

Commercial Services Committee 3 September 2026 Enclosure 1

Guildhall Pricing Review and Hire Policy Proposal

At its meeting on Wednesday 8 July, the Commercial Services Committee requested that Officers review the Guildhall pricing structure and bring forward a range of options for consideration.

Officers have also taken the opportunity to undertake a broader review of the Terms and Conditions of Hire, together with operational changes that could be implemented with immediate effect to better meet the needs of the business.

It is proposed that all recommendations arising from this review be implemented on a six-month trial basis, following which their effectiveness will be evaluated and any further changes considered

The aim of the review is to simplify the charging structure, improve the customer experience, encourage repeat business, and reduce administrative processes. It is also anticipated that the proposed changes will help to increase bookings and overall turnover.

The proposals set out below are presented for further discussion and consideration by Members of the Committee.

Proposed Changes to Room Hire Terms and Conditions

It is proposed that a comprehensive review of the Guildhall Booking Terms and Conditions be undertaken in due course, with the aim of making them more user-friendly and ensuring that they better reflect the needs of the business.

In the short term, however, the following provisions could be introduced to improve the customer hire experience and provide greater clarity, while better supporting the operational needs of the business.

- Kitchen facilities (currently charged per occasion) to be included at no additional charge for all room hires, however kitchen use will still be limited to the duration of the room booking.
- Where the kitchen is not left in satisfactory condition, a cleaning charge of **£50 per hour** will be applied based on the time required to restore it.
- Any damage to the building, fixtures, fittings or equipment will continue to be recharged to the hirer where appropriate.
- Rather than taking a £100 surety deposit, a **£0.01 card authorisation** will be taken from a valid debit or credit card 30 days prior to the event to check that the card is valid.
[The card details will be retained until it is established if there are any further charges needed following the event and if so, the necessary invoices would be raised to the customer and charged to the card]
- Wedding hirers will be advised that it would be prudent to take out appropriate event insurance.
- The current provision of 30 minutes and one hour of free hire before and after an event would be removed. Hirers would instead be charged for the full period required, including set-up and clearing away.
- That payment deadline be moved from 14 days before the booking to 30 days.
- For special package bookings payment deadline to be six months prior to the event and a deposit of £750 is required.
- For all bookings, whatever price is quoted at the time of booking remains the price that is invoiced, regardless of any subsequent changes to the charges.

- Tighter control over when hirers are permitted to deliver and collect items to/from the Guildhall. While deliveries are currently permitted by arrangement, these should, where possible, be scheduled to coincide with periods when a PA is on duty.
- Hirers will be asked to complete a sensitive information document
- All bookings will be subject to an appropriate Risk Assessment (RA), with security requirements determined by the outcome of the assessment from the information provided by the hirer on the sensitive information form.
Consideration will also be given to any other events taking place within the City, rather than security requirements being determined solely by whether alcohol is being served at the event.
- The wording on the published price list will be updated to make clear that any additional charge will be determined by the outcome of the event risk assessment, taking into account the nature of the booking, expected attendance, security requirements and any other relevant factors, and will not be based solely on whether alcohol is being served.
- A Risk Assessment specific to Guildhall Bookings is currently being compiled
[There is currently a general building RA for the Guildhall]

Proposed Pricing Structure

1) *Simplified Pricing Model*

It is proposed that the current Commercial and Wedding pricing categories are removed and replaced with a single standard pricing structure.

Subsidised rates will still be available for those qualifying but will not be publicly advertised, only that discounts may be available if they enquire.

The proposed standard hourly charges are:

ROOM	Proposed Hourly Rate inc VAT
Main Hall (including kitchen)	£50.00
Guildroom (including kitchen)	£35.00
Ashmole Room	£25.00
Whytmore Room	£20.00
Whole Building	£110.00
*Special Event Package	£2,000.00

* It is proposed that the price of the Special Event package remains unchanged, but that the hire period is extended to provide access to the venue from 8.00am, rather than 10.00am, with the existing end time of 1.00am retained.

Extending the access period would incur no additional cost to the Council, as contracted PAs will already be on site. The additional set-up time would also better meet the needs of the hirer and allow sufficient time for the event to be prepared prior to opening.

The Special Event package would continue to represent a saving of £460 compared with hiring the venue for the equivalent period at the standard hourly whole-building rate.

2) **Discounted Rates**

The following discounts are proposed:

- **Private Parties:** 20% discount (reflecting that VAT cannot be reclaimed) *[previously adopted by Council on 27 July 2026]*
- **Voluntary Organisations and Charities:** 50% discount. (reflecting the discounts already applied at the current subsidised rate)
- **Regular Hirers:** A 20% discount for organisations making regular bookings *(anticipated to be fewer than 10 bookings per year, for example one booking each quarter)*.

3) **Promotional Offer**

To encourage repeat business and increase venue utilisation, it is proposed that the following loyalty scheme be introduced:

- Hirers who book **three events within a 12-month period** will receive their **fourth booking free**.
- The free event will be equivalent to the value of the cheapest of the 3 previous bookings. [Members may wish to consider if this should be a 12-month rolling period or in line with the financial year]
- All three events must be paid for in full before the fourth event is provided free of charge.
- This promotional offer would only apply to bookings made at the full hire price where no other discount or subsidised/promotional rate is being received. For example, Bridge and Chess bookings would not be eligible for the offer, as they already benefit from a discounted rate.

The promotion may also be used to encourage traders and customers attending the Market to book events within the Guildhall. For example, the Antiques Market

This could be launched as an Autumn promotional campaign for a trial period of six months initially, stating that we are running promotional offers following the recent closure of the venue.

In addition, the Hire Terms and Conditions will be updated to state that the promotional offers may be withdrawn at any time and may not be used in conjunction with any other offer.

Operational Arrangements

The following operational changes are proposed:

- The Guildhall to rationalise opening hours and/or days. For example, following the loss of Slimming World, Thursday daytime is now consistently not booked, with the only remaining booking being the Chess Club in the evening. Closing the venue during these quieter periods could help reduce operating costs without significantly affecting current bookings.
- Rationalising opening hours would allow for more effective building management, with routine maintenance and contractor visits able to be planned more efficiently during periods when the venue is not in use. A similar arrangement is already in operation at Boley Park Community Hall.

- Bookings that are requested on these days may still be accommodated where operationally feasible.
- The introduction of Summer and Winter opening times in line with bookings.
[The Samuel Johnson Birthplace already operates seasonal opening hours.]
- All existing bookings will be honored under their current arrangements.

Financial Implications

The proposed pricing structure is intended to:

- Simplify the process for hirers and Officers.
- Improve marketing strategies with simplified pricing
- Reduce administration associated with multiple pricing categories and surety deposits.
- Encourage repeat bookings through a loyalty scheme.
- Increase venue occupancy and income.
- Ensure that additional cleaning and damage costs continue to be recovered where necessary.

The six-month trial period will enable the financial impact of the revised pricing structure to be monitored before any permanent changes are implemented.

Risk Management

Potential risks associated with removing the surety deposit will be mitigated by:

- Taking a valid debit or credit card authorisation of 00.01p
- Recovering costs for any damage caused during the hire.
- Charging for additional cleaning where required.
- Charging for additional hours that have not been pre-arranged or booked.
- Undertake a risk assessment for all events based on the nature of the booking and the expected attendees, rather than relying solely on whether alcohol is being served. Appropriate security measures should then be put in place where the risk assessment identifies a need.
- Wedding hirers will also be encouraged to obtain suitable event insurance.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL:

- a) That Council adopts the simplified Guildhall pricing structure, discounted prices and promotional offers as detailed herein.***
- b) That the revised hire conditions detailed herein be adopted.***
- c) That the revised rationalisation of opening arrangements for the Guildhall as detailed herein be adopted.***
- d) That the proposals detailed herein be implemented when feasible and adopted for a six-month trial basis, with a review of performance, and financial outcomes reported to the Commercial Services committee.***