



Report to Scrutiny

Item Number: **6**

Contains Confidential or Exempt Information

No

Subject of Report:	Hospitality and Events – Community Hire
Meeting:	Scrutiny Review Panel 2 – Community Centres 28 January 2016
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Brief:	The scope of this panel includes consideration of community facilities available in the borough. This report sets out those facilities, managed by the Council's Hospitality and Events department and available for community hire, and provides information on the lettings and pricing policy, marketing, and usage by community groups.
Recommendations:	The Panel is asked to consider the report and make recommendations as appropriate.

1. HOSPITALITY & EVENTS – COMMUNITY GROUPS REVIEW

Background

- 1.1 Ealing Council's Hospitality & Events department has undergone significant change since 2008 when a new staffing infrastructure and business strategy was implemented. The department primarily looks after the venue spaces for hire within both Ealing Town Hall, Greenford Hall and the Rickyard within Walpole Park (weekends only).

Ealing Town Hall has 12 rooms available for hire comprising of 5 smaller committee-size meeting rooms, 5 mid-sized spaces and 2 large venues. Greenford Hall comprises of the main Assembly Hall, two small meeting rooms on the ground floor and the Cyril Grant Room on the first floor. The Cyril Grant Room is available Mon-Fri after 7pm and at the weekends. During the week, it operates as a nursery on a lease basis.

Venue	Theatre-style seating capacity	Boardroom / committee style seating capacity	Dinner seating capacity	Dinner Dance seating capacity	Cabaret seating capacity
Ealing Town Hall					
Victoria Hall	450	N/A	250	200	200
Princes Hall	100	30	200	110	80
Queens Hall	150	50	100	80	80
Liz Cantell Room	120	50	100	80	80
Nelson Room	80	30	60	50	48
Telfer Room	80	30	N/A	N/A	48
Council Chamber	70	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Committee Room 1	40	20	N/A	N/A	24
Committee Room 2	N/A	20	N/A	N/A	N/A
Committee Room 3	50	20	N/A	N/A	30
Committee Room 4	30	16	N/A	N/A	20
Walpole Room	30	16	N/A	N/A	16
Greenford Hall					
Main Assembly Hall	470	N/A	350	280	280
Cyril Grant Room	150	50	100	80	80
Ruislip Room	40	20	N/A	N/A	24
Ravenor Room	50	20	N/A	N/A	24

The spaces available for hire within Ealing Town Hall and Greenford Hall are used by internal council departments and external clients both for community use and corporate / private commercial hire.

The Rickyard opened up for commercial hire in November 2015 and is available from 5pm on Fridays through til Sunday evenings for approx 30-50 people. During the week, it is an educational space run by the Parks team.

1.2 **Lettings and Pricing**

The management of the Hospitality & Events business was addressed through the Lettings and Pricing policy (see Appendix 1) - endorsed by Overview & Scrutiny Committee in 2008-9. The policy's major driver was to ensure that market comparable rates were being charged and that there was consistency and transparency for all bookings made at Ealing Town Hall and Greenford Hall. Subsequent years have seen small price rises which have been approved by the Director of Business Services Group.

Rates for the Rickyard are approved by the Assistant Director for Leisure and any income from events operated at the weekend is split 50:50 between Hospitality & Events and Parks. Due to the nature of the booking periods available and types of events at the Rickyard – in addition to the need to ensure that the Rickyard is a self-sustaining property – there is only one level of pricing available.

The policy focuses on operating peak and off-peak periods which allows the council to maximise income at the most commercially desirable period and off-set the costs of offering reduced rates to community groups at off-peak times.

The current venue hire fees for both Ealing and Greenford are attached in Appendix 2(a-c) along with the published community rates for April 2015 – March 2016. It is anticipated that there will be no increase for the period April 2016 – March 2017.

1.3 **Community Hire**

When the Hospitality Manager assumed responsibility for the management of regular hirer bookings – usually comprised of local community groups – in early 2009, there was a discernible discrepancy between what each group was being charged for use of the various rooms within Ealing Town Hall and Greenford Hall. In addition to this, contracts were flimsy and there was no formal booking process that allowed for fairness and transparency.

1.3.1 **Community Rate Policy**

To address these issues, there is now a fixed Community Rate policy for Ealing Town Hall and Greenford Hall (see Appendix 3) and all community groups are charged the same rates.

The community rate is a reduced fee of approximately 40-45% on the normal venue hire fee and it can be offered to registered charities and to local groups and organisations whose intention is to offer facilities/opportunities to residents of the Borough on a non-profit making basis. The policy is intended to show the

Council's support for such groups who are providing additional services to residents in the Borough. Whilst the community rate primarily operates on a Monday – Friday basis, weekend community packages are available at Greenford Hall throughout the year and also at Ealing Town Hall (Victoria Hall & Princes Hall) for bookings with less than 3 months' notice. The community rate is also the same as the internal rate for other council departments wishing to book rooms.

1.3.2 *Community bookings process*

In addition to this, a formal bookings process was established and contracts for both commercial and community clients were tightened up to streamline the business and ensure that the venue spaces were managed safely and efficiently. For those who book on a regular basis at either Ealing Town Hall or Greenford Hall, it was acknowledged that there was a significant saving on staff administration time if clients booked large numbers of events at one time. It was also desirable to incentivise local groups to commit for longer periods of time. As such, **a multiple booking discount** of anything between 10-50% was introduced and which is applied to both peak and off-peak rates to community hire.

1.3.3 *Public Health*

With Local Authorities assuming responsibility for public health in 2013, it was appropriate that the Hospitality and Events Team adjusted its community rate policy to support activities taking place in Ealing Town Hall and Greenford Hall that supported these aims.

As such the community rate is now applied to all dance and exercise bookings that can demonstrate that they are providing valuable services to the residents of Ealing and charging a fair price for the classes. At Ealing Town Hall, this applies primarily Mon – Fri 9am – 10pm and Sat and Sun 9am – 5pm throughout the year and at Greenford Hall Mon – Friday 9am – 10pm (with the exception of the Victoria & Princes Halls in Ealing and the main hall at Greenford where the peak commercial rate operates from 5pm on Fridays and at weekends/bank holidays). In addition, the aim of the department is to encourage as diverse a range of dance and exercise classes as possible to ensure the entire community can benefit from the facilities on offer.

1.3.4 *Telfer Room bookings*

The Telfer Room was overhauled in the summer of 2011 and was reopened to the public primarily as a new dance/exercise space available for hire although it has the capacity to act as a multi-function room with meetings taking place during the daytime. Refurbishment works included the introduction of a sprung wooden floor, mirrors, inbuilt sound system, air-conditioning system, new changing area and portable ballet barres.

The overall project cost £95k with approx. £50k coming from S106 money from St George's as part of the Dickens Yard development project.

Early on into the bookings process, it became apparent that there was a lot of interest in booking the new dance space by ballet companies; however, given the responsibility to use the section 106 money from St George's to its' fullest community value and ensure as many users as possible benefitted across a wide variety of exercise and dance, the decision was taken to only accept one regular

booking per type of dance. As a result, there are now 10 regular dance / exercise classes who use the Telfer Room on a weekly basis.

1.3.5 *Regular community/ charity groups in our venues*

In 2009, there were approximately 20 regular external community groups who used Ealing Town Hall, Acton Town Hall and Greenford Hall. For clarity, regular hirers are organisations who book on a daily, weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis throughout the year. It does not include those organisations who book on a quarterly, bi-annual or annual basis.

As of November 2015, there are now 52 organisations which use either Ealing Town Hall or Greenford Hall regularly. These comprise of a wide range of community activities from flower-arranging, religious groups, social networking, exercise and dance to children's homework classes, blood donor sessions and arts groups. They also include public sector organisations such as National Blood Service and NHS / Ealing CCG. A full list of the current regular hirers along with the frequency of their bookings and the purpose of their meetings is listed in Appendix 4.

In addition to this, we have a large number of community groups and charities who use the facilities at both venues for regular adhoc, quarterly, bi-annual and annual events. Examples of these hirers include local pantomime shows, Met Police meetings, Ealing in Bloom awards, Jack Petchey Foundation, local schools' awards ceremonies and annual community religious/cultural festivals. Finally, we welcome a huge volume of one-off events and meetings for community organisations and charities. To give an indication of the diary for community / public sector / dance & exercise bookings at Ealing Town Hall and Greenford Hall for any given month, please see Appendix 5 (Ealing Town Hall – October 2015) and Appendix 6 (Greenford Hall 2015) – these provide a breakdown of purely external bookings which took place in October 2015 and are filtered by dates / times and types of bookings and users.

1.3.6 *Number of Bookings*

This has steadily increased over the years and the financial year April 2014-March 2015 saw Ealing Town Hall and Greenford Hall host over 4300 meetings / events. Since 2010, the number of events within the 2 venues has increased by ~1100 and this is predominantly down to the increase in the number of regular hirer community bookings (see Appendix 7).

Based on the April – early January figures for 2015-16, this trend looks set to continue and there have already been 3713 events which have taken place or are currently scheduled.

1.4 **Marketing**

Hospitality & Events implements and regularly reviews a comprehensive marketing strategy. Hospitality is focused on future bookings and marketing investment in six months' time will most likely produce activity in nine to twelve months.

- 1.4.1 Over the last 4-5 years, the Hospitality & Events department has worked closely with a specific contact within the Marketing & Communications team. There is a marketing plan which, whilst focussing primarily on the private commercial market eg. weddings and social occasions in order to generate the peak

commercial income required to help sustain the internal and community bookings, also seeks to develop and support community groups. It has been found beneficial to look predominantly at local options around marketing including poster board sites across the borough and advertising within Around Ealing (see Appendix 8 for example of advert). The strategy is based on operating a full marketing calendar to engage in some form of marketing or promotional activity on a year-round basis.

Whilst the budget remains relatively low, recent opportunities for marketing have included the development of the new venue hire brochure (which can be used flexibly across private, community and corporate hire and has specific information for community hire – see Appendix 9).

In addition, the new website – www.ealing.venues.co.uk – has an entire community section which covers facilities available for groups and charities alongside testimonials.

1.4.2 We also make a concerted effort to work with the community users who book with us to ensure that their groups and meetings are advertised as well as possible, Many choose to produce leaflets / posters which are freely put on display at both Ealing Town Hall and Greenford Hall. There is also a facility where they are able to advertise on the screen in the Town Hall lobby to attract interest and we will regularly feature events and activities through the Ealing Venues facebook page.

On the website, there is a full list of contact details for current community activities taking place.

With regard to accepting bookings for community groups, we will do our best to help accommodate their meetings / events within the spaces that we have available. In the instance that we are unable to help due to lack of availability / size / pricing etc, we will then try to refer them to an alternative council community venue or, if appropriate, to a venue which is run by a neighbouring council.

Through the Local Authorities Venue Forum – which was established in June 2014 and comprises of Event Managers from several London councils who come together to share knowledge and best practice – there is now an informal system in place for referrals across our venues to help maximise usage and income potential for council properties.

1.5 **Future moves**

1.5.1 *Ealing Town Hall*

Some initial works were undertaken to improve the main event spaces in 2009/10 in Ealing Town Hall – most notably the redecoration and installation of a new lighting / sound system in the Victoria Hall and refurbishment of the Princes Hall kitchen in 2009-10 – to conform to H&S standards and bring the spaces up to date for community and commercial hire. Little else has been done across the Town Hall aside from the partly funded refurbishment of the Telfer Room.

Any future plans with regard to the Town Hall have now been put on hold as the tender for the redevelopment of the building has gone out to commercial developers. Whilst no decision has yet been made as to the exact details of the redevelopment, it is our understanding that proposals for the east end of the new Town Hall (which is being retained for civic purposes) will include spaces which will be available for community and commercial use.

In the meantime, all existing regular community groups and charities which use Ealing Town Hall were written to in September / October 2015, were advised that the building would be closing in early 2017 and were informed that we would only be able to accept bookings until the end of March of that year. We have committed to update these users as and when any concrete information is made available and have also provided details on alternative council venues within the borough and the community hire pages on the council website. Contact details have also been provided for the Hospitality & Events team for any queries and, to date, there have only been a handful of questions.

More details regarding the plans for redevelopment can be provided by Regeneration & Planning who are leading on the tender process (contact: Lucy Taylor, Director).

1.5.2 *Greenford Hall*

Greenford Hall was closed for a period of refurbishment costing approximately £1.1m between April 2011 and December 2011. Whilst the majority of the works concentrated on addressing the deterioration of the fabric of the building, services and equipment, some money was directed towards the improvement of the facilities on offer to make the spaces more attractive for use by commercial and community clients alike. This included the redevelopment of the 2 dressing rooms into multi-use meeting rooms and the overhaul of the sound and lighting systems within the main Hall.

When the building was reopened, it was very much a directive to ensure that the new spaces were made available and affordable for the various community groups who would be interested in using it encompassing religious, cultural and club activities as well as 'one-off' shows and events and so a weekend community rate package was also made available.

Since the Hall reopened, one of the remaining issues was the lack of DDA access up to the first floor of the building and, more specifically, the Cyril Grant Room. A capital bid to repair the lift shaft and bring it back into working order in 2013 was rejected and so, on this basis, the decision was made to offer the space out to tender for nursery provision on a shared lease basis for 7 years. This provides a solution for the long-term use of the first floor on a daily basis Monday – Friday, delivers much-needed early years care space within the borough (particularly for under 2 year olds) and still allows the flexibility for evening and weekend private hire. The value of the nursery at Greenford Hall is approximately £35k per annum and commenced in August 2014.

Whilst the event / meeting spaces at Greenford Hall don't lend themselves particularly well to regular community groups, the main hall is a particularly popular venue for one-off community cultural, religious and social celebrations.

It is anticipated that Greenford Hall will continue to serve as a valuable community asset in future years.

2. Legal Implications

All lettings should be made on the basis of standard and approved terms and conditions. The legal position of any existing letting arrangements will need to be investigated before decisions can be made about future arrangements or possibilities.

3. Financial Implications

No specific financial implications arise from this report other than those associated with the closure of Ealing Town Hall and the loss of Hospitality & Events bookings.

4. Other Implications

As above, the only implication arising from this report is with regard to the Town Hall closure and the subsequent need for all of the existing community groups / registered charities to find alternative venues.

Links to Strategic Objectives

4.1 The provision of Hospitality & Events provides support in achieving the following specific strategic objectives:

- **Making the borough safer**

Operating a high performing business focussed on the needs of its' communities. Having established processes in place to ensure that events are delivered responsibly and that the democratic process and other public meetings are supported in a safe and welcoming environment.

- **Securing public services**

Providing a range of spaces to improve opportunities for community groups, local schools and public health activities.

- **Delivering value for money**

To make Ealing a better place to live by improving customer experience and service facilities. Supporting events for local community and charity organisations by offering subsidised rates of hire.

Staffing/Workforce and Accommodation Implications:

4.2 No specific staffing/workplace and accommodation issues arise from this report.

Equalities and Community Cohesion

4.3 No specific equalities and community cohesion issues have been identified. Any material changes to current policy or procedure will require an Equality Impact Assessment to be undertaken.

5. Background Papers

Files held within Business Services Group on Hospitality & Events.

Consultation

Name of Consultee	Department	Date Sent to Consultee	Date Response Received from Consultee	Comments Appear in Report Para:
Internal				
Tom Rennie	Interim Director of Business Services	19.11.15		
Dominick Kelly	Interim Head of Corporate Facilities	19.11.15		

Report History

Decision Type: Non-key Decision	Urgency item? No
Authorised by Cabinet Member:	Date Drafted:
Report Deadline:	Date Report Sent:
Report No.:	Report Author and Contact for Queries:
	Jane Coughlan – Hospitality & Events Manager Tel: 020 8825 6700 E: coughlanj@ealing.gov.uk