

Committee(s): Civic Affairs Sub (Policy and Resources) Committee Policy and Resources Committee	Date: 25/10/2023 16/11/2023
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: Town Clerk	For Decision
Report author: Chris Rumbles	

Summary

At the Civic Affairs Sub-Committee meeting on 13th July 2023, Members considered a report of the Town Clerk relating to the Members' Bedroom Policy highlighting a number of issues that had previously been raised by Members i.e., a list of those eligible to use the bedrooms, noise and misuse issues, queries around guest entitlements, booking arrangements, with Members' views having been sought on any areas where they considered the policy would benefit from further revision and updating.

The Members' Bedroom Policy relates to a small number of bedrooms on-site at Guildhall which are made available to elected Members, with the nature of their role sometimes requiring 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.

Members had noted that the Members' Bedroom Policy had not been fully reviewed and updated since 2014, with agreement that a review would be timely in allowing an update of the policy in the interests of providing clarity.

Members provided feedback on a range of areas to allow for a revised policy to be drafted and brought back for Members' further consideration.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Approve the updated Bedroom Rules and Eligibility document at Appendix 1;
- Approve that charges to be applied to the rooms should be £65 for a small double room and £70 for a large double room for Members; non-members to be charged £100 for a small double room and £125 for a large double room, with implementation of these updated charges being from 1st February 2024.

Main Report

Background

1. At the last Civic Affairs Sub-Committee meeting on 13 July 2023, Members considered a report of the Deputy Town Clerk relating to the Members' Bedroom Policy and potential revisions to the booking terms, eligibility criteria, rules and pricing. This was in response to a number of queries that had previously been raised by Members seeking clarity regarding various aspects of the policy.
2. There was agreement that the existing policy remained largely appropriate, but with a number of areas having been highlighted as requiring further consideration and revision.
3. Issues raised had included the current pricing level and a need to ensure all costs were being covered when an overnight stay was for non-official usage, the eligibility criteria and those permitted to stay in the bedrooms e.g., Masters and Livery Clerks and with the potential of bedrooms only being made available to external guests during a period of low usage.
4. A clear definition of official usage was considered necessary when allowing free use of a bedroom, with this category of usage to be limited to when a Member was chairing an early morning meeting or hosting a dinner finishing late at night.
5. The Town Clerk was asked to give further consideration to a range of issues and report back with an updated Bedroom Rules and Eligibility document and bedroom pricing for Members' further consideration and approval.

Current Position

Bedroom Guidance and Charges

6. The Bedroom Rules and Eligibility criteria along with the level of charges applied to overnight accommodation have not changed since a review that was undertaken in 2014. Members agreed that it would be timely to further consider an appropriate level of charges for use of the Members' Bedrooms moving forwards.
7. Marginal costs of provision of a small double room for one night has been calculated at £65, with this figure including a range of City Surveyor's costs in managing the facility along with a small amount to cover administrative staff costs incurred by the Remembrancer's Department and Chamberlain's Department in managing bookings and invoicing, which is equivalent to one day a week and split across the cost of each of the 10 bedrooms.
8. To assist Members further in their assessment of an appropriate level of charges to apply, a reminder is provided of a comparison exercise that has been undertaken at a selection of hotels in the area. A light-touch search of a selection of five low-budget hotels in the City has shown charges ranging between £106 and £236 for a weeknight overnight stay in the City. These rates would be variable depending on a number of determining factors, but it does appear to show how

rates applied to Members' accommodation at Guildhall are set very competitively for an overnight stay in the City of London.

9. Members had previously raised their concern that the schedule of charges needed reviewing to ensure all costs were being covered when an overnight stay was for non-official use. As such, an increase in the level of charges is proposed for non-official use of the Members' bedrooms to £65 for a small double room and £70 for a large double room; non-members to be charged £100 for a smaller double room and £125 for a double room. This will allow for all costs be met and for the bedroom facilities and the servicing of these to be maintained at the required standard.

Official / Non-Official usage

10. Members were mindful of a need to ensure appropriate usage criteria was being applied to all bookings and that a correct level of charges were being applied accordingly.
11. There is currently no charge levied for overnight accommodation where the stay is deemed to be for official business. The following criteria is currently being applied for 'official usage' and 'non-official usage'.
 - *No charge will be levied for '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 Corporation 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 City Corporation at a major evening event.*
 - *Members will be charged for '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.*
12. The existing criteria around 'official' and 'non-official' usage is deemed to remain appropriate as it is currently set out, but with there being recognition of a need to ensure the usage category is being made clear at the time of booking and applied accordingly.

13. 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; however, there is no standardised submission required.
14. A tightening up of the booking procedure is proposed for inclusion within the Bedroom Rules and Eligibility whereby a Member will be required to complete a light touch booking form at the time of their booking clearly detailing their name, purpose of booking e.g., 'Official Use' or 'Non-official Use' and indicating how the stay would constitute 'official usage', if this is the case. No room booking will be allowed without a booking form being completed and confirmation of usage being provided at the time of booking.
15. This will provide the Attendant with sufficient information to assess each booking request to ensure it is in line with the agreed Bedroom Rules and Eligibility. Where a Member refuses to provide booking usage information at the time of their booking, the Attendant must clearly state that a booking will not be allowed without providing this information. Any issue that may arise as a result this, can be referred to the Chief Commoner, Chair of Civic Affairs Sub-Committee and Assistant Town Clerk for their further consideration and review.

Approved list of users

16. 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 City Corporation and others who are detained on City 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
17. Members had previously questioned the eligibility criteria and those being permitted to stay in the bedrooms e.g., Masters and Livery Clerks and any impact this was having on availability of the bedrooms for Members' usage. It had been suggested that bedrooms might only be made available to certain external guests during periods of low usage.
18. Having reviewed occupancy levels, statics indicate that the bedrooms are very rarely at full occupancy levels; also, the Bedroom Rules and Eligibility make it

quite clear that priority is to be given to Members at all times over any Officers, non-Members or external guests. Usage data indicates that the number of external guests using the bedrooms is very low, with the bulk of bookings being taken up by Members (42%), Aldermen (9%), Senior Officers (30%) and external guests, in which category Masters and Livery Clerks would fall (8%).

19. Usage data shows that the bedrooms are primarily used by Members and Officers, with very few external users. Use of the bedrooms by external users does not appear to be an issue that requires addressing at this point; if anything, there would appear to be the potential to look at expanding usage of the bedrooms, but this is not being proposed at this point and it is recommended leaving the usage criteria and list of approved users as it currently stands.

Booking Procedure and Usage Statistics

20. A matter that several Members had previously queried is the matter of “block bookings” and how long an individual Member is able to book a room.
21. Members had previously indicated a desire to stop block bookings for extended stays and to put in place a restriction on the maximum stay a Member would be able to book at any one time.
22. It is therefore proposed that at the time of booking a maximum of two overnight stays be permitted at any one time. Block bookings will not be permitted as standard, with Members only being able to book a bedroom for a maximum of two consecutive days, other than where an overnight stay is needed for official usage and with this needing to be clearly detailed as part of the booking process.

Complaints and misuse

23. The policy includes 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.”*
24. There is, however, 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, the policy is silent on the question of payment and at what point outstanding invoices should preclude further bookings.
25. It would seem prudent to consider making provision for such a situation to ensure common understanding of process, in the event it is needed. The absence of any articulated process can make it 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.
26. It is proposed that any allegation of misuse will be reported to the Chair of Civic Affairs Sub-Committee, Chief Commoner and Assistant Town Clerk who will make a determination over any claim of misuse and decide on an appropriate

course of action. A proposed course of action may include, but not be limited to, suspension of use of the bedrooms for such period as they see fit. There will be no right of appeal of the decision reached.

Outstanding invoices

27. In the event that invoices remain unsettled for a period exceeding two quarterly periods, it is proposed that no further bookings will be allowed from the Member in question; the Members will be prohibited from making any further bookings until the debt is cleared.

28. In the event of any dispute over outstanding payment of invoices, it is proposed that these be referred to the Chair of Civic Affairs Sub-Committee, Chief Commoner and Assistant Town Clerk who will make a determination. There will be no right of appeal of the decision reached.

Communications Plan

29. It is proposed that changes be implemented by 1st February 2024, which will provide a sufficient period of time for changes to be clearly communicated to all Members.

30. To ensure these changes are communicated widely to all Members, a range of communications will be provided including a notice being placed in the Members' Briefing, reference to the changes being included in the Chief Commoner's monthly note out to all Members, Town Clerk to email all Members a copy of the updated Bedroom Rules and Eligibility document confirming the changes and with an updated Bedroom Rules and Eligibility document being provided to all Members as standard as part of the booking process.

Proposals

31. Members are being asked to consider and endorse the range of areas presented in this report relating to the Members' bedroom eligibility booking criteria, terms of usage, associated costs and indicate any approve changes for inclusion in an updated Bedroom Rules and Eligibility document.

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

32. Members are being asked to consider and approve changes to the Members’ Bedroom Rules and Eligibility for inclusion in an updated document for implementation in by 1st February 2024.

Appendices

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

Chris Rumbles

Governance Officer

E: christopher.rumbles@cityofondon.gov.uk