

Committee(s): Civic Affairs Sub (Policy and Resources) Committee	Date: 13/07/2023
Subject: Members' Bedrooms Policy	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1, 2
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Deputy Town Clerk	For Discussion
Report author: Greg Moore	

Summary

At the last Civic Affairs Sub-Committee meeting on 31st March 2023, Members received an oral update of the Assistant Town Clerk relating to the Members' Bedroom Policy, highlighting a number of issues that had been raised by Members i.e., list of those eligible to use the bedrooms, noise issues, queries around guest entitlements, booking arrangements, and so on. This policy relates to a small number of bedrooms on-site at Guildhall which are made available to elected Members, noting that the nature of the role sometimes requires them to be at Guildhall late at night and / or very early in the morning, and in the interests of removing barriers for those holding elected office in undertaking their duties.

Noting that the Members' Bedroom Policy had not been fully reviewed and updated since 2014, Members agreed that a review would be timely and asked for an initial review of the policy, in the interests of providing clarity and / or options for Members to consider.

This report sets out the existing booking terms and eligibility, current charging levels and usage, and also identifies a number of matters for consideration on which a view is sought, in order to allow for a revised policy to be drafted and brought back for Members' further consideration.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Provide feedback and set out their views on the Members' Bedroom Policy in respect of issues identified in the report; in particular, the questions set out at paragraph 26.

Main Report

Background

1. At the last Civic Affairs Sub-Committee meeting on 31 March 2023, Members received an oral update of the Assistant Town Clerk relating to the Members' Bedroom Policy. This was in response to a number of queries that had been raised by Members seeking clarity regarding various aspects of the policy.
2. Issues raised had included queries around the potentially outdated list of those eligible to use the rooms, noise related issues, guests and pet entitlements, and so on. Members agreed that it would be timely to take the opportunity to review a number of areas included within the Members' Bedroom Policy relating to eligibility and booking terms, current pricing levels and room costs, misuse of the facilities and any penalties that might be applied. Members acknowledged a need to be mindful of equalities implications relating to any policy decisions to be taken in due course in this area.

Current Position and issues of note

3. Current booking eligibility allows for Members to book a bedroom up to two calendar months in advance of their stay, with non-Members on an approved list also being able to book a bedroom one month in advance of their stay, with a view to minimising void costs (albeit with the understanding that Members on official business take priority and non-Members may have bookings cancelled at relatively short notice to accommodate this).

Bedroom Guidance and Charges

4. Guidance for the use of Members' bedroom accommodation was last fully reviewed and updated in 2014, following the improvement works that had been carried out to the Members' facilities at that time.
5. The Policy and Resources Committee agreed at its meeting on 14 March 2014 to refer consideration of an appropriate level of charges for use of the Members' bedrooms to Members' Privileges Sub-Committee for review, to establish whether prices were set at an appropriate level (mindful of the expectations on Members and the absence of remuneration associated with the role).
6. The Members' Privileges Sub-Committee subsequently considered the level of charges to be applied to Members for overnight accommodation and it was agreed that £20 for a single room and £30 for a double room be recommended.
7. The Policy and Resources Committee agreed at its meeting on 4 September 2014 to set the level of charges as proposed. The Committee also agreed that the level of charges for overnight accommodation for non-Members, subject to them meeting the relevant eligibility criteria, should be £60 for a single room and £95 for a double room.
8. Only minor revisions have taken place to the Members' Bedroom Policy and eligibility criteria since 2014, with these being to include a restriction on pets

staying in any of the bedrooms overnight (in response to a matter raised at the Members' Privileges Sub-Committee in 2016), the establishment of an agreed list of senior City of London Police Officers entitled to use the bedrooms where operational demands required, and provision for exceptional cases to be considered by the Chair and Deputy Chair of this Sub-Committee.

9. Members will note from the current booking terms and eligibility criteria (Appendix 1) that the level of charges applied to overnight accommodation has not changed since the review that was undertaken in 2014. However, it should be noted that the beds in what were previously "single" rooms have now been upgraded and are now "small doubles".
10. The marginal costs of single (now small double) bedroom provision for one night has been calculated by the City Surveyor as £60.72. This excludes administrative staff costs incurred by the Remembrancer's Department and Chamberlain's Department in managing bookings and invoicing.
11. Members are asked to consider whether the existing level of charges remain at an appropriate level or if it would be an opportune moment to review these and determine whether any increase should be applied and in what category, noting that they have remained static for some period and the importance of ensuring that operational costs continue to be covered.
12. To assist Members further in their assessment of an appropriate level of charges to apply, a comparison exercise has been undertaken and with information on this being set out below:
 - *Hotels* – An initial light-touch search of a selection of five low-budget hotels in the City has indicated charges ranging between £106 and £236 for a weeknight stay. Rates would be variable depending on the date of stay, whether it was a flexible or non-refundable booking, any potential pre-payment of the booking etc. It should be noted that the rooms provided at Guildhall are not comparable with those of a hotel; however, this does appear to show that the rate applied to Members' accommodation in Guildhall is set competitively and below rates applied to comparative hotels in the City of London.
 - *Livery Companies* – Some Livery Companies have similar arrangements whereby bedrooms are available for their members or some limited external users. Using information provided in confidence, this has shown that rates charged to internal and external users are differentiated in a similar way to the approach used for the Guildhall bedrooms. The data sample available at present is sufficiently limited that it is probably imprudent to draw concrete comparisons at this point in time but, if Members would wish to pursue a review of charges, this might be an additional source of helpful comparative data to explore.
 - *Local Authorities* - Research has shown that Local Authorities do not tend to provide overnight accommodation on site, but instead have provisions in place to cover the cost of an overnight stay where a Councillor is required to

stay as part of an official business trip, with this approach being in line with the City Corporation's Business Travel Scheme.

Official / Non-Official usage

13. There is currently no charge levied for overnight accommodation where the stay is deemed to be for official business, with Members and Officers being asked to specify at the time of their booking whether the stay is for official business or otherwise. Details on what is deemed official and non-official usage is set out within the bedroom booking eligibility, so it is clear at the time of booking, and are set out below for ease:-

- *No charge will be levied (official usage) where –*
 - a) *A Member needs to attend early (i.e. before 8:30 am) official City Corporation engagements such as Market visits.*
 - b) *A Member is representing the City at an official event (e.g. a Party Conference) which finishes very late at night, i.e. 10:30pm or later.*
 - c) *A Member is hosting or speaking at an early morning event and therefore needs to be certain of being on time.*
 - d) *A Member is hosting a dinner or speaking on behalf of the Corporation at a major evening event.*
- *Members will be charged (non-official usage) when they use the accommodation as detailed below:*
 - a) *When attending morning discussion meetings – but are not hosting or speaking.*
 - b) *When attending Banquets and dinners unless hosting/chairing a reception committee.*
 - c) *When attending social events e.g. concerts at the Barbican.*
 - d) *When attending Ward Club or Livery events unless they have a speaking role and are representing the Corporation.*

14. Members may want to consider whether the existing guidelines around official City business and non-official business remains appropriate or whether this may require updating; for instance, should greater clarity be specified around what constitutes an official engagement; are there additional occasions not previously considered which should be taken into account, etc.

Approved list of users

15. In addition to Members, there is a list of non-Members who are identified as approved users and so are entitled to use the bedrooms, viz.:-

- Past Lord Mayors
- Past Chief Commoners
- Past Members who have served for a minimum of 8 years on the Court of Common Council
- Senior Officers of the Corporation and others who are detained on Corporation related business
- Senior CoL Police Officers (identified as the Chief Officer Team)
- Masters of Livery Companies (for the period they are in office)

- Clerks (currently in office) of Livery Companies
- Immediate Past Masters of Livery Companies (when deputising for the Master)
- The Honourable The Irish Society
- Members' Guests

16. Members are invited to consider whether this list remains appropriate and whether it needs refining. By way of specific consideration, an agreed position on a definition for "senior officers" would be welcomed, in order to assist administrative processes.

Booking Procedure and Usage Statistics

17. The booking procedure for the Members' bedrooms currently involves a Member contacting the Committee Desk direct via email, through a telephone call, or in person, to make their booking request. Bookings are logged on a file and records retained in duplicate; however, there is no standardised submission required.

18. Following the introduction of (optional) limited remuneration for Members, the City Corporation's tax advisors have brought specific attention to the need to maintain vigilance in respect of potential benefits-in-kind and taxable implications. To that end, greater standardisation in respect of managing and recording bookings would be welcomed; in particular, Members should be asked to specify clearly when booking the justification for any official usage.

19. One matter that several Members have queried is the matter of "block bookings" and how long an individual Member is able to book a room. Whilst differing views have been advanced by some Members as to what is or is not permissible, it should be noted that there is, in fact, currently no reference on limitations included within the current policy and, by implication, no limitation on the number of bookings an individual can make. These are, therefore, treated under the same procedure as any other booking.

20. Members will note from the usage data provided (Appendix 2) covering the years 2021-2023 and detailing the number of nights booked that there have been no capacity issues with the existing booking policy, with total utilisation generally being below capacity.

21. Members are invited to confirm whether they are content with the current arrangements or if any alterations may be needed in relation to this matter.

Behaviour or Misuse

22. The current policy makes provision that *"those using the rooms must not use the rooms in a way that could potentially cause embarrassment to the City of London Corporation, create a nuisance or misuse the facilities provided and always leave the bedroom in a respectful condition."* However, there is no detail specified as to what this might constitute in practice, nor any indication as to who might make an assessment as to whether this provision has been breached, and what penalties might be imposed. Similarly, whilst this has not been a problem for some years,

the policy is silent on the question of payment and at what point outstanding invoices should preclude further bookings: it would seem prudent to consider making provision for such situation to ensure common understanding of process, in the event it is needed.

23. The absence of any articulated process can make things challenging for the Chief Commoner of the day and relevant officers; users may have legitimate complaints and yet there is no process by which they might clearly be raised, escalated, and managed.
24. Members are, therefore, asked to consider whether they would wish for the policy to articulate a clearer position in this area.

Proposals

25. Members are being asked to consider the range of areas presented in this report relating to the Members' bedroom eligibility booking criteria, terms of usage, associated costs and indicate any areas they consider require further revisions and / or updating for inclusion in a revised policy to be drafted and brought back for Members' further consideration.

26. Specific questions which Members are asked to provide a steer on include:-

- a. Do Members wish to review the schedule of charges?
- b. If so, should official use remain free?
- c. Should non-official use be charged at a higher rate (for Members and / or external users)?
- d. Does the list of what constitutes official usage remain acceptable?
- e. Does the list of external approved users remain appropriate?
- f. Is a formal procedure required in respect of misuse?

Corporate & Strategic Implications

- Financial implications – Any increase in charges for the Members' bedrooms would go towards covering the associated costs for a bedroom, with no additional financial implications to the City Corporation.
- Resource implications – There would be no additional resourcing implications, with bedroom bookings and management of these maintained through existing resources.
- Legal implications – none.
- Risk implications – none.
- Equalities implications – An accessible room has been designed for disabled guests, allowing wheelchair access.
- Climate implications – Guildhall is part of the City Corporation's Operational Property Estate and operates in accordance with a number of workstreams as part of the City Corporation's Climate Action Strategy
- Security implications – none.

Conclusion

27. Members are asked to consider an appropriate level of charges for use of the Members' bedrooms, current eligibility and usage criteria and indicate whether they consider any changes may be required for inclusion in an updated Members' Bedroom Policy to be brought back for their further consideration.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Bedroom Rules and Eligibility
- Appendix 2 - Bedroom Usage Data

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