

Major Review Working Title	"Maximising Council Spaces: A Review of Business and Private Hire Opportunities"
Committee	Corporate Resources and Infrastructure Select Committee
Review Year	2025/26 MY

1. OBJECTIVES

Aim of review

The review aims to assess the availability and utilisation of Council-owned spaces for private hire and temporary letting use. The objective would be to identify opportunities for the optimisation and commercialisation of these spaces, ultimately benefiting the local economy, community and generating additional revenue for the Council.

Terms of Reference

1. To identify all Council-owned spaces available for hire, including halls, rooms in buildings and libraries, rooms in the Civic Centre, and any other spaces managed by the Council.
2. To assess their current usage, facilities and the promotion of these spaces and identify ideas and opportunities to maximise income at such spaces for commercial, public and private use.
3. To explore marketing potential, an online register and booking service for such spaces, detailing their suitability for different types of events, locations, facilities, conditions, and management – aligned to any efficient regulatory requirements.
4. To explore best practice and synergies with partner, businesses and any other local organisations who may also hire spaces for events or provide services to events in spaces.
5. To review levels of fees and charges against private and public competitors to maximise income.
6. To present to Cabinet innovative and deliverable recommendations on the resourcing required, investment needed and charges to maximise income from these spaces, contributing to, and ideally, exceeding existing income targets.

2. BACKGROUND

Context

Hillingdon offers various spaces for hire, including commercial properties like office spaces, market stalls and industrial units, event venues such as community centres, halls, and outdoor spaces, theatres, and library meeting rooms. These spaces cater to all manner of business operations, private events, and community activities.

The Council itself has numerous opportunities for commercialisation and better usage of its assets, spaces and rooms. Given Hillingdon's position between London and the counties and great transport connections, there is the potential to further market these and commercialise. For residents, the ability to easily find and use local venues for family events would also support the Council's mission.

Scope

It is suggested the review considers, where feasible, the use of, and marketing of all the relevant assets the Council owns to maximise the opportunities for income. As a guide, therefore, it is suggested the review initially focuses on the following spaces:

- Halls of all sizes, with or without stages etc, (e.g., the Manor Farm estate in Ruislip, village Halls, small theatres, individual rooms or collections of rooms,
- Rooms in halls, buildings and libraries,
- Rooms in the Civic Centre
- Any other space owned / managed by the Council
- Appropriate outdoor spaces that could be hired and used for suitable outdoor events.
- Those spaces designated specifically to a council service, e.g. Adult Education, to see if there is any potential of co-use of spaces and rooms outside service requirements.

On assets that may not be suitable, it is suggested that the review does not look in detail at the leisure facilities currently marketed by the Council's Leisure Operator GLL for sports use, which has its own booking and marketing facility, but lessons could be learnt from how well used or effective this is.

Similarly, this review is about temporary hire or short-term letting, so it may not be practical to review any longer commercial or business leasing arrangements of Council facilities, e.g. shopping parades. Notwithstanding this, should opportunities present themselves around such leasing arrangements, e.g. as marketing empty shops, in the spirit of this review, the Committee may wish to consider this.

Involving witnesses from local businesses, universities and the voluntary sector to understand their needs and how they can use council services will be useful. Also exploring best practice from other London boroughs and considering how they manage and use assets. The Committee is keen to focus on a user centric approach including mapping out existing assets, understanding user needs and involving the community in the process.

Known factors

At present there is no central register of all known hireable spaces of this type, who is responsible for them, how they are let or most importantly, how they are promoted or if they are promoted at all. It appears there is a lack of any comprehensive understanding of what spaces are available, their potential and strategic management and marketing of these spaces.

The Committee is aware of some good practice examples of the marketing of spaces, e.g. by the library service for their rooms at Theatres, Manor Farm and the Bunker (links at end of

report). Room hire is one of their main income generators and are looking to maximise this by providing more rooms with better access in the future. The Service uses a system called Booking Plus to promote and take payment with a reduction in wasteful and transactional work.

Connected activity

1. **Strategy** - The Council Strategy 2022 – 2026 does not explicitly mention the impact on Council-owned spaces (rooms) for business, private hire, letting, and commercialisation in the Borough. However, it does emphasise making the best use of land and buildings, which could imply optimising the use of Council-owned spaces for various purposes, including business and private hire. Additionally, the focus on promoting investment, business growth, and supporting local businesses may indirectly support the commercialisation of Council-owned spaces. This aligns with the ambitions for the Council to be an efficient well run digital enable council offering a central base of information that can improve the lives of residents.
2. **Budget** - The Cabinet's budget proposals for 2025/26 include an income target of £40k for Meeting Room Hire Revenue in Libraries, along with additional savings around asset optimisation.
3. **Economic opportunities** - The hire of spaces for different types of local events also contributes to a thriving local economy using small businesses and other private sector services for connected services required e.g. catering, audio-visual, entertainment. This review could look at opportunities to link up such services and any potential for sponsorship of venues.
4. **Service innovation** - Recent services reviews, e.g. Youth Strategy and Family Hubs have also identified changes in use, co-location and innovation in spaces for the delivery of services, which will be worth exploring.
5. **Civic Centre Project** - The wider transformation and co-location of services to the Civic Centre also offers a range of opportunities with new spaces being created for use in the new Library and Registrars facilities etc...
6. **Regulatory aspects** - With the hire of any venue, and dependent on event type and numbers, there will be varying degrees of regulatory requirements, e.g. risk assessments, licensing permissions, health and safety and insurance. Looking at clarifying and streamlining any such processes to improve the customer experience should be investigated.
7. **Corporate Landlord / Asset Management Review** – the Council's property team act as the Corporate Landlord and the current position is where assets are operational, they are notionally let to the departments to use. Additionally, the Property Team are undertaking a strategic review of the Council's assets and the optimisation of their use for local services, so any duplication of (or benefit from) this should be factored.
8. **Digital** – a potential output of this review around online information/bookings, pending the review and ultimately Cabinet approval, may require input from the Digital Team. Therefore, resourcing requirements and timescales will need to be

considered in conjunction with them. It is important to note that a booking system across the council's assets is not currently within the planned work programme.

9. **Filming** – the approach being taken to commercialise and increasing filming income could be explored for any good practice, interrelationships or benefits from this review. This approach seeks to match sites and buildings the Council owns to specific filming location requests and consider a range of requirements to meet a client brief, e.g. a filming production company may wish to film at one of the Council's sites as well as a school and community hall, for example. A joined-up approach on locations/assets for wider marketing will help join up the dots to promote our Borough in this way.

Legislative context

The Local Government Act 1972 provides councils with the authority to manage and let their properties. It includes provisions for leasing and renting council-owned spaces to businesses and individuals.

3. EVIDENCE GATHERING

Core intelligence required

1. How many spaces indoor and outdoor can be identified?
2. Where are they, by address and Ward?
3. Parking and transport connections available
4. What facilities are available for each space?
5. What "condition" are they in?
6. In which directorate does each space sit?
7. Who is responsible for their management?
8. Lettings history / occupancy rate for last year
9. Any planned space improvements
10. Fees and Charges for spaces

Cabinet Members & Service relevant to this review

This review would fall fully under this Committee's approved remit set out in the Constitution.

It would also cut across all Cabinet Member portfolios as the range of buildings and spaces would cut across all Council Directorates and service areas. However, the primary Cabinet Members and immediate service areas in relation to the review are set out below:

Leader of the Council	Corporate Services	Communications & Engagement (e.g. marketing)
Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Property	Place	Property (maximising income from holdings)

		Facilities Management
		Civic Centre, Property and built assets (cross-cutting brief)
Cabinet Member for Finance & Transformation	Finance	Income maximisation
	Corporate Services	Digital technologies

Discussions on draft or emerging recommendations may be undertaken with relevant Cabinet Members as per the Protocol on Overview & Scrutiny and Cabinet Relations approved by full Council.

Potential witnesses and site visits

Officers from:

- Libraries and Cultural Services
- Property and Estates Team (all assets)
- Education (schools/adult education)
- Facilities Management
- Green Spaces
- Children's Services
- Youth Services
- Learning and Development
- Corporate Communications
- Digital Team

External witnesses / user testimony:

- GLL leisure provider or Sports Contract Manager
- Brunel University Events Team
- Local Community Centre operator
- Private sector event space operator, e.g. entertainment venue or hotel
- Wedding Planner or similar local event organiser
- Best practice local authority events / booking manager

Site visits:

- Hillingdon Civic Centre rooms / Manor Farm
- Brunel University
- Other London Borough Events Services – good practice on indoor and outdoor events with an App and Event Management Service.

Initial Papers / further reading

- [Council venues and spaces to hire - Discover Hillingdon](#)
- [Theatre spaces to hire - Discover Hillingdon](#)

- [Meeting rooms and spaces to hire in our libraries - Hillingdon Council](#)
- [Council GIS property browser](#) – internal only
- [EventApp - Camden](#) (example only)

Lines of Enquiry

Specific lines of enquiry will be worked up prior to witness sessions.

A possible gap analysis exercise could be suggested by the Committee in which services are asked to complete surveys identifying spaces that are used in their service areas by various stakeholders. areas that are being met. This information would then be analysed and areas of improvement identified.

Members will be interested in identifying the number and types of spaces available for hire within the Borough, including their addresses and wards. Members will note the facilities available at each site and assess their conditions. Identifying the directorate responsible for each site, the management structure and the letting history over the past three years will enable Members to create a single point of useful information. Members will also wish to explore opportunities for better marketing and commercialisation of these spaces. The findings will provide valuable insights into the current state of these spaces, enabling the Council to make informed decisions that benefit the community and generate additional revenue.

Some early ideas to consider:

1. Business lettings for planned upgrades to rooms
2. Serviced business suites / conferences
3. Expanding online register / App / booking service
4. Event Management and Lettings Service (income generation is far greater than the cost)
5. Targeted communications locally amongst residents, community groups and the business sector.
6. Streamlined / online process for regulatory requirements for space hire

4. REVIEW PLANNER

Proposed timeframe & milestones for the review:

Meeting Date	Action	Purpose / theme	Witnesses / officers attending
11 February 2025	Agree Scoping Report	What do we need?	Democratic Services
April/May - Survey for data / informal meetings			
17 June 2025	Witness Session 1 Discovery Phase : Setting the scene	Where are we now?	Officers from core council services, e.g.

			Property, Libraries and Communications
23 July 2025	Witness Session 2 Discovery Phase : identifying spaces, uses and opportunities	Where are we now?	Officers from core council services, e.g. Property, Libraries and Communication
17 September 2025	Witness Session 3	Where do we want to be? What do residents, customers, businesses want?	External witnesses
Summer / Autumn 2025 - Site visits			
19 November 2025	Witness Session 4	Identifying potential uses and opportunities based on feedback	Officers from other service areas
6 January 2026	De-brief and emerging findings	To discuss key findings and identify potential recommendations	
12 February 2026	Approval of draft final report	Proposals – agree recommendations and final draft report to Cabinet	

Resource requirements

This review is not expected to require a financial assessment at the scoping stage. However, as the review progresses, Committees should seek to ensure any recommendations are feasible, cost-effective or indeed can save the Council money. Any early findings or recommendations by the Committee which may result in a call on Council budgets, or savings, should be discussed at the earliest opportunity by the Chairman, with the relevant Cabinet Member and Leader of the Council, along with service areas, to assess viability.

The aim of this review is to generate additional income.

Equalities impact

This review will seek to strengthen the Council's efforts ensuring equal access by residents to council services. No Equalities Impact Assessment will be required.

Scrutiny Benefit

This review demonstrates that independent overview and scrutiny in Hillingdon is:

1. Driving improvement and modernisation
2. Innovative with actionable outcomes
3. Supporting sound financial management
4. Aligned with local strategic and residents' priorities

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