

Report on	Policy on Room Hire
Date of Meeting	Thursday 3 rd December 2020
Reporting Officer	Philip Moffett, Head of Democratic Services
Contact Officer	Ann McAleer, Corporate Policy & Equality Officer

Is this report restricted for confidential business?	Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	x

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	The purpose of this paper is to allow for further consideration on the application and review of the Council's current general policy on Room Hire, with specific reference to Section 5.3 of existing arrangements – exclusions to hire.
2.0	Background
2.1	The Council has a policy in place developed specifically to deal with room hire and the availability of Council Civic Buildings and facilities for the transaction of council business. The policy was taken and discussed at November Committee.
2.2	Discussion on the policy centred on section 5.3 (exclusions to hire), with particular reference to the unavailability of rooms for events and activities which could be viewed as promoting the profile and interests of political parties over other political parties. The policy refers specifically to council civic buildings and council facilities with the latter being all facilities, except the council offices, where rooms are available for hire.
2.3	On discussion of the removal or retention of the existing exclusion to hire it was agreed at November Committee that Party Leads take time to consider the existing policy and feedback any commentary on same, with a view to the matter being brought back to next available meeting. It was recommended that a further report be brought back on the matter together with research undertaken of current policy positions in other councils and reflect any commentary received from Party Leads.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	Research undertaken on policy and practice within other Councils and that within other jurisdictions is summarised in Appendix A to this paper.
3.2	Reflecting on the research contained within the attached and commentary received from Party Leads, consideration may be given to amending section 5.3.1 of the current policy on exclusions to hire to reflect the research. For information and ease of reference section 5.3.1 in the existing policy is:

5.3 Exclusions to Hire

5.3.1. Council facilities and Civic Buildings shall not be hired for the purposes of;

- *Events and activities which could be viewed as promoting the profile and interests of political parties over other political parties. This refers to all political parties and independent representatives irrespective if they have representation on Mid Ulster Council or not. This does not extend to hiring rooms to undertake and progress business in the course of their representative role as a group of elected representatives of the Council.*
- *Activities deemed to be outside the ethos of the Council business*

3.3 Whilst reflecting on the research it, consideration may be given to amending the existing 5.3.1 of the policy to generally reflect same, with the rest of the policy remaining unchanged.

For example, consideration should be given to:

- i. Being specific on the types venues that can be hired for political type events/hired by political parties for political purposes (i.e. that such hires be permitted at any of the Councils 'facilities' but not any of the 3 civic offices)
- ii. That the hire of rooms in any of the council facilities for party political purposes or on behalf of a political representative for conferencing or meetings are restricted to rooms that are available to the public generally and paid for at the hire rate.
- iii. That banners, posters, leaflets or any other paraphernalia attached to the political party be displayed in the room only being hired in the facility
- iv. That block bookings are not permitted
- v. That a limited number of exclusions be set on what the hire is for i.e. events linked to elections and political party campaigning not be permitted
- vi. That all other aspects would remain in the existing policy. For example, council members can book rooms at either of the council offices during normal opening hours for constituency related business and must be in attendance (with no charge being levied on the member) etc.

3.4 It is proposed that consideration be given to points (i) to (vi) above to assist in reviewing section 5.3.1 of the current policy.

3.5 Following Committee consideration, revised wording can be brought to the next committee meeting within a draft (revised) policy for final consideration. An equality screening will be completed as part of the policy development process to identify any adverse impacts on equality of opportunity with mitigating activities, if required.

4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial: not applicable
	Human: not applicable
	Risk Management: not applicable
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: not applicable
	Rural Needs Implications: not applicable
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	That the committee considers the paper and agree an approach on the revision and updating of the Policy on Room Hire.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	Appendix A - Room Hire Policy Research Overview