

For Publication

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority  
Corporate Services Policy and Challenge  
Group  
14 September 2016  
Item No. 9

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**REPORT AUTHOR:** HEAD OF FINANCE/TREASURER

**SUBJECT:** COMMUNITY FACILITIES CHARGES AT STATIONS

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Background Papers: None

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Implications (tick ✓):

LEGAL		FINANCIAL	✓
HUMAN RESOURCES		EQUALITY IMPACT	✓
ENVIRONMENTAL		POLICY	✓
CORPORATE RISK	Known	OTHER (please specify)	
	New	CORE BRIEF	

*Any implications affecting this report are noted at the end of the report.*

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## PURPOSE

To inform the Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group of the Authority's current position on charging for the use of Authority premises and agree the approach going forward.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the CSP&CG consider the report and if deemed appropriate:

- Recommend to the FRA the charges for meeting rooms detailed in Table 1.
  - Recommend to the FRA that discretion is permitted on charging to Senior Service Officers.
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### 1. Introduction

1.1 For a number of years, the Authority has charged for the use of its premises by external groups/organisations. This has predominantly been at Dunstable Community Fire Station, where the reception desk and suitable meeting rooms make this an ideal location to enable the station to be utilised for community and/or corporate use. The charges had not been reviewed for a

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number of years and in doing so recently, this generated FRA interest and a report was requested on the current charges and rationale.

- 1.2 This report does not cover the charges that are levied for full time use and access of stations with current partners such as the Ambulance Service, Police and St Johns Ambulance.
- 1.3 This report has been prepared following FRA Members requesting an update on the community use of premises charges.

## 2. Charges for Station Use and rationale

2.1 The charges for the external use of the Authority’s facilities should be consistent between stations. The aim is to avoid a complicated charging policy. It is proposed that the charges should also be comparable to the rates levied by local authorities with a key factor being cost recovery. Each room hire will generate a requirement for cleaning, the use of light, heat/air conditioning, toilet facilities, refreshments and administration, both in booking the rooms, meeting/greeting, sending invoices and also general wear and tear.

2.1.1 Current/proposed charges and are shown in Table 1 below. These figures cover the stations that are more likely to be requested for community/corporate meeting and are therefore Dunstable, Luton and Ampthill, however the same rates would apply at other stations.

Table 1: Proposed BFRS room hire charges

Station	Standing Charge for each hire £	Plus hourly fee (part hour charged as one) £	Use of kitchen	Tea and coffee can be provided	Refreshments when available
<b>Dunstable</b>					
Small meeting Room	15	9	N	Y	85 pence per head for tea, coffee and biscuits.
Large meeting Room	20	9	N	Y	85 pence per head for tea, coffee and biscuits.
Lecture Theatre	40	9	N	Y	85 pence per head for tea, coffee and biscuits.
<b>Luton</b>	15	9	N	Y	85 pence per head for tea, coffee and biscuits.
<b>Ampthill</b>	15	9	Y	N	85 pence per head for tea, coffee and biscuits.

Varying charges between businesses/profit making organisations and charities/non profit making organisations need to be taken into account. It is proposed that for local groups and charities, the first hour is not charged. For the charges of corporate entities/businesses, to more align with market rates, it is proposed that an additional 50% is applied to the standard charity/community group local rate. It is predominantly local authorities and local groups that utilise the Authority’s premises.

Members may wish to consider if a one off local community meeting, such as a Neighbourhood Watch meeting or a mother and baby group could have this use for free (paying for refreshments if applicable). If these develop after the first meeting and continue to meet, the reduced price could be charged as noted above, with the first hour free. The discretion to apply the free use of the meeting rooms should be with Senior Service Officers at Borough Commander level or if not available, CMT level.

To avoid different charges and to make the charges more transparent, part hours will be charged as one hour. This is the approach that the local council community centres take too.

Table 2 below provides a useful comparison to local community centres in Bedfordshire. The rates below are comparable to the proposed rates in Table 1 above. There is often a minimum booking time of two hours and payment for one off bookings is required in advance. The rates are generally similar for meetings in weekday evenings, although weekends do have additional charges at some community centres. Deposits are generally required too.

Table 2 - Hire Charges Comparison for Community Centres in Bedford Borough

	<b>Mon-Fri 8-6</b>	<b>4 hour charge to enable comparison</b>
<b>BFRS – Charity rate</b> - <b>Corporate rate</b>	See rates above in table 1	£42 £84
<b>Church Lane – upper hall, (kitchen additional £2)</b>	£10 p/h	£40 – currently closed due to refurbishment, new prices due
<b>Biddenham – residents rates</b> - <b>Non residents</b>	£15 p/h £30 p/h	£60 £120
<b>Faraday – Charity rate</b> - <b>Corporate rate</b>	£10 p/h £20.50 p/h	£40 £82
<b>Queens Park – Charity</b> - <b>Other users</b>	£12 p/h £15 p/h	£48 £60
<b>Scott Hall (kitchen +£5) – Regular</b> - <b>Corporate rate</b>	£11 p/h £16 p/h	£44 £64

Appendix 1 enables the above rates to be compared to other organisations that have rooms available for hire. Some of these are used by local authorities within Bedfordshire. As can be seen from the appendix, the rates proposed for the Authority are lower than these comparisons.

- 2.1.2 A different approach will need to be taken where for example at Ampthill, a request to utilise the community area of the station could require a Retained Officer to open and close the building and be on duty specifically for this purpose. These should ideally be avoided as they will incur retained officer salary payments, but the meeting date/time if flexible could link in with officers being on site to complete planned administration work or operational training. The same charges would therefore apply if addition expenditure was not incurred.

2.1.3 There will be a policy and procedure on the use of Community Fire Stations produced. These will be then used by stations and will amongst other areas, cover which groups cannot use the stations facilities as well as rules to adhere to for groups/organisations using the facilities such as no pets (with the exception of guide dogs), no alcohol, no equipment using fire/heat etc.

## 2.2 Options

2.2.1 Continue with the proposed charges above for standard fees to organisations such as local authorities, an increased fee for corporate/business use and a reduced fee for charities/local groups.

2.2.2 To amend the above fees as deemed appropriate.

2.2.3 To consider charges for various groups/users.

2.2.4 To consider the one off free meetings and discretion to be exercised by Service Senior Officers.

## 2.3 Timescales:

2.3.1 Following CSP&CG review and recommendations to the FRA, the fees and charging rationale will be implemented with immediate effect.

## 3. Implications

### 3.1 Financial

3.1.1 For groups/businesses to use our facilities an appropriate comparable charge should be levied. This is to ensure that there is at least cost recovery and that their use of the facility is not being subsidised by taxpayers.

3.1.2 VAT implications are being further considered. The current position is that the rates above are exclusive of VAT. Should it be deemed that VAT needs to be included, the rates proposed will be reduced, so that the rate is equivalent including VAT so as not to be detrimental to the local groups that cannot reclaim VAT. This will also ensure that the comparability with community centres above is not invalidated. The rates will therefore apply with or without VAT, which is yet to be confirmed. This is impacted by having opted to tax on the properties, this is currently being reviewed.

### 3.2 Legal

3.2.1 There are no legal implications

**3.3 Equality, Human Resources, Environmental, Policy, Other:**

3.3.1 The charges levied will impact users who have to date been paying no charge or a lower charge. It is proposed, subject to discussion of this paper, that the charges proposed above are fair and reasonable.

3.3.2 A policy and procedure based on the above is in train.

**PAUL FULLER  
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**

**GAVIN CHAMBERS  
HEAD OF FINANCE/TREASURER**

## Appendix 1

### Comparison of proposed charges

(In this example, exclusive of VAT for comparisons purposes, charged where applicable)

Organisation	Small Room 4hr	Small Room 8hr	Large Room 4hr	Large Room 8hr	Lecture Theatre/Style 4hr	Lecture Theatre/Style 8hr	Refreshments (when avail)
<b>BFRS</b> Charity/local voluntary group (first hour no charge) Standard charge Corporate 50% above standard rate	£35.00 £42.50 £63.75	£65.00 £72.50 £108.75	£39.17 £46.67 £70.00	£69.17 £76.67 £115.00	£55.83 £63.33 £95.00	£85.83 £93.33 £140.00	£0.85 per person for tea, coffee and biscuits
<b>Luton Town Hall – committee room (excl staff costs)</b>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	£81.00	£250.00	£250 is up to 12 hours. Fees exclude staff costs. Can accommodate 10 to 50 people
<b>Kempston area – office/meeting room facilities</b>	£100.00	£180.00	£130.00	£245.00	£200.00	£350.00	£1.75 per person for tea, coffee and biscuits
<b>Hotel with office/meeting room facilities Kempston, Bedford</b>	£150.00	£210.00	£150.00	£210.00	n/a	n/a	Water, mints and biscuits included. Additional cost for unlimited teas and coffees 4hr £3.00 per person/8hrs £6.00 per person
<b>Leighton Buzzard Library Theatre</b> Commercial Community	£84.00 £54.00	£168.00 £108.00	£108.00 £76.00	£216.00 £152.00	£168.00 £128.00	£336.00 £256.00	
<b>Charity providing office/ meeting facilities in Luton</b>	£96.00	£156.00	£132.00	£210.00	£164.00	£260.00	£1.60 per person for tea, coffee and biscuits