many individuals, businesses and groups are struggling to reconcile the implications of adhering to COVID-19 guidelines with resuming their activities. Key issues identified are that:
 - 3.4.1 maximum attendance numbers at all venues are much reduced due to the necessity of social distancing, potentially restricting income for payable activities.
 - 3.4.2 additional time may be required before, after and during sessions to meet stringent cleaning requirements, resulting in longer hires and increased hire costs.
 - 3.4.3 for previous Astral Park hirers, the need to book the entire hall rather than half or a quarter of the hall, as in the past, means an increased cost.
- 3.5 Hirers are keen to resume their activities for the benefit of the community but the changes brought about by the pandemic are clearly having an adverse impact on the viability of doing so.
- 3.6 The Town Council recognises the benefit to residents of resuming community activities and seeks to support this as far as practicable.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 It is recommended that the fundamental fee structure agreed by Committee in December 2019 be retained as this was based on a significant amount of research and consideration over an extended period of time.
- 4.2 To encourage and support the resumed use of Town Council pavilion buildings for community activities, it is proposed that:
 - 4.2.1 a discount of 50% be applied to the previously agreed fees and charges for this financial year, for bookings to regular hirers taking place**

between 1st January - 31 March 2021. This includes the off-peak and charitable/not for profit discounted rates.

4.2.2 that each hirer be granted a free half-hour immediately prior to and immediately after their chargeable hire period to allow for the enhanced cleaning required by COVID-19 guidelines.

4.2.3 that the above arrangements be reviewed by the Committee at its next meeting on 8th March 2021.

- 4.3 The proposed reduction will not only help ensure that community activities can re-commence to the benefit of residents, but also aims to ensure that regular hirers feel empowered to take the risk of committing to venue hire, by restricting their financial liability whilst also ensuring that a proportion of venue hire income can be generated during this difficult period.

End.