

Community Building Licensing Policy

A Cost-to-Council approach

Community Buildings play a pivotal role in improving the quality of life for our community. To provide a framework for the consistent, equitable and transparent management of community buildings, the City of Ryde published its first Community Buildings Licensing Policy in July 2013, with the unanimous support of Councillors, Council Management and staff, current tenants and the community service sector – a significant achievement for a highly contentious and complex reform.

In August 2012, Council undertook a review of procedures and consultation with existing tenants which found inconsistencies and inequities in how Council manages its community buildings. All consulted requested greater clarity, transparency, consistency in the management of the portfolio.

In response to the consultation results and to respond holistically to the challenges raised, the City of Ryde established the *Community Building Improvement Program*, which included:

- Tenant Enquiry Service System: establish one-point-of-contact for tenants with enquiries and improve customer service processes.
- Licensing Policy: create consistency and equity in how Council manages its buildings and processes to ensure transparency.
- Social and Cultural Infrastructure Plan: plan for future infrastructure provision.

After establishing an internal Project Team, Steering Committee and workshops with tenants and Councillors, a draft policy with the following key features was created:

- Cost-to-Council approach for setting licensing fees which recognises that Council seeks only to recover all or part of the costs of providing the tenancy (rather than profit or market subsidy). Costs were established by undertaking condition audits by independent auditors. This approach was easy for tenants to understand and preferred over a standard fee or a market subsidy;
- Generous subsidies based on the tenants capacity-to-contribute and community benefit determined through the transparent Assessment Tool which uses a points system to determine the appropriate subsidy category;
- Clarification and standardisation of tenant and Council operations, maintenance and renewal responsibilities. Five-year costed maintenance and renewal plans were provided to tenants so they could plan for the future costs of the building they occupied. The policy also allows for the provision of tailored solutions to small, volunteer run services;
- Provision of transition plans for existing tenants who need them, allowing tenants the time to manage and plan for any increases in licensing fees; and
- Establishment of plain-English licensing documentation to provide clarity and transparency to tenants, improving customer service while managing Council's reputational, legal and property risks.

After nine months of policy development, deliberative internal and external consultation and Council consideration, Council published its first Community Buildings Licensing Policy in July 2013. By developing an innovative approach to determining licensing fees and subsidy provision, the City of Ryde has achieved its aims of meeting community, tenant and service sector expectations of seamless customer service, widespread deliberative engagement in planning for the future, transparency in decision-making and consistent processes.

For more information, please visit www.ryde.nsw.gov.au/communityhubs