

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 June 2019

Report of the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet

1 TONBRIDGE CASTLE – CONCESSIONARY USERS

Summary:

This report sets out a review of the concessionary charging regime applicable to Tonbridge Castle and presents options for further consideration

- 1.1.1 At a previous meeting of the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board it was agreed that the list of concessionary users of the Tonbridge Castle Council Chamber and the rate of discount, if any, to be given to any booking by an approved concessionary user be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.1.2 The Council has historically reviewed the list of concessionary users of the Castle, and the level of charges applicable to such users, on an annual basis as part of the budget setting process. The list of users was last reviewed and approved by the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board in January 2019 – please see **Annex 1** for a list of the current concessionary users, and **Annex 2** for the current terms and conditions applicable to use. For ease of reference the current terms and conditions are also set out at paragraph 1.3.3 below.
- 1.1.3 Following on from the Customer Services Review carried out during 2017 which covered all aspects of Customer Service, as well as focusing on Tonbridge Castle, the Borough Council has been moving to adopt a commercial seven day a week operation, targeting fee revenue from a number of different areas hired by external commercial users. Two examples of this are the Watercolour Classes £6,500 a year, Rochester Bridge Trust Exhibition (£10,000 through subsidised tickets).
- 1.1.4 This report seeks to provide options for further consideration by Members.

1.2 Concessionary users

- 1.2.1 Members will note from **Annex 1** that there are currently 29 organisations on the approved concessionary user list. These are predominantly Tonbridge based organisations.
- 1.2.2 No specific criteria have been agreed for determining whether to include an organisation as an approved concessionary user. The list is instead reviewed by the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board on an annual basis with a view to considering whether any organisations should be added or removed from the list.

1.3 Charges & other terms/ conditions

- 1.3.1 The current charges applicable for concessionary users are set out below, together with the comparative standard charges for hire of the Castle Chamber.

	Standard hire charge	Concessionary users
Monday – Friday – AM (09:00 – 13:00)	100.00	
Monday – Friday – PM (14:00 – 17:00)	100.00	
Monday – Friday – PM (18:00 – 21:00) NB: outside normal caretaker hours	100.00 (plus caretaker costs)	
Saturday – AM or PM (09:00 – 13:00) (14:00 – 17:00)	100.00	
Saturday (18:00 – 23:00) NB: outside normal caretaker hours	200.00 (plus caretaker costs)	
Sunday – 10:00 – 16:00	120.00	
Cleaning charge *1	45.00	45.00
Weekly rate Monday - Friday	Contact Castle for pricing	
Weekly rate Saturday - Friday	Contact Castle for pricing	
Day rate		75.00
Weekly rate Monday - Sunday		150.00

*Cleaning charge only applies to users where food is eaten.

All charges shown are inclusive of VAT where applicable.

1.3.2 With the exception of the applicable cleaning charge, all elements of the concessionary charges have been subject to increases over the past years.

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
First 3 hours	£23	£24	£26	£30	£30
Plus each additional hour or part hour	£8	£8	£9	£10	£10
Caretaking per hour	£16	£16	£18	£20	£20
Cleaning charge*	£35	£35	£35	£35	£35
Daily rate	£38	£38	£50	£75	£75
Weekly rate	£95	£95	£110	£150	£150

1.3.3 The current terms and conditions applicable to concessionary bookings are set out below.

- Sessions will be limited to two per month and will only be permitted between 01 October - 31 March each year (a session being morning, afternoon or evening) or one seven day period in the case of exhibitions.
- The chamber is not available on Friday evenings as this time may be required to set up and rehearse for weddings the following day.
- Charges for caretaking start at 5pm each day.
- Concessionary bookings will not be accepted more than 12 months in advance.
- A charge will be made for cleaning in the event of food being consumed.
- One Parking Permit only will be issued to the hirer.

1.4 Usage/ Income

- 1.4.1 Members will note that concessionary users may only book the Chamber during the 6 month period from 1st Oct to 31st March. Bookings are not permitted from 1st April to 30th September.
- 1.4.2 There are currently 29 Concessionary Users who can book the Council Chamber at Tonbridge Castle at a discount, payment ranges from between 16.76 – 66.67 % of fixed rate. The current booking fees are shown at **Annex 3**
- 1.4.3 Out of the 29 Concessionary Users only 8 have booked the Chamber during 2017/18, 6 have booked in 2018/19 and 6 in 2019/20.
- 1.4.4 The six long standing concessionary users who have made bookings for the last two years are Tonbridge Art Group; 4Art, Tonbridge Camera Club, Homestart AGM; Tonbridge Model Engineering Society and the CAB.
- 1.4.5 The Concessionary users generated the following income from Chamber bookings:

Concessionary users	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Number of organisation bookings	8	6	6
Revenue	£965	£1,320 (including CAB £665)	£1,237 (including CAB £765)

- 1.4.6 As Members will be aware, the CAB is also a tenant of the Borough Council and rents out rooms on the first floor of the Castle offices.
- 1.4.7 The Castle Chamber is also used for a number of other purposes. These include:-
- Weddings – the most popular period for bookings is from April – November, although weddings do take place all year round. Up to 80 guests can be seated in the Chamber during the ceremony. During the financial year 2018/19 a total of 9 weddings took place at the Castle, resulting in income of £8,400. For the year 2019/20 there are 14 bookings resulting in an income of £13,620.
 - School visits – during term times only. The children visiting the Castle take part in a well organised activity held in the Castle Chamber, dressing up in costumes and playing period games. In addition the staff at the Castle have built a number of interactive exhibits, such as a Trebuchet. The most popular days for school visits to the Castle are Thursday / Friday.

During the financial year 2018/19 a total of 16 school visits took place, resulting in income of £10,992. Visits by school parties also generate a separate revenue stream from purchases in the gift shop;

- Organisations that hold events on the Castle Lawn, where the Chamber has been made available to them during the events. In liaison with Leisure Services organisers who hold events on the Castle Lawn, pay for the use of the Council Chamber.
- Tonbridge organisations holding regular meetings in the evening for which there has been no charge e.g. Tonbridge Town Team;
- User Panels, such as Haysden Country Park, for which there has been no charge;
- Miscellaneous paying users e.g. private family functions
- Internal TMBC meetings. A total of 52 bookings of the Castle Chamber took place during the financial year 2018/19 for these purposes. These meetings do not bring in any income to the Council, although they are of course important in contributing to the delivery of key services to residents and businesses.
- External bookings. We are starting to attract more commercial bookings for the Council Chamber which are reflected in the follow table:

External users	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20 (bookings to date)	2020/21 (bookings to date)
Revenue	£965	£3,100	£6,905	£6,690

1.4.8 On a purely commercial basis, Members will note that weddings and school visits are the most advantageous to the Borough Council. Members will be aware that growth in both of these areas is a key component of the future business model for the Castle, with a new pricing models having been agreed by Cabinet on 8 February 2018.

1.5 Considerations/ analysis

1.5.1 There are a number of considerations that arise from a review of the current approach towards concessionary use of the Castle. These may conveniently be grouped under 3 main headings, namely (1) Purpose/ Community Benefit, (2) Impact on other usage of Castle (3) Financial considerations. Each of these headings is explored in more detail below.

(1) Purpose/ community benefit

- 1.5.2 In the event that the Council were either to cease a concessionary charging regime, or were to significantly raise the level of the concessionary charge, there would inevitably be a risk that some community groups would be unable to afford accommodation at the Castle or elsewhere in Tonbridge for their meetings.
- 1.5.3 Comparative costs have been obtained for the hire of other meeting rooms within Tonbridge. The current charges are set out below.

Medway Hall (Angel Centre)

- Daytime per hour until 6pm | £34.50
- Weekends 8am to 6pm | £325
- Sunday to Thursday evenings 6pm to 10pm | £200
- Friday & Saturday evenings 6pm to 10pm | £300
- Additional Charges - Evenings after 10pm | £100 per hour min inc staff charges

Meeting Rooms (Angel Centre)

Current charges per hour range from £14.75 to £32.50. All are subject to a 150 minute minimum evening booking

- Castle 2 or 3 £14.75 | Castle 2 & 3 £16.75
- Judd 1 or 2 | £16.75
- Vauxhall | £17.75
- Judd Suite, Castle 1 | £24.75
- Castle 1 & 2 | £27.75
- Castle Suite | £30.75
- The Riverside | £32.50
- Dance Studio, Exercise Studio & Jubilee Room | £25.50

(2) Impact on other usage of the Castle

- 1.5.4 Bookings made by concessionary users will ordinarily be for use of the Castle Chamber, although storage of chairs etc. in connection with the booking may necessitate use of additional room space at the Castle. This has a consequential impact upon the ability of the Borough Council to rent space to other organisations.

Gateway

- 1.5.5 TMBC has an existing agreement with Kent County Council in respect of the Gateway.
- 1.5.6 Gateway at Tonbridge Castle Gateway is a Kent County Council and Borough/District Council joint scheme that makes it much easier for people to access a range of public and voluntary services under one roof, from libraries and

adult education to council housing and benefits advice. Each Gateway offers a unique mix of partner services, specific to the location and customer need in each area.

- 1.5.7 Gateway operates on the principle that services follow customer need, not the other way around. Compared to traditional one-stop shops, it offers convenient physical access to front line customer advisors and officers from multiple agencies/delivery partners covering central and local government and the voluntary sector. Gateway unites services under a neutral brand, removing the confusion of a myriad of public service organisations.
- 1.5.8 The Gateway Model comprises four key service offerings: Meet and Greet; Self-Help, including assisted Self-Help; Routine Transactions; and Multi-agency Service Hubs.

Customer Service

Over 32,000 people visited Customer Services at Tonbridge Castle during the financial year 2018-19. The top ten reasons people attend the Castle Customer Services are 1) Kiosk; 2) Benefits; 3) Parking; 4) Self Help (Computers); 5) Council Tax; 6) Housing; 7) To use the Toilet; 8) Bus and Train Timetables; 9) General Enquiries; and 10) Bus Passes.

Tourist Information Centre (TIC)

The top five reasons people contacted the TIC during 2017-18 were 1) Castle Tours; 2) Shop; 3) TIC Enquiries; 4) TIC Phone Calls and 5) Box Office.

- 1.5.9 The financial impact of concessionary charging is mitigated to some extent by the agreed restrictions on use of the Chamber, particularly the limitation on the months during which concessionary users may book the Chamber.

(3) Financial considerations

- 1.5.10 Caretaking costs – currently concessionary users are required to pay a charge for the costs of caretaking after 5pm, at a rate of £20 per hour. However, these costs do not cover the fees payable by the Council to Prosec (the appointed security firm), as the Council will be liable for a minimum fee of £150 representing 5 hours at £30 per hour,
- 1.5.11 We will be going out on tender for the security/caretaking at Tonbridge Castle within the next few months. In addition we are looking to recruit a local casual contracted caretaker to lock up when there are evening meetings. This will enable us to have a more flexible cost model for evening bookings.

1.6 Conclusions/ options

1.6.1 There is a balance to executing a strategy that increases revenue against serving the local community need. It is considered that the following options exist

Option 1 – Continue to offer the existing concessionary user discounts to serve and enhance community need;

Option 2 – Discontinue the Concessionary User list. Any exceptional future discounts, would need to be authorised by the Director of Central Services;

Option 3 – Change bookings to work alongside other contracts to maximise profit and reduce losses from bookings e.g. the concessionary discount available at busy times could be reduced or removed in order to discourage use at those times. This would then allow the Council to maximise the revenue from commercial hire at the most financially beneficial times.

1.7 Legal Implications

1.7.1 None arising from this report.

1.8 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.8.1 The financial considerations are set out above.

1.9 Legal Considerations

1.9.1 None arising from this report.

1.10 Corporate Strategy

1.10.1 The following core values within the Council's Corporate Strategy are relevant to the matters set out in this report.

Embracing Effective Partnership Working – achieving more by working and engaging effectively with a wide range of local partners from the private, public, voluntary and community sectors.

Taking a business-like approach - focusing on ensuring good value for money, continuously reviewing how our services are provided and funded, focusing our available resources where they will have most beneficial impact, and maximising commercial opportunities.

Promoting Fairness - acting transparently at all times and being accountable for what we do, and promoting equality of opportunities.

1.11 Equality Impact Assessment

1.12 In the event that Members were minded to discontinue the concessionary users list, or reduce the concessionary discount available at busy times, it is likely that an Equalities Impact Assessment would be required. Recommendation

1.12.1 It is **RECOMMENDED** that Members consider the options set out in this report.

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Background Papers:

Nil

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