

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

CABINET – 18 FEBRUARY 2016

REFERENCE FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 16 FEBRUARY 2016

EVENTS POLICY

The Chair introduced the report and explained that the draft Event Policy had been considered by the Committee at its meeting on 17 November 2015. The Committee had asked for it to be re-presented at this meeting following the conclusion of the public consultation on the policy so that the final version to be presented to Cabinet could be considered.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Crime and Community Safety presented the report and made the following points:

- Prior to the development of this Policy, the way that organisations could apply to the Council to run an event in the borough was co-ordinated in a haphazard manner;
- The way in which events were applied for were dependent on which officer within the Council dealt with the matter and there was no policy and no guidance;
- Parks and Open spaces were valuable assets for the Council and it was important that these were maintained appropriately;
- As a result the Council has now drafted a Policy with clear guidance and which set out the Council's aims and objectives;
- The purpose of the Policy was to empower local communities and organisations to manage events, ensure that they were aware of their responsibilities and encouraged others to run similar events in the borough;
- The draft Policy went out for public consultation in November 2015 and various changes were made to the policy as a result of the responses received to the public consultation.

The Environmental Services Manager – Community Engagement then addressed the Committee and set out various issues in relation to the consultation responses including:

- There had been approximately 180 to 190 responses to the public consultation;

- 16% of the respondents had been from park user groups and 11% from other organisations. 52% of the total respondents agreed that the Policy was required and necessary;
- The timescale for applications to be made under the Policy had been reduced as a result of the consultation responses;
- In relation to application fees, 69% of respondents felt that there should be no fee for park friends groups and £20 was an appropriate fee for small charity events;
- The feedback had been considered and as a result it had been proposed that the application fee be changed to £50 and a concession of 80% be applied for events held by community organisations, schools, places of worship and registered charities;
- As part of the feedback the Council had also proposed that hire charges for small events should be £400, for medium size events £700 and for large size events £1,700;
- The forms to be used under the Policy had been simplified to make them more user friendly as a result of the feedback received;
- As a result of the consultation and as a result of the Council's commitment to local groups there was no charge for specific civic events including Remembrance Sunday and religious events;
- It was important to note that the Council as a result of the Social Value Policy, a community fund had been established which volunteer groups could apply for which could be used to pay for charges under the Events Policy. These groups had to demonstrate that the funds would add community value;
- The Policy would play a key role in informing event organisers of their legal duties and responsibilities so that no residents were put at risk.

The following questions were made by Members and responded to accordingly:

- It had to be recognised that there were events such as the French Markets in Stanmore, which whilst not being a charitable event, provided a great community benefit and assisted local traders. How was this taken into account?

The person who ran the French Market did so as a commercial venture and made enough profit to cover commercial rates so it was not envisaged that this would cause an issue. Because the event was run in partnership with local traders as a community event, all relevant road closures were done free of charge.

- A Jewish Festival regularly held in Stanmore provided a huge community benefit. However if it was subject to the full charges it would not be able to run. Would this event incur any charges?

This would be classed as a religious event and would be provided concessions for the charges. The idea of the Policy was to put a robust process in place so that everyone knew what was happening. So if other departments or partners such as the Police needed to be aware of the event, the Council could advise them in a co-ordinated manner. Any costs involved would simply cover the costs of the Council in performing the tasks.

- It was important to recognise that the Policy had to be sensitive to the needs of local communities.

A sensitive approach was at the heart of the Policy and where fees could be waived they would be, if appropriate. The Community Fund could also help organisations with any costs that they may incur and it ensured that they were aware of all relevant facts before holding an event.

- How would the Policy ensure that parks and open space would not suffer from any permanent damage?

Prior to the introduction of the Policy, the problem that was occurring was that events were taking place without the Council's knowledge. The Policy enabled the Council to consider issues such as the frequency of use of parks and open spaces and introduce relevant stipulations to protect them if necessary. Additionally large size events required deposits to be paid. The Council could keep hold of these deposits if reparation work was required.

- How could the Council monitor the number of people attending any one event?

The numbers provided by event organisers would be a guesstimate which the Council would consider carefully. For large events where safety was important, such as Bonfire Night, the Council would only allow a maximum number of entrants.

- How would insurance work in relation to events held?

Insurance would be the responsibility of the event organisers as they would be personally liable if they did not have this in place.

- Were there any issues with events being advertised on private land, an estate agent's board for example?

As far as the Council were aware there were no issues with advertising events on private land.

- Would organisations such as the Harrow Youth Parliament be able to draw on the Community Fund if it wished to hold events?

For an organisation to apply for funding it would need to have an appropriate governance structure in place along with a mission statement which had

benefit for the borough. It was expected that the Harrow Youth Parliament would fulfill these requirements so potentially could apply for it.

- Whilst the Policy had improved since it was presented to the last Committee meeting in November 2015, there were still concerns regarding it. The Policy had provided no information on baseline figures so an analysis could take place on the effectiveness of the Policy. Additionally no financial implications had been reported so it was difficult to assess how much money the Council could make or lose as a result of the implementation of the Policy.

The application fee that would be charged would cover the basic administration costs, which had been streamlined. It was difficult for the Council to get baseline figures as there had been no co-ordination if how events in the borough had been managed in the past and no record of how many events had taken place.

The Council would also look to attract appropriate commercial events into the borough as a source of income generation.

- There were concerns that terms had not been defined properly in the Policy. For example no definition had been provided of the term Civic Service and the term Community Events. There were also concerns that the Labour Manifesto had been referenced in the Policy.

These suggested changes would be looked into.

- In relation to Community Events the Policy states that discounts will only be offered where all monies gained through entry charges, trader's fees, caterer's fees and any other means go directly to benefiting the community or a non-executive community organisation. The use of the word 'all' was too encompassing.

This was a fair point and would be considered.

- In relation to the Event Size stipulated by the Policy, it was important to recognise that by calculating the numbers attending per day could cause significant increases in charges for events where there may be no more than 100 people attending at any one point, but by the end of the day have several hundred people attending.

This was also a fair comment and would also be considered.

- The changes made by the Policy were welcomed. The Application Fees for local charities had been set at £10 (with the application of concessions) whereas responded had stated that they were happy with paying £20. What was the reason for the difference?

The reason for the difference was so that consistency could be applied for local charities, community organisations, schools and places of worship.

- How would the Council deal with events proposed that could be inappropriate for the borough? A clear criteria and fair process was required.

Ultimately all proposed events would be considered carefully. If it was believed that an event could be inappropriate there would be the necessary liaison with the relevant Portfolio Holder, Directors and if necessary the Police.

- Could more information be provided on whether weddings could take place in public parks?

The issue of whether a wedding could take place in a public park was very much site specific. Some parks could accommodate marquees. Any application would be considered carefully.

- When would the Policy be reviewed?

It was expected that the policy would be reviewed within 3 years of its implementation and probably in 2018.

- Would civic events not organised by the Council qualify for the relevant concessions under the Policy?

All civic events would qualify for the concessions regardless of whether they were organised by the Council or not.

- Was there a cap on the maximum amount that an organisation could claim under the Community Fund?

The Community Fund was a finite pot and was funded from a number of contracts which related to a direct benefit to the community. The Council would judge all applications to ensure that the fund was not exhausted in one application and a cap would be imposed.

- Would there be criteria in relation to the fees for road closures?

It was important to note that costs in relation to road closures were incurred by ensuring that this was conducted by people who were properly trained and licensed to conduct road closures. Major religious events would not be charged in addition to voluntary events. For the Pinner Panto event, this would be subject to a concession. It normally cost the Council £700 to implement a road closure as advertisement, notices etc. were required.

The majority of Members felt that all of the issues that had been raised at the Committee meeting in November 2015 had been addressed and commended the Policy. Other Members commented that whilst the proposed Policy had been improved since it went out for public consultation, there were still issues that needed to be addressed.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder and the officer for their attendance.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to Cabinet)

That the comments from the Committee on the Events Policy be referred to Cabinet.

Background Documents:

None

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