

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE
12 MARCH 2009

Agenda Item	7
Report No	ECS 10/09

**Charging for Council Community Facilities and Community Managed Facilities in
Schools and Leisure and Community Centres**

Report by Director of Education, Culture and Sport

Summary

This report seeks to harmonise scales of charges for public use of the Council's community facilities and also facilities in schools, leisure and community centres managed by communities.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Education Culture and Sport Service operates a variety of facilities which are open for use by the public for sport and community activities – these include schools, leisure facilities, halls and community centres. All Education, Culture and Sport facilities and schools operate under one set of values established in the Service Plan. However, the history of inheriting pricing structures from different District and Regional Councils, together with some autonomy within the Council's previous Area structure to set charges, means that the pricing of similar facilities in different parts of the Highlands can sometimes vary significantly.

1.2 Charging for community use of facilities is a balance in achieving a number of sometimes conflicting objectives:

- Ensuring affordable access to all sections of the community to encourage participation
- Fostering social inclusion for those who are economically and socially vulnerable
- Developing opportunities across a broader range of activities for an increasing range of participants
- Reflecting differing local priorities and size, quality and design of facilities
- Raising income

1.3 A previous report on pricing policy was brought before the Council in March 2004. This established the following charging principles:

- The High Life scheme will underpin affordable all-inclusive access to the Council's Leisure Centres, encouraging regular exercise and healthy lifestyles. A 50p per activity Budget option for those on principal benefits will further ensure all sections of the community can participate. Nevertheless the pay-as-you-go option for those seeking less regular facility use will be maintained.
- Setting maximum pay-as-you-go charges for Council and grant-aided facilities and schools to ensure they remain affordable to all sections of the

community.

- Maintaining free use of schools for youth groups, while allowing charging for any additional janitorial costs incurred.
- Allowing actual charges set to be varied down from the maximum charge by Area Committees or School Management Committees, to reflect local priorities and differences in facility design standards. Facility Managers are permitted to vary prices downwards for short term promotions. This excludes High Life because High Life members can access all Leisure Centres for one price.
- Establishing set charges for group use of schools where no management committees exist.
- That the Director of Education, Culture and Sport be given devolved powers to vary charges annually by a maximum of two times the annual inflation rate.

1.4 Because of the range and variety of facilities across the Highlands, a pricing structure has been established for the main types of facilities that are common across most leisure centres and schools. The detail of pricing of more unusual facilities will normally be left to individual managers or Management Committees within the overall principles of the pricing levels set.

2. Establishing a single pricing structure

2.1 **High Life:** High Life is the principle means for providing affordable, regular access to the Council's Leisure Facilities. Whereas it is also important that pay-as-you-go charges are accessible and affordable for those who use facilities less regularly, or are visitors, they are set in the context of the availability of the High Life option.

2.2 **Lets:** Charges for lets of education premises, school playing fields, community centres and halls have been organised into 'bands', according to the type of user group. Although rarely applicable in Leisure Centres, in order to achieve a standard pricing policy, it is recommended that this principle is now extended to Leisure Centres.

3. Youth Activities - Charging

3.1 Under current arrangements, users providing activities for school age young people can obtain free use of school facilities, whereas there is a charge levied for similar use in Leisure Centres. The situation has been exacerbated in recent years as charges are levied for such activities in new joint school and community facilities.

3.2 Members have raised concerns that on occasion they have been approached by groups to question why they have to pay for a let in a Council facility when they can get a free let in a nearby school facility. Clearly not all groups can readily access appropriate school facilities on their doorstep.

3.3 The large majority of free lets in schools are organised through the school and treated as school based extra-curricular activities. These would not be affected by any decision to introduce charges.

- 3.4 Casual bookings by young people are mainly concentrated on Leisure Centres, where entry fees are charged. Therefore extending free use for young people into Leisure Centres would have a significant impact on income, including cancellations of High Life memberships.
- 3.5 In an area such as the Highlands, access to comparable facilities is not always possible in every location. In the interests of equity and in light of the Council's current financial position, it is proposed to introduce charges for youth activities in school buildings, for activities other than those organised by the Council directly. The purpose of this is to ensure equity of provision across the Highlands. If adopted, it will be proposed to introduce these charges over two financial years.

4. Proposed Charges

- 4.1 Appendix One sets out a standardised banding system and standard 'target' prices. Target prices for 2009-10 have been set approximately 5% higher than typical prices in the upper range of 2008-09 charges, while disregarding any atypically high charges.
- 4.2 Because achieving target prices will, in a few cases, mean a significant price change, it is recommended that, where the change would be an increase greater than 5%, the change is brought in over a maximum of three years. These prices will increase by one third of the difference between the prices per year, or by 5%, whichever is greater. If prices are already higher than the target price, these would remain capped at the current level to ensure stability of revenue income, and because the prices are already established. It is assumed that target prices will eventually catch up with prices capped in this way.

5. Voluntary Management Committees and Grant Aided Facilities

- 5.1 The community facilities of some schools and community centres are managed by voluntary committees. In some cases the management has included setting the charges for community use, namely at Ardnamurchan High School, Charleston Academy, Culloden Academy, Glen Urquhart High School and Inverness Community Centres. As a result these scales of charges have tended to be different from equivalent facilities elsewhere. There is an issue as to whether these schools and community centres should be included in efforts to equalise prices across the Highlands and should be required to move towards the target prices in the same way as other facilities, or whether pricing should continue to be a matter of local responsibility where management committees exist. This report recommends that prices are capped at the target price level, or at current prices if these are higher, but that flexibility is allowed to vary prices below that level.
- 5.2 Similarly, leisure facilities that are grant aided by the Council have, in the past, been required to cap prices at a designated maximum in order to ensure accessible pricing is maintained. This report recommends that any prices in grant aided facilities currently above the Council's target price should be frozen at current levels.

6. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Members agree:-

- 6.1 the target prices set out in Appendix One of this report
- 6.2 that where the difference between the current and proposed prices are greater than 5%, increases are staged over two or more years
- 6.3 to equalise charges to community facilities and community use of school facilities by introducing the same charges in both school and community venues for youth groups and others providing activities for young people
- 6.4 that school facilities with prices set by Community Management Committees, and Grant-aided facilities be required to cap prices at a maximum of the target price level, or at the current level if greater
- 6.5 the booking policy and prices for Badaguish Lodges outlined in Appendix One of this report
- 6.6 that in future years the Director of Education, Culture and Sport maintain delegated authority to vary prices by twice the annual inflation level, and target prices are consequently adjusted.

Signature:

Designation: Director of Education, Culture and Sport

Date: 24 February 2009

Author: Graham Watson, Community Development Manager

Ref: HF/IM/GW

Background Papers:

Appendix One:

Proposed Pricing Bands, and Target Prices for ECS Sport and Community Facilities 2009-10:

(includes schools, leisure centres, town halls and community centres)

Leisure Centre High Life Charges:

Most Leisure Centres now operate the High Life scheme which provides all inclusive access to individual activities (including most instructed activities and swimming lessons) at all participating facilities (terms and conditions are detailed on application forms). This is a set charge which, during 2008, reduced (due to the reduction in VAT) for a family (up to two adults and dependants under 18 in one household) from £21.00 to £20.55 per month, and for an individual from £15.00 to £14.68 per month. The proposed charge for 2009-10 is, for a **family, £21.60 per month**, and for an **individual, £15.40 per month** (subject to change should VAT rates change during the year).

Budget (applicable to adult, partner and dependants under 18 on Income Support, Pension Guarantee Credit or Job Seekers Allowance income based, and individuals on Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance) reduced in 2008 from 50p per activity to 49p. It is proposed to restore the price to 50p for 2009-10.

Pay-as-you-go prices:

Where the following booking of facilities requires a janitor to be in attendance, an additional charge of £35 per booking will be made to defray janitorial costs.

Band A: Community Activities:

Band A prices for sporting, social, political and religious activities and meetings; not for profit instruction, activities, ceilidhs and dances where any fees taken go to voluntary sector clubs; musical competitions; Blood Transfusion Service.

Target prices:

Classroom: £7.75 up to 3 hours.

Badminton Court (no more than 4 persons) £6.90 per hour

Small Hall (one or two badminton court size) £13.35 per hour

Games Hall (three or four badminton court size) £30 per hour

Theatre £33 per hour

Grass Playing Field (without changing facilities) £34.50 per 2 hr match

Grass Playing Field (with changing facilities) £44.50 per 2 hr match

All-weather Pitch (full size, peak, without changing facilities or lights) £44.25 per 2 hr match

All-weather Pitch (full size, peak, with changing facilities and lights) £64.25 per 2 hr match
(Changing Facilities £10; Floodlighting, 2 hrs, £10)

Swim – Conventional Pool £4.00

Swimming Lesson (per person in a group lesson) £6.15

Hire of Swimming Pool (based on 25m x 4 lanes) £57.00

Fitness Room £4.20

Fitness Room Induction £6.40

Hire of Football or racquet £1.50
Use of shower and changing facilities £1.50

50% reduction applies where 100% participants are under 18, full time students or over 60.
An additional £35.00 per hour charge applies for additional staffing outside standard opening hours.

Band B: Semi-Commercial:

Instructed activities of educational or sporting content where the instructor retains the income; elections; unlicensed ceilidhs and dances where individuals retain the income; weddings.

Target prices:

Classroom: £15.75 per hour.

Badminton Court (no more than 4 persons) £15.75 per hour

Small Hall (one or two badminton court size) £19.85 per hour

Games Hall (three or four badminton court size) £38.75 per hour

Theatre £42.00 per hour

Grass Playing Field (without changing facilities) £44.50 per 2 hr match

Grass Playing Field (with changing facilities) £54.50 per 2 hr match

All-weather Pitch (full size, peak, without changing facilities or lights) £54.25 per 2 hr match

All-weather Pitch (full size, peak, with changing facilities and lights) £74.25 per 2 hr match
(Changing Facilities £10; Floodlighting, 2 hrs, £10)

Swim – Conventional Pool £6.00

Swimming Lesson (per person in a group lesson) £8.15

Hire of Swimming Pool (based on 25m x 4 lanes) £70.00

Fitness Room £6.20

Fitness Room Induction £9.40

Hire of Football or racquet £2.00

Use of shower and changing facilities £2.00

50% reduction applies where 100% participants are under 18, full time students or over 60.
An additional £35.00 per hour charge applies for additional staffing outside standard opening hours.

Band C: Commercial:

Commercial organisations for profit making activities including instruction, dances, events, sales and spectator events.

Target prices:

Classroom: £57.30 per hour.

Badminton Court (no more than 4 persons) £26.25 per hour

Small Hall (one or two badminton court size) £69.00 per hour

Games Hall (three or four badminton court size) £122.75 per hour

Theatre £145.00 per hour

Grass Playing Field (without changing facilities) £118.50 per 2 hr match

Grass Playing Field (with changing facilities) £133.50 per 2 hr match

All-weather Pitch (full size, peak, without changing facilities or lights) £162.75 per 2 hr match

All-weather Pitch (full size, peak, with changing facilities and lights) £192.75 per 2 hr match

(Changing Facilities £15; Floodlighting, 2 hrs, £15)

Swim – Conventional Pool £12.00

Swimming Lesson (per person in a group lesson) £18.50

Hire of Swimming Pool (based on 25m x 4 lanes) £170.00

Fitness Room £12.50

Fitness Room Induction £19.00

Hire of Football or racquet £4.50

Use of shower and changing facilities £4.50

50% reduction applies where 100% participants are under 18, full time students or over 60. An additional £35.00 per hour charge applies for additional staffing outside standard opening hours.

Badaguish Lodges: Hire Charges:

Highland Council in partnership with Northern Constabulary holds the leases to four lodges in the Cairngorm National Park near Aviemore. Primarily they are a resource for Outdoor Education groups led by Highland Council or Northern Constabulary, and for use by schools and constituted youth, community or voluntary groups from the Highland area. Each lodge sleeps up to 17 people.

The demand for the lodges from the target groups varies according to the season, and to ensure best value is achieved it is possible, under certain conditions, to let the lodges to Highland Council Members and staff for use by family and friends at a price which can subsidise use by the target groups. Bookings from family groups are accepted provisionally, and only confirmed 21 days beforehand if there are no bookings from school and community groups. Permitting private use has certain advantages. It has proved valuable in raising awareness of the Centre for Community groups. Many of the groups staying have been teachers and youth leaders practising their outdoor skills, with subsequent benefit to our young people, and it is sound business practice not to have premises standing unused. The 21 day confirmation period ensures that family groups do not displace the main user groups, as school and other groups book well in advance in nearly all cases. Subject to availability, it is proposed that the lodges may be let to commercial bodies within the Highland Council area, other local authorities, and tourists (through STB) at commercial rates. These bookings will only be taken when there is little chance of displacing Highland Council groups, eg Christmas and Hogmanay weeks, school holidays and late autumn months. The charges reflect those of the landlord, who has similar accommodation, and vary according to the season.

Per lodge per night (sleeps up to 17):

School, youth and community groups:	£40
Highland Council and Northern Constabulary staff and family groups:	£60
Other Local Authorities or commercial tourism groups: (depending on season)	£110 to £250