

BILLERICAY TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held remotely via Zoom on Thursday 4th March 2021 at 10.30am

Chairman: Cllr A Adshead
Vice-Chairman: Cllr M Roessler
Councillors: J Clark, R Clark, M Dear, J Devlin, M Moore, G Talbot

Also in attendance the Town Clerk

157. Apologies for absence

Cllrs C Roberts, A Talboys, J Tutton

158. Declarations of interest with regard to items on the Agenda

Cllr Adshead updated members with regards to pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests and the Clerk presented the opinion of the Monitoring Officer which had been sought following the previous meeting. The Monitoring Officer has defined the interest as non-pecuniary and given consent for Cllr Adshead to take part in hire rate discussions.

Agenda Item 5(a)(ii)

Cllr Adshead declared a non-pecuniary interest as Chair of the Billericay Community Cinema, Chair of Trustees of the Cater Museum and Chair of the Billericay Art Trail.

Cllrs J Clark and M Moore declared a non-pecuniary interest as members of the local Conservative Association

Cllr J Devlin declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of the local Conservative Association and Billericay Community Archive

Cllr R Clark declared a non-pecuniary interest as Chairman of Langham Hall Charitable Trust, Trustee of Essex Land Rover Club and Treasurer of Basildon Rifle Club

159. Public Participation session with respect to items on the Agenda

There were none.

160. Minutes of the Finance & GP Committee meeting held on 25th February 2021

Members received and considered the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 25th February 2021.

Cllr Devlin stated that on p.45, Minute 152(b)(iv) was unclear as to how long a session was and asked that this be revisited and corrected at this meeting.

Cllr Dear asked that the clarification requested by Cllr Dan Wakefield during the Public Question Time is added to the minutes.

Resolved: (i) that the above proposed amendments are accepted, and **(ii)** that in all other respects the minutes of the meeting held on 25th February 2021 be approved as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

161. The Chantry Centre

(i) Members received a list of potential hirers of the facility.

(ii) Cllr Adshead explained that there was a need to keep things simple with regard to the charging policy. Members should think about how any decisions will affect staff and consult with them about the impact on their day to day work. The decisions to be taken are complex and members were urged not to rush and make consequential decisions. Cllr Adshead said that the Council will make mistakes initially and this is why it is important that the operation of the Chantry Centre should be kept under regular review. There is a requirement that the Council is flexible and reactive. Cllr Adshead suggested adding a rider to any proposal that they can be revisited and amended outside of the six month rule. This was supported by Cllr Roessler, however Cllr Devlin said that as these decisions were operational the six month rule for revisiting a resolution does not apply. Cllr Dear agreed that operational decisions for the day to running of the building can be made by the Clerk provided that the Council is kept informed. All policy issues will be determined by resolution of the Council.

Cllr Adshead said that further to Minute 152(b)(iv) from 25th February, clarification was required as to when sessions were applicable to the Main Hall. To be clear, an hourly rate will still apply but at certain times the hall would be available in a block booking only (sessions), i.e. Friday evening, weekend daytime and evenings. Members were reminded that the hours of operation as approved by Basildon Borough Council are from 08.00 to 23.00. Cllr R Clark said that at Langham Hall they had a minimum hire period of one hour and that weekends were generally quieter. Devlin said he had proposed sessions for Friday evening and weekends as there was the possibility that out of hours hire would require employing a caretaker which would be an additional cost to the Council and not worth it if the hire periods were short. The Town Clerk is currently awaiting a response from the Council's insurers as to what constitutes an acceptable level of security with regard to the locking of the facility. Members agreed that the Council had to make assumptions about usage then fine tune them. Cllr R Clark said that in his experience with Langham Hall restricting usage at weekends to sessions would deter keep fit and exercise classes as they generally only require hire for an hour. Langham Hall does not have a caretaker and the users let themselves in and out, but if they abuse that then they are not permitted to hire again. Most facilities insist that the premises are returned to how users found them, so any tables and chairs have to be put away and mess cleared. If not a charge is taken from the deposit or it is not returned.

Cllr Devlin said that if there was a set hire period on Saturday night from 6.30 until 10.30 and the hirer only wanted 7.00 until 9.00 then they would pay the cost for the entire period. Cllr Moore asked if having sessions would make administering the bookings any easier and whether this was just for the main hall.? Any length of hire period can be set in the booking system so there is no additional work to book the facility in sessions and Cllr Adshead confirmed it is the main hall only that this discussion is referring to. It was asked whether the period of hire for a session can be at the discretion of the Clerk? Members should consider whether the Council tells hirers what times they can have, as it was felt that this could cause issues if hirers want it at differing times. To be too rigid might risk losing hirers or do we permit short bookings that impact on longer hires? Ultimately the users will make the decision. Members discussed charging hourly with a minimum session length at certain times and hire on an hourly basis for the majority of the week. It was agreed that anything decided can be reviewed going forward and kept under review and the

office has the power to make decisions with regard to bookings which make the best use out of the building.

Cllr Devlin proposed the following:

(i) that the main hall is hired out in session blocks at the following times:

Friday evening – 6.30pm-10.30pm

Saturday and Sunday morning – 8.30am-12.30pm

Saturday and Sunday afternoon – 1.30pm-5.30pm

Saturday and Sunday evening – 6.30pm-10.30pm

(ii) and that flexibility is given to staff to maximise the potential of the Centre.

Seconded by Cllr Dear. Members voted and there were 4 votes for and 4 against. As the Chairman has the casting vote the proposal was defeated.

Cllr R Clark proposed that the Main Hall is hired on a Friday evening and weekends on an hourly basis with a minimum hire of four hours. This will provide greater flexibility to hirers whilst still maintaining the Clerk's ability to maximise the potential of the facility.

Seconded by Cllr Talbot. Members voted and there were 6 in favour with 2 abstentions. Therefore it was:

Resolved: That the main hall is hired on a Friday evening and at weekends for a minimum time period of four hours.

Cllr Roessler requested that the proposed rate card put forward by Cllr Adshead be considered for acceptance by all members of Finance & General Purposes with regard to room hire charges but with further discussion on additional charges such as the AV equipment. Cllr Devlin said he felt that the rates were too high for the smaller rooms and that the daytime rates should be lower than the evening. Cllr Adshead explained that the table was put together to be as simple as possible and was compiled after reviewing rates from other facilities plus revisiting what had previously been charged for the old Chantry Centre. The hourly rate card is simple to administer and should remain the same price at this stage of one rate across the board which can be reviewed at a later date when usage is known. Cllr R Clark asked whether the Clerk could have discretion to offer minimal or free hire to groups that provide social benefit. It was agreed that there is prior agreed flexibility to do this in the previous resolution. Other members felt that the size of the rooms was irrelevant as each hirer would have a personal preference for the size of space they required but the Council would be guided on rates by the volume of hirers. It is always more difficult to raise charges – however they can always be dropped if the hirers don't take them up. Free hire should be presented to full Council as being under the auspices of Billericay Town Council working in partnership so the Council would be providing the services. Cllr Dear said that offering free hire should be a separate proposal to the rate card but must be a full Town Council decision.

Cllr Roessler proposed that the room hire rates only as shown on the rate card are adopted subject to review as necessary. Seconded by Cllr Talbot

Resolved: that the proposed room hire charges are approved and adopted subject to regular review.

Cllr Adshead proposed a ten minute break.

162. Outstanding Issues

Members considered the items that still needed a resolution with regard to charging policy. These are:

- (i) how much to charge for use of the kitchen – a separate charge was previously agreed under Minute 152(b)(i) on 25th February.
- (ii) Separate charge for the audio-visual equipment.
- (iii) Cleaning concept.
- (iv) amount of booking deposit
- (v) groups that will not be permitted to hire.

Discussion took place about the kitchen hire. It was agreed there were a wide range of uses for the facility – from drinks only to a fully catered event involving use of the oven, plate warmer and food storage. Should there be levels of charging? A basic hire then a full catering option. Basic catering could be included in the hall hire with the addition of a small cost to cover the power used and cleaning. Larger catering services would be a more expensive charge. It was suggested there could be a basic charge of £5 for use of the kitchen during the main hall hire period and £25 for full use of the facilities. If the use of the kitchen was required by hirers then they could be asked their level of usage and charged a flat rate based upon this.

Cllr Devlin proposed that £2 an hour is charged for standard usage of the kitchen and £25 is charged as a flat rate catering charge for the entire hire period. To be administered at the Clerk's discretion.

Cllr Roessler proposed an amendment that there is a flat rate charge of £5 for standard kitchen hire and a flat rate of £25 for full catering hire. Seconded by Cllr Moore.

Resolved: that if required by main hall hirers, the kitchen is charged at an additional £5 flat rate for standard hire and £25 flat rate for full catering usage.

Hire of audio-visual equipment. Cllr Adshead had previously circulated a document that set out various user scenarios for the audio-visual equipment. All use would require access to the backstage store to switch on the equipment. Discussion took place as to whether the hire should be split into two scenarios to keep it simple – (i) music/microphone only; (ii) anything that would also use the screen and spotlights.

Cllr Devlin said that this discussion should be postponed until a judgement has been received from HMRC about whether VAT is chargeable if the AV equipment is hired separately. Discussion took place and Cllr Moore proposed that use of the audio-visual equipment is included in the main hall hire rate. Seconded by Cllr Devlin.

Members voted and there were 6 in favour with 2 abstentions. Therefore it was:

Resolved: that use of the audio-visual equipment is included in the main hall hire rate.

Cllr Adshead proposed that as the meeting had been going for three hours it was closed and the remaining items tabled for discussion at a later date.

163. Consideration of Material for Press Release/Social Media

Nothing at this time.

164. Questions from the Press and Public

Nothing at this time.

Cllr A Adshead
Chairman of the Committee

The Vice-Chairman closed the meeting at 1.32pm

Chairman:..... Date: