



Strategic Development

Community Halls Policy

HUTT CITY COUNCIL COMMUNITY HALL POLICY

Adopted by Hutt City Council on 18 December 2007.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Council owns 14 facilities that can be described as community halls. All were built between 1953 and 1970 and either funded jointly by the community concerned and the Council, or by a special rate specifically for community hall construction, or built and funded by the community concerned. These halls are managed in different ways. Some are leased either to a specific (community or commercial) organisation or to a Community Trust and others are managed by Council.

The Council currently has no policy to guide the management of these halls. Management arrangements for each hall have been established on an ad-hoc basis. A more streamlined, consistent approach to hall management based on clear objectives, responsibilities and support formulas would assist Council to administer and use these assets more efficiently and effectively. Such a management approach may increase the level of usage thus making these facilities work better for their communities as well as be more economic for Council.

2. BACKGROUND

The Council's Community Plan Committee resolved in June 2006 to commission a review of community halls in order to understand the extent to which these halls meet local community needs and understand governance options for the facilities. Six halls were selected as examples for a detailed consultation and analysis: Epuni, Taita, Stokes Valley, Avalon, Belmont and Naenae.

The original call for a review was prompted by concern about whether the Council's community halls were providing value for money to the community. Community Halls are substantial Council assets yet some people perceive their use by the community may be declining. When built, they provided a central focus of community life. But lifestyles and the nature of the demand for leisure and entertainment have changed since the 1970s and there are concerns that the facilities available in community halls and the configuration of these community halls may not be suitable for the types of community activities demanded today. There is also a concern that the poor condition of some of the community halls may be contributing to their low levels of use.

During the 1990s the Council adopted a policy of leasing some halls to community groups or other organisations in an effort to increase overall usage. There have been questions about whether the associated governance mechanisms have worked in the best interests of the wider community.

The review concluded that by and large, given the quality of the buildings and their configuration, these facilities are very well used but for most of the six halls assessed, there is considerable scope to increase their use, especially by younger people.

3. KEY OBJECTIVES OF COMMUNITY HALL POLICY AND REVIEW

The key objectives of this policy are:

- Council when reviewing the role and purpose of each community hall will establish:
 - The extent to which it meets contemporary needs
 - Whether it has the appropriate management systems in place to meet the needs of the community
 - that the day to day running of the hall will work to provide the facilities wanted by the community.
- That Council establish a more streamlined, consistent approach to hall management based on clear objectives, responsibilities and support formulas to assist council to administer these assets more efficiently and effectively.
- To review each hall in accordance with the process outlined below (in clause 4. Review Process) as the leases come up for renewal or if requested by Council.
- Establish to what extent the Council should devolve the management of community halls to communities and groups. Council accepts the best solution for each facility will differ according to its particular situation. In this regard clear agreement between the parties involved should be reached to ensure the day to day running of the hall will work to provide the facilities wanted by the community.
- If Council determines that a community hall is no longer needed, the process to determine options for its future will be established by Council.

4. REVIEW PROCESS

In seeking to address the issues confronting the City's community halls, there are a range of options to be considered. These include options for the physical building itself, funding options and governance and administration

options. The options need to be considered in light of the financial and organisational capacity of the Council and the communities concerned. The best solution for each facility will differ according to its particular situation.

The following key issues will be addressed when reviewing each community hall.

a) Buildings

There are six possible options for the actual buildings. These are:

- status quo
- renovation/modernisation.
- reconfiguration to increase specialization or to appeal to a broader range of users:
- replacement on site or with a centralized facility.
- closure
- sale to user group.

b) Funding

There are four potential funding options. These were:

- the Council meets all costs of administration and maintenance through rates, partly subsidised by income from hire.
- Community Trusts, partially funded from hall hire with an annual subsidy from the Council to cover minor maintenance and running costs. Major maintenance would continue to be covered by the Council.
- lease to a specific community group or commercial agency which would retain hall hire fees to cover minor maintenance and running costs, possibly with an annual subsidy from the Council. Major maintenance would continue to be covered by the Council.
- long-term lease to a commercial agency to operate as a straight commercial operation with all costs covered by the agency.

c) Governance and Administration

There is a spectrum of options for governance and administration from total council control to total devolution. The 2007 review concluded that the most successful form of governance for a community facility seems to be some form of partnership arrangement where Council and the community concerned share the responsibilities and decision-making. This can be achieved in a variety of ways including:

- Council management with council staff meeting regularly with a community advisory group to decide what needs to be done

- community management by hall committees (elected at an AGM) which have regular contact with Council staff to discuss issues and needs
- community management by Community Trusts with the Council providing some support services (e.g. assistance with funding applications or a central booking system for some halls).

In practice the delegation of management by the Council to community groups has tended to mean that management becomes the responsibility of an individual within the group. The quality of this arrangement from the point of view of other users is strongly determined by the management skills and personality of this individual.

The arrangement of leasing a hall to a specific user group which then sub-leases to others can have serious limitations. On the other hand, management by a community group can work very well in the right circumstances.

Council considers community trusts which are incorporated societies to have the potential to be the most effective form of management, provided:

- they are adequately supported by the Council (through subsidies, monitoring of administration capacity and advice)
- there is a strong sense of community that will ensure ownership and stewardship of the facility and an adequate supply of volunteers over the long term
- the community can deliver the skills and leadership necessary to run the facility efficiently and effectively
- there is a source of funding which the Trust can apply to for grants to supplement Council funding.

d) Maintenance

The 2007 review found that the maintenance programme has not kept pace with the wear and tear on the buildings reviewed and the standard of kitchen and toilet facilities expected of such facilities. The review recommended the programme of work and spending forecasts be re-evaluated.

The Asset Management Plan for Halls will be reviewed annually to ensure the community halls are maintained to acceptable levels to meet the needs of the community.
