

13 February 2024

Report of	Strategic Director	Author	Mandy Jones / Alistair Wilson
Title	Community use of Colchester City Council Assets and Colchester Events Policy		
Wards affected	All Wards		

1. Executive Summary

1.1 This briefing note sets out additional information relating to the Council’s approach to the policy, use and charging towards the use of Council assets by Community Groups.

2. Action Required

2.1 To note the information set out in the briefing note.

3. Reason for Scrutiny

3.1 At the meeting of the Scrutiny Panel on the 9th August 2023 it was resolved that Scrutiny Panel adds an item to its work programme to clarify the Council’s approach and policy towards the use of community assets which it owns, and guidance as to which could be leveraged for income via charges for use, and which should be kept free for use by the public. Specific reference was made to the use of the Castle Park and other larger assets which are programmed by Colchester Events, a part of Colchester Amphora who run events on behalf of the Council.

4. Background Information

4.1 An Estate Plan has been developed following the recommendations of the October 2023 CIPFA report ‘Property Asset Management Framework – including Policy, Strategy and Action Plan’. The plan outlines an alternative approach to asset management to improve the financial sustainability of the Estate, reduce risk and liability and ease the pressure on the General Fund. The approach is to ensure dynamic management of the estate ensuring performance and efficiency of buildings are maximised, decision making is supported by robust quality data, risk and liabilities are understood and proactively managed and governance is clear and transparent. It will support the Councils strategic plan and link to existing policies.

4.2 The Council has an extensive asset base, made up of a multitude of buildings and building uses range from operational, for example depots, office accommodation, community centres, leisure centres, heritage assets, sports facilities and more. Some of these have multiple uses such as the Town Hall which is used for civic, operational, and income generation space. Whilst there are some policies in place regarding the management of assets, these current suite of policies does not cover all aspects of the estate as there is not a ‘one

size fits all' approach. As part of the Estate Plan, classification of assets will be undertaken, and any outstanding policies will be drafted for approval by the Policy Panel.

4.3 Many assets are used by Community Groups. The approach to the use of each asset needs to take account of several criteria: cost of the asset (future and current inc. maintenance etc), differing service provision and use criteria. (all according to the strategic plan). There are several different plans and policies to support the operation of services, whether service based or corporate, the Events Policy is one of these. This briefing summarises relevant parts of the policy, but further detail can be viewed online by following this link: [Events Policy – Leisure Services Outdoor Events \(windows.net\)](#)

4.4 Colchester Events are permitted via a contract with The Council to use the following venues for Commercial and Community events:

- Town Hall including Moot Hall, Grand Jury Room, Council Chamber and Committee Rooms
- Old Library
- Castle
- Castle Park including Upper and lower park, Castle Bailey, Bandstand
- Charter Hall
- Old Heath Recreation Ground
- Colchester Sports Park

This agreement which entails Amphora paying The Council £100k for the rights to use the venues also recognises the need for shared use by The Council for services and civic events as well as ensuring these assets are available for Community Groups and Commercial uses.

Colchester Events work with a number of Community Groups to programme events such as:

- Hospital radio
- Pipes in the park
- Free family fun festival
- Classic vehicle show

4.5 In relation to assets used for events and programmed by Colchester Events, the Council has an Events Policy which states:

“While registered charities and non-profit making community groups may be offered a “charitable hire rate”, costs will still be passed to the event organiser to ensure no additional burden on the Council (or CATL), although these costs will be kept as low as possible”.

All events, regardless of size, have a cost to the Council (and its companies). The Council is unable to subsidise costs, for example, staff time, hiring of equipment and services, organisation, set-up and clear-down. These costs will be passed on to all event organisers where incurred.

There is constitutional delegation of authority to be allow pricing flexibility to alter standard hire fees.

CATL adhere to The Council's Events policy and seek to recover some of the costs for local registered Charities and Community Groups. Specifically, the use of the bandstand is free for Community Groups, with any event which extends beyond the use of the bandstand charged a minimum £250 plus VAT fee. The bandstand programme is currently sponsored by the café operator in the Castle Park, and this enables use of this facility to remain free for Community Groups.

- 4.6 There has been a Cultural and Creative Events Fund 2024/25 in place, for which applications had to be made by 5th February 2024 for which Community Groups could apply for micro grants of between £250 and £1500 maximum for cultural and creative events/activity taking place between 1st May 2024 and 30th April 2025. Whilst these grants cannot be used for hire of Council assets, they can contribute to the overall event costs provided the applicant has funding to cover the hire of Council assets.

Background Documents

[Events Policy – Leisure Services Outdoor Events \(windows.net\)](#)