

Chipping Norton Town Council

Free Use of Council Venues Policy

Purpose

This policy sets out the framework for the allocation of free use of Chipping Norton Town Council venues, including Chipping Norton Town Hall and Glyme Hall. The policy aims to ensure that free use is provided fairly and transparently while recognising the financial pressures associated with operating council venues.

Background

The council operates the Town Hall and Glyme Hall as community venues that support a wide range of local activities and events. However, the cost of operating these venues currently exceeds the income generated from venue hire. The council must therefore balance community support with the financial sustainability of its venues.

Current Financial Context

The operating cost of the Town Hall is approximately £85,000 per year and the operating cost of Glyme Hall is approximately £75,000 per year. Both venues currently operate at a deficit and contribute to the council's overall budget deficit.

Existing Community Support

The council already provides significant support to community organisations through discounted venue hire and grant funding. Analysis indicates that approximately £50,000 of venue hire value is provided each year through discounts and concessions to community and charitable organisations.

Legacy Use Arrangements

Some organisations have historically been granted free or heavily subsidised use of council venues. These arrangements are referred to as legacy use. The council will maintain a record of legacy arrangements and will periodically review them to ensure they remain appropriate and financially sustainable.

Definition of Free Use

Free use refers to the allocation of council venues without any hire charge. This differs from discounted use where a reduced hire rate is applied.

Eligible Uses for Free Venue Hire

Free use of venues may be granted in limited circumstances where the activity provides clear benefit to the community. This may include council organised events, civic and ceremonial functions, activities directly delivered by the council, or events supporting community wellbeing or local initiatives where approved by the council.

Community Organisations

Community and voluntary organisations will normally be eligible for discounted hire rather than free use. Free use will only be considered in exceptional circumstances where there is clear community benefit and where the council determines that the support is justified and affordable to the council.

Approval Process

Requests for free use of council venues must be approved by the Finance and Resources Committee. Each request will be assessed against the community benefit delivered and the financial impact on the council.

Recording Subsidies

The council will record the estimated value of free use provided each year to ensure transparency regarding the level of subsidy provided through venue hire.

Interaction with Grant Funding

Where an organisation receives council grant funding and also requests free venue use, the council will consider the overall level of support being provided.

Operational Management

All bookings, including free use bookings, must be recorded through the council's venue booking system to ensure accurate records of venue usage and availability.

Review of Policy

This policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure it continues to support community activity while ensuring responsible management of council assets.