

MOTION TO COUNCIL ON 16 JANUARY 2024

RECONSIDERATION OF COMMUNITY CENTRE HIRE RATES

At the meeting of the Communities and Culture Committee on 12 December there was a line item (no report) relating to a raising of hire rates at the centre.

Upon announcing this item the Chairman appeared flustered and had to revert to the Chairman of the Council who also appeared flustered and mumbled that it was the intention to raise the rates across the board by £2 per year then correcting himself to £2 an hour.

He immediately called for a vote without any discussion, no report on the impact of such changes or on the competitiveness of the rates. As with all votes all members acquiesced, there being no non party member of the Committee and those present being precluded from speaking.

The current rates for hire in the Centre were agreed in 2022 so there would be no dispute that due to intervening financial issues with regard to energy etc that a rise in rates was justified, but such rises needed to be proportionate, fair and the impact on the centre and its hirers needs to be taken into account. Many of our hirers, especially the repeat businesses, are small concerns who hire the centre and carry out a number of community uses such as childrens' organisations and health and well being services .

The pandemic has had a major effect on all businesses, not just the centre, which is recovering well and is as busy as it ever was, but small businesses and organisations have felt the brunt of the loss of trade and the need to rebuild.

The proposed changes are quantified below. There are 2 chargeable rates - Pre 6pm M-F/Post 6pm M-F and Weekends. There are also rates for both of these for regular hirers and One off hires.

Room	Current rate	Proposed rate	% change
One off hires			
3/5/6/8	£11.50/17.50	£13.50/19.50	17.4/11.4%
1	£12/19	£14/21	16.7/10.5%
4/7	£18/26	£20/28	11.1/7.7%
LH	£24/36.50	£26/38.50	8.3/5.5%
Café	£23/31.50	£25/33.50	8.7/6.3%
Regular hire			
3/5/6/8	£10.50/16	£12.50/18	19/12.5%
1	£11/17	£13/19	18.2/11.8%
4/7	£15/23.50	£17/25.50	13.3/8.5%
LH	£21/33	£23/35	9.5/6.1%
Café	£19/27	£21/29	10.5/7.4%

The current rate of inflation is under 5%, so it can be seen that all of these rises are above the inflation rate, and in the circumstances of the centre's most prolific users considerably higher.

A £2 rise per hour in One off hires can be justified because of their nature they tend to be larger events, using the bigger rooms with consequent effects on caretaking and energy provision. Whereas the small businesses and classes will be hit severely.

Our prices compare well with other venues – of which there are few that offer the range of rooms and facilities – but nevertheless will be seen as more cost effective for these smaller groups.

THE MOTION

That this council recognises the disproportionate burden a blanket rise of £2 per hour on small hires will have on the small local groups and businesses that rely on the centre for their livelihoods and social interaction, and who offer a wide range of opportunities for all age ranges and abilities as well as providing a safe space for meetings and socialising in the café area.

To uplift the prices by such an arbitrary amount with no prior research and comparisons is inappropriate and will lead to a detrimental effect on the operation of the centre in terms of revenue, visitor numbers and consequently on the community life of the town.

It is therefore recommended that a rise of £2 per hour be applied to all one off hires in the centre but that a below inflation average rise of 3% (rounded to the nearest 50p for ease of accounting) be applied to all regular hirers as follows, and that the budget for the Communities and Culture Committee be amended accordingly.

Regular hire

Room	Current rate	Proposed rate	increase
3/5/6/8	£10.50/16	£11/16.50	50/50p
1	£11/17	£11.50/17.50	50/50p
4/7	£15/23.50	£15.50/24	50/50p
LH	£21/33	£21.50/34	50p/£1
Café	£19/27	£19.50/28	50p/£1

Proposer Cllr Carole Mulroney

Seconders Cllrs Alan Hart and David Bowry

NOTICE OF MOTION 16 JANUARY 2024

LEIGH COMMUNITY CENTRE AND OTHER COUNCIL ASSETS – THE FUTURE

This motion is not about the future of the Centre or the assets, per se, although there are consequences flowing from it. In the first instance it is about contravention of the Local Government Act 1972 Section 101 and an abuse of position.

At the meeting of the Council on 31 October, Cllr Mulrone y asked for an unequivocal confirmation that Leigh Town Council and Leigh Community Centre and all other assets and activities of the Council would remain unaltered except for any genuinely consulted on, debated and agreed changes that are beneficial to the people of Leigh.

No answer was forthcoming at that time, nor since.

At the meeting on 29 November she reiterated that question and pursued the issue further as newspaper reports had made it clear that discussions had been taking place between the Chairman and the Leader of Southend City Council regarding the future of the Centre.

The Leader of the City Council referred to this as an approach from Leigh Town Council.

In the press the Chairman confirmed these discussions had taken place. Yet no such potential discussions nor any content or terms had been considered by Leigh Town Council and no authority was available to the Chairman to partake or initiate such actions.

This also begs another question, how is it that the Echo was able to report on this matter before the councillors of this Council were aware of it?

I would refer the Chairman to the Council's media policy which requires that when speaking to the press members make it plain that they are giving a personal view unless conveying a decision which has been taken by the Council.

This was not the case.

The inference from all of this is that the Chairman considers that he speaks for Leigh Town Council even when he has no authority to do so and thereby has misrepresented to the Leader of the City Council as to the Town Council's considered views and it should be said without consultation of the people of Leigh.

Under Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 no authority is devolved to any member of a Council, not even the Chairman. Such authority lies with the Council itself or a committee or an officer. That is why any urgent actions between committees are taken by the Town Clerk, but in consultation with the Chairman. The Chair or a member can have a view but the decision is that of the officer. It is normal practice for such decisions to be reported back at the next available meeting.

If Cllr Mulrone y had not raised this issue there appears to have been no intention of reporting back.

THE MOTION

1. That this council recognises that no authority had been given by the Council for any discussions to take place with Southend City Council regarding the future of the Community Centre, or any other of the Town Council's assets or activities, to any member of this Council.
2. That the Chairman apologises for the breach of Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 and undertakes that in future no such discussions will be held, with any outside party, unless the need for, content and remit have been discussed in Council and authorised by full Council.
3. That this Council resolves that in future any decisions affecting the future of the Community Centre or other council assets, or any activities of a significant nature which affect Leigh generally across the parish, shall be the subject of a public consultation with residents before any irrevocable actions, negotiations or decisions are made.

Proposer Cllr Carole Mulronev
Seconders Cllrs Alan Hart and David Bowry

MOTION TO COUNCIL ON 16 JANUARY 2024

STANDARDS

Residents need to be able to engage with councillors to develop better services and deliver local change. Residents have high expectations of what the Council can do and entrust it to represent the local area, take decisions fairly, openly, and transparently. Councillors have both an individual and collective responsibility to meet these expectations by maintaining high standards and demonstrating good conduct, and by challenging behaviour which falls below expectations.

It is right that residents should hold the Council to account. Robust questioning and seeking accountability is part of the cut and thrust of council life, it is not bullying or harassment, whilst threatening emails are. Residents have no desire to intimidate, abuse, bully or threaten councillors and expect them to behave without such tactics.

There has to be accountability so residents can see and understand what is happening. In effect the Council needs to follow the Nolan principles of public life.

Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership

These principles are all that residents and fellow councillors have to rely on in the absence of a proper regime of standards. It is noted that both the Chairman of Council and of C & C committee take a very aggressive attitude towards residents and non party councillors in meetings which is unnecessary and ironic as they are the two appointees of the Council to the City Council's standards committee.

This Council also signed the NALC Civility and Respect pledge and on 28 March adopted a statement from Staffing as follows

110. STATEMENT FROM STAFFING COMMITTEE Council RESOLVED the public statement and for its inclusion on the Leigh-On-Sea Town Council Website: 'As a Council we are proud to have signed up to the Civility and Respect Pledge and we fully support all our councillors, officers and community centre staff in the execution of their duties without harassment, bullying or intimidation and that should such behaviour be found to occur we will do all within the powers available to us to highlight and eradicate it.'

We should also be mindful of the fact this is a parish council not a first tier authority and our purpose should be to work with our residents and keep them informed through transparency of decisions and debate.

MOTION

1. That this Council and all councillors individually wholeheartedly reaffirm a commitment to the Nolan Principles of Public Life and to that end resolves that this Council adopt the following best practice –

.A. Governance

Meetings and Governance (some of this will be initiated by staff but it is for the Councillors to see actions through and assist where required by promptly responding to staff).

All Chairman/councillors, as appropriate will

- i. make every effort to attend all meetings of committees of which they are a member or proffer their apologies, accepting that there will be times when attendance is not possible.
- ii. ensure that within their roles they respond to staff requests promptly so that all agenda for meetings are issued on the correct day (usually Thursday for Tuesday meetings) – on the website and notice boards and circulating to ALL councillors on the same day – and ensure that all financial papers and other attachments for meetings are issued at the same time as agenda in a readable format to ALL members.
- iii. allow non aligned councillors to play a full part in council business and extend courtesy to them by allowing them at the committee table and to ask questions during meetings and not take up the time allocated to residents.
- iv. deal efficiently and respectfully in answering residents' questions at meetings, and if unable to provide a written answer within 5 working days.
- v. extend the 15 minutes allocated when questioners are in attendance to allow all submitted questions to be asked and answered.
- vi. in line with NALC LTN 5 para 45 and usual practice of this Council, will minute all public questions and answers – this note reads as follows –

45 Where a council permits the public to participate at a meeting, this session:

- Is included as an item on the agenda
- Forms part of the council meeting by law
- Is managed by the chairman of the meeting
- Is documented in the minutes of the meeting

LTC Standing order 3t states –

The minutes of a meeting shall include an ACCURATE RECORD OF the following

.... vi. if there was a public participation session;

- vii in line with all legal requirements, publish (suitably redacted as to personal details) all FOI requests and answers.

- viii in line with usual practice of this Council, will minute all councillor questions and answers
- ix pay attention to speakers and not hold side discussions while they speak.
- x answer truthfully.
- xi ensure that they do not delay approval of minutes so that they can be produced within 5 working days and placed on the website and circulate to ALL councillors at the same time.
- xii review all governance and policy documentation which has been overlooked in the last 7 months and produce any other documentation which has been overlooked and is required by Southend City Council and keep to the timetable in future.
- xiii review all decisions since May and ensure they have all been acted upon
- xiv cease and desist excessive use of the gavel and raised voices and seeking to prevent councillors from speaking
- xv reaffirm its commitment to the Civility and Respect Pledge and the Nolan Principles

B. Training

- i. All members who have not done so in the past, will undertake appropriate training – at as little cost as possible - in chairmanship, budget processes, licensing, planning, general power of competence and any other training which would enhance their understanding and knowledge of how to run a successful council to Gold Standard. Use of online facilities should be used in the first instance unless there is no alternative to attendance at a course.
- ii. That the current appointees to the City Council's standards committee undergo necessary training in this field.

C. The public face of the Council

All Councillors, as appropriate, will

- i. assist the Town Clerk in dealing with all FOI and SAR within the legal requirements.
- ii. Assist the Town Clerk in acknowledging all correspondence from residents within 5 working days and if a reply requires additional input to seek to respond fully within 10 working days.
- iii. provide, in a timely manner, the appropriate information to allow staff to keep the Website accurate and up to date.
- iv. carry out consultations on the Strategic Plan and any proposals affecting the community centre's future and that of its users or any other matter of general concern to Leigh and the Town Council
- v. liaise effectively with the Youth Group/Arts Group and any other such groups which may be formed, through a balanced organisational team, to include staff.
- vi. prepare the next Magazine through a balanced editorial team, to include staff.
- vii. set up an events working party with a balanced organisational team, to include staff and external advisers and groups as necessary.



IN COLLABORATION WITH SECC, RALC, CIVIC COUNTY ASSOCIATIONS

**This is to certify that
Leigh-on-Sea Town Council
has signed up to the Civility & Respect Pledge**

Leigh-on-Sea Town Council believes now is the time to put Civility and Respect at the Top of the Agenda and start a culture change for the local council sector.

Certificate number: 6.

Leigh-on-Sea Town Council will:

- Treat all councillors, clerk and all employees, members of the public, representatives of partner organisations and volunteers with civility and respect in their role.
- Put in place a training programme for councillors and staff.
- Sign up to Code of Conduct for councillors.
- Have in place good governance arrangements in place including, staff contracts, and Dignity at Work Policy.
- Commit to seek professional help at early stages should civility and respect issues arise.
- Commit to calling out bullying and harassment when it and when it happens.
- Continue to learn from best practice in the sector and aspire to being a role model / champion council e.g., via Local Council Award Scheme.
- Support the continued lobbying for the change in legislation to support the Civility and Respect Pledge including sanctions for elected members where appropriate.

Signed on behalf of the council by:

Chairperson/Mayor: _____ Date: _____

The Nolan principles

Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership