

**CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL – FULL COUNCIL MEETING
OFFICER’S REPORT TO PARISH COUNCIL
COMMUNITY USE POLICY ASSESSMENT**

Meeting Date: 26 March 2026

Event: Chigwell Row Operatic & Dramatic Society (CROADS)

Event dates and times: 27 September – 3 October 2026

1. Purpose of Report

This report presents the application by Chigwell Row Operatic & Dramatic Society (CROADS) for the hire of Victory Hall from 27 September – 3 October 2026 and evaluates whether they should be charged the *Community/Not-for-Profit* rate instead of the *Commercial* rate. This follows a meeting held on 19 March 2026, at which CROADS representatives explained that commercial pricing would make their long-standing cultural activities financially unviable.

2. Summary of Applicant’s Submission

CROADS is a not-for-profit amateur dramatic society that has operated for over 70 years in Chigwell. The group is entirely volunteer-run, with 20 unpaid volunteers, and provides both plays and musicals. They indicate that although plays often make a small surplus, musicals incur substantial losses which are offset through membership fees and social fundraising. The group estimates that approximately 50% of its audience consists of Chigwell residents, based on ticket sales and longstanding familiarity with local attendance patterns.

CROADS has provided all documentation required under the Community Use Policy, including a risk assessment, a Public Liability Insurance certificate (£10 million cover), safeguarding compliance where required, and confirmation they will manage all cleaning and waste removal. They have also committed to providing free tickets through the Community Hub to support access for residents who otherwise may not be able to attend cultural performances.

The group also communicated by email that they believe a £2,000 contribution is a reasonable and supportable fee, noting that the current commercial hire cost of £120 per hour would equate to approximately £4,420, a level described as financially prohibitive.

3. Benchmarking – Summary of Evidence from Other Councils

A review of hire fees across a range of UK parish and community councils indicates a clear pattern: not-for-profit, volunteer-led community groups are consistently charged at discounted community rates, not commercial rates.

For example, Studley Parish Council distinguishes between commercial and community hire, offering community organisations lower hourly rates for hall use, typically £18.90 compared to commercial rates exceeding £22, demonstrating a structured differential supporting community access. Similarly, Llantwit Fardre Community Council charges community groups substantially reduced rates, between £7.50 and £9.50 per hour, whereas business and

one-off commercial users pay more. This reinforces the expectation that community cultural groups should not be treated as commercial entities for hire purposes.

Other councils follow the same approach. Unstone Parish Council sets community hire at around £12.50 per hour, while commercial hirers pay around £17.00 per hour, again demonstrating a clear differentiation between volunteer-led groups and commercial activity. Goostrey Parish Council also provides discounted rates for local or community groups, with hall hire at around £16.80 for community use, compared with higher standard rates for non-residents and business users. Additionally, Clipstone Parish Council maintains low-cost community rates (£10–£15 for smaller or regular groups), specifically to ensure affordability and continued community engagement, while charging higher rates to occasional or non-resident users.

Across all assessed councils, the principle is consistent: community groups are supported through reduced rates, and commercial charging is reserved for for-profit or externally operating bodies.

4. Community Benefit Assessment

The CROADS application meets and exceeds all relevant Community Use Policy criteria. Their long-standing presence in Chigwell provides cultural enrichment and regular social inclusion opportunities through amateur theatre. Their productions help bring together residents across age, background, and interest groups. The group has demonstrated a track record of open membership, recently welcoming new residents who contacted the Parish Office directly.

CROADS also contributes economically to the local area, as audience members often visit local businesses, particularly hospitality venues before performances. This type of indirect economic benefit is consistent with the community uplift many councils recognise when granting community rate concessions.

Additionally, by offering free tickets through the Community Hub, CROADS is taking proactive measures to ensure that vulnerable or financially limited residents can participate in local cultural life.

5. Insurance and Risk Assessment

All required documentation has been supplied:

- **Public Liability Insurance:** £10,000,000
- **Risk Assessment:** Submitted and meets expected standards
- **Safeguarding compliance:** Provided where required
- **Waste and clean-up commitment:** Confirmed

No concerns arise from an insurance or risk management perspective.

6. Financial Considerations

CROADS' proposal of a £2,000 contribution is broadly consistent with community-rate charges in comparable councils and significantly more aligned with not-for-profit charging structures than the Parish Council's commercial rate of £120 per hour (approx. £4,420 total). Charging the commercial rate would be out of step with standard practice nationally and risks discouraging or displacing a long-standing cultural group.

7. Officer Recommendation

Based on:

- Benchmarking from multiple councils showing consistent use of community rates for volunteer-led groups;
- CROADS' not-for-profit status and 70-year historical contribution to Chigwell;
- Demonstrated community benefit, accessibility initiatives, and volunteer effort;
- Compliance with insurance, risk, and operational requirements; and
- The strong alignment with the Parish's social, cultural and community-cohesion objectives,

it is recommended that CROADS be charged the Community/Not-for-Profit Rate rather than the Commercial Rate.

The Officer further recommends accepting £2,000 as a fair contribution and approving their booking under community classification.

8. Decision Sought

Council is asked to:

1. Approve CROADS' booking under the Community Use classification.
2. Confirm the charge at the community rate, consistent with benchmarking and policy.
3. Note CROADS' long-term contribution to cultural life in Chigwell and their commitment to accessibility.
4. Record that all required documentation has been submitted and presents no concerns.

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