

**CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL
OFFICER'S REPORT TO FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

Meeting Date: 14 May 2026

Subject: Community Use Request – Extended Use of Victory Hall: Policy Alignment and Hire Conditions Assessment

1. Purpose of Report

To present to the Finance and Governance Committee an assessment of a request for extended or more frequent community use of Victory Hall, examining:

- Alignment with the Council's Community Use and Not-for-Profit Group Use Policy (adopted 26 July 2025);
- Compliance with the Terms and Conditions of Use of Premises and Land (adopted 26 July 2025); and
- Governance, contractual, operational and reputational considerations arising from the request.

The report seeks a committee recommendation on whether and how the request may proceed within the Council's approved governance frameworks.

2. Background

A community group currently permitted to hire Victory Hall for Friday prayer sessions and occasional additional bookings has requested more frequent and/or longer-term access to the hall.

The request has already been assessed against the Council's Community Use and Not-for-Profit Group Use Policy, which provides a framework for eligibility, value for money, fairness and community benefit.

However, any approval must also comply with the legally adopted Terms and Conditions of Use of Premises and Land, which govern the form, duration and structure of all hall hire agreements.

3. Alignment with the Community Use Policy

Eligibility

The Community Use Policy confirms that faith-based groups are eligible to apply for use of Parish assets where activities demonstrate community benefit and are non-commercial in nature.

The group's current use and proposed continuation fall within the scope of eligible users under the policy.

Community Benefit and Value for Money

The request aligns positively with the policy's Value for Money criteria by:

- Supporting regular utilisation of Victory Hall;
- Providing predictable and consistent community use;
- Contributing to cost-neutral operation of a Council asset;
- Offering community-based activity aligned with social inclusion.

From a policy perspective, the request is therefore capable of being supported in principle, subject to fairness, balance of access and governance controls.

Fair Access and Equality

The Community Use Policy requires:

- Equitable access for all eligible community groups;
- Transparent decision-making;
- Avoidance of dominance or exclusivity by any single organisation.

While the policy does not prohibit regular use, it anticipates that frequency must be balanced to preserve access and public confidence. The request can therefore align with the policy only if it does not create an exclusive or dominant pattern of use.

4. Assessment Against the Terms and Conditions of Hire

Maximum Duration of Regular Bookings

The Council's Terms and Conditions of Use state:

"The maximum regular booking period is 13 weeks or three months."

This provision applies to all use of Victory Hall without exception.

Implication

- Any approval framed as open-ended, rolling, permanent or long-term use would conflict directly with the adopted Terms and Conditions.
- The Council cannot lawfully grant a single agreement exceeding 13 weeks without breaching its own contractual framework.

Council Discretion and Control

The Terms and Conditions expressly preserve the Council's right to:

- Refuse or cancel bookings;
- Prevent use that may be contrary to the public interest or harmful to the Council's reputation;
- Ensure bookings remain discretionary and non-exclusive.

Granting long-term or guaranteed access would undermine these protections and materially weaken the Council's governance position.

Operational and Reputational Risk

The Terms and Conditions also place obligations on the Council to consider:

- Safety, capacity, security and compliance (including Martyn's Law);
- Nuisance, parking pressure and neighbour impact;
- Reputational risk to the Council and perception of its assets.

Increased frequency of use heightens these risks and reinforces the need for:

- Time-limited approvals;
- Periodic review;
- The ability to amend or refuse future bookings if circumstances change.

5. Summary of Alignment and Conflict

Overall assessment indicates that the request is broadly consistent with the Council's Community Use and Not-for-Profit Group Use Policy, in that it aligns with the policy's objectives of supporting community engagement and appropriate use of Council assets.

However, the request would conflict with the Council's adopted Terms and Conditions of Hire if approved as a long-term or open-ended arrangement, as those conditions impose clear limits on the duration of regular bookings.

From a governance and risk perspective, the identified issues are capable of being mitigated through the imposing of strict conditions, including time-limited approvals, periodic review, and retention of Council discretion. Equality and fair access considerations can be satisfied if frequency is capped, access remains non-exclusive, and regular reviews are undertaken to ensure balanced availability of the facility for all eligible groups.

6. Recommended Approach

Officer Assessment

The request cannot be approved as a long-term or permanent arrangement without breaching the Council's Terms and Conditions of Hire.

However, it can be supported in a controlled and lawful manner by structuring any approval as a series of time-limited regular bookings, subject to review.

7. Recommendation to Finance and Governance Committee

The Committee is asked to recommend that Full Council:

- Notes that the request aligns in principle with the Community Use and Not-for-Profit Group Use Policy;
- Confirms that the Council's Terms and Conditions of Use do not permit open-ended or long-term regular bookings exceeding 13 weeks;
- Supports approval only on the following basis:
 - Bookings limited to a maximum 13-week period per agreement;
 - No exclusivity or priority rights granted;
 - Use remains subject to re-application, review and availability;
 - Council retains full discretion to refuse or amend future bookings;
- Requires a written agreement for each booking period confirming:
 - Permitted frequency and times;
 - Compliance with all Terms and Conditions;
 - Review dates and conditions for continuation;
- Confirms that any future request for increased frequency must be reassessed against both policy and hire conditions.

8. Governance Statement

This approach ensures that the Council:

- Supports community engagement;
- Acts consistently with adopted policy;
- Complies with its own contractual framework;
- Protects fairness, safety and public confidence in Parish assets;
- Maintains clear legal and operational control of Victory Hall.

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