



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Fire and Rescue Authority

FEES AND CHARGES

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Date: 18 December 2015

Purpose of Report:

To revise the scale of charges in relation to special service calls and the use of Service facilities (hire of rooms).

To revise the scope of special service calls where charges are made.

To extend the regime of room hire charges to all premises within the Service.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The services provided by the Fire Authority are set out in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (the Act) and the cost of these services is met from the Authority's funding from central Government and raising local taxes. A fire authority is given power under Section 19 of the Act to apply a charge for certain incident types.
- 1.2 The Act stipulates that in setting the amount of a charge, the income from charges must not exceed the cost to the Authority of taking the action for which the charges are imposed. The Authority has an existing set of fees and charges which have been in place for some time and are now outdated. Income raised from these fees and charges has been relatively low in recent years.
- 1.3 This report focuses on two areas of directly charging for discretionary services and seeks approval to update the fees and charges, and then to extend the range of services charged for in the future.

2. REPORT

SPECIAL SERVICES

- 2.1 The Fire and Rescue Services (England) Order 2004 (SI 2305/04) details the special services for which a charge can be made by English fire authorities. These are:
 - 1) Containment and clearance of debris, spillages, discharges or leaks from a vehicle, storage tank or pipe.
 - 2) Provision or removal of water.
 - 3) Effecting entry to, or egress from, premises.
 - 4) Rescuing persons from lift cabins.
 - 5) Rescuing animals.
 - 6) Removal of dangerous structures.
 - 7) Lifting of incapacitated persons.
- 2.2 The current schedule of fees and charges is set out in Appendix B, and allows for an hourly rate to be charged for personnel, vehicles and equipment used at any type of special services incident. The charges were last calculated in 2002. The same appendix shows the proposed new charges, which have been calculated with reference to the actual cost of providing services in the most recent full financial year (2014/15).

CHARGING FOR SPECIAL SERVICES IN THE FUTURE

- 2.3 Although charges for special services have been in place for many years, the Service does not routinely attempt to recoup the associated costs. It is custom and practice to not make a charge for most special services.

- 2.4 A survey of other fire and rescue services in the UK has revealed that more than half actively pursue cost recovery for defined incidents. Of the fifteen other English FRSs that make up Family Group 4: ten actively pursue cost recovery, three are considering their position and only two have ruled it out as a policy.
- 2.5 It is proposed that the Authority seeks to recover costs from the special services listed in Paragraph 2.1 within the following framework:
- 2.5.1 Charges for the containment and clearance of debris, spillages, discharges or leaks from a vehicle, storage tank or pipe would be made where the owner can be readily identified. With regards to vehicles following road traffic collisions, charging would only be considered after the conclusion of the emergency phase, and where the services provided go beyond that normally encountered from a collision – eg: clearance of a shed load or tanker discharge.
- 2.5.2 Charges for the provision or removal of water would relate to flooding in premises that has been caused by a lack of appropriate maintenance or mistakes on the part of the responsible persons. For example, these could include insurable risks such as burst pipes and leaking roofs. Charges would not be made for flooding caused by inclement weather or other natural disasters.
- 2.5.3 Charges for effecting entry to or from a premise would apply in circumstances that would be best facilitated by a lock smith. They would not apply when the incident involves a vulnerable person – eg: elderly person or child, or where there is the potential for a fire, or other emergency to occur.
- 2.5.4 Charges for the removal of a dangerous structure would only apply where there is no risk to life, property or public infrastructure.
- 2.5.5 No charge will be made for releasing persons from lift cabins.
- 2.5.6 No charge will be made for rescuing animals.
- 2.5.7 No charge will be made for lifting incapacitated persons.
- 2.6 If this proposal is approved, it is anticipated that the number of chargeable special service incidents attended by the Service may fall. This is because the introduction of charges will prompt some callers to seek an alternative, more appropriate solution to their problem.
- 2.7 Revised procedures will be required and employees trained to ensure appropriate implementation of the framework. In addition, there will be a targeted campaign to raise awareness within the business community of the potential charge for releasing persons from lift cabins.

- 2.8 It is proposed that the revised arrangements would be implemented with effect from 1 April 2016.

HIRE OF ROOMS

- 2.9 Facilities at the Authority, in terms of rooms at venues such as headquarters and fire stations, are available for use by members of the public and other organisations for various activities. Since 2010 charges have applied for the use of facilities at headquarters for organisations using rooms where there is no Service involvement in the meeting or where the priorities of the Service are not being worked towards through the activity taking place.
- 2.10 The existing schedule of fees and charges is set out in Appendix C, together with the proposed new charges, which have been updated to reflect the current cost of providing and servicing meeting rooms. Such costs include premises and insurance costs, wear and tear on furniture and the cost of staff arranging the booking of facilities and servicing the meetings.
- 2.11 Charges for the hire of meeting rooms have been applied at headquarters over the past five years, but not at other Service premises. This has led to an inconsistent approach in how the Service deals with community groups and businesses using facilities. For example, groups that have approached Headquarters and not wished to be charged for their booking have then gone on to hold their meetings at Highfields fire station free of charge.
- 2.12 The demands on the Service in this area have increased, particularly at Highfields fire station (300 bookings per annum) where there are good facilities available. As the use of rooms has increased, the work required from the administration team at that site has also escalated.
- 2.13 A review of the use of facilities by the public has been undertaken and the policy has been updated. It is proposed that charging for the hire of rooms is extended to all Service premises, and that a decision-making tool is used to assess whether a full charge, discounted rate or no charge should be applied to the person or organisation proposing to hire a room.
- 2.14 This proposal will help to ensure that the Service applies a cost recovery system which does not disadvantage the Service, does not disadvantage other non-profit making organisations, is aligned to the Service's key priorities and objectives, and adds social value to the communities served. If this proposal is approved, it will be applied to all new booking with effect from 1 January 2016.

FUTURE REVIEW OF CHARGES

- 2.15 It is proposed that a full review and recalculation of charges will take place every three years to maintain the principle that charges must only recover the cost of services provided. In the interim years, fees and charges will be updated annually for inflation utilising the Consumer Price Index. Updated fees and charges will be reported to the Fire Authority in the budget report each February.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Finances raised from charging for special services over the past three years have averaged £7k per annum.
- 3.2 In 2014, 195 special services incidents were attended which could have qualified for charges to be made. These incidents would have generated income of around £77k if charges had been made. In view of the likelihood of incident numbers falling, it is proposed that the current budget of £30k for special service income is maintained for 2016/17 and is reviewed annually.
- 3.3 Virtually no income has been raised from charging for the use of facilities at headquarters over the past three years. Around 300 room hire bookings are made each year at Highfields fire station alone. These bookings would have generated income of around £41k if charges had been made although room bookings at other fire stations are likely to be minimal in comparison due to the smaller number of rooms available. It is recognised that if the proposal to extend charging to all Service premises is approved it may well lead to a fall in the number of bookings made. In view of this it is proposed that a budget of £30k is set for use of facilities income in 2016/17 and is reviewed annually.
- 3.4 These financial implications will form part of the budget recommendation reported to the Fire Authority in February 2016, if the recommendations in this report are approved.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are human resources implications relating to the administration of charges for both special services and the use of facilities. Existing processes will need to be reviewed to ensure that they are suitable for managing the increased workload, and amended if required.
- 4.2 Control staff will decide whether or not an incident is chargeable on receipt of the call. Costs would be explained and the caller's approval sought before resources are mobilised. This process would be explained in a revised Control Procedure.

- 4.3 The officer in charge of the incident would be responsible for collecting information from the person liable for the charge. Some familiarisation training would be required but is unlikely to have a significant impact.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 An equality impact assessment has been undertaken in relation to special services charging and has found that there would be no negative impact as a result of this policy being introduced.
- 5.2 An equality impact assessment has been undertaken in relation to the use of facilities and the implications are that this has a neutral impact to both employees and the communities NFRS serves. However, the decision-making process has been discussed with the Equalities and Diversity Officer and it has been noted that there may be a positive impact on groups identified as at risk of being involved in an incident or those the Service aims to support through the equality and inclusion agenda. This initial equality impact assessment is attached at Appendix A.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

There are no crime and disorder implications arising directly from this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

It is a requirement for the full Fire Authority to make decisions on the application of charges to recover costs.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Service's Business Risk Manager has identified the requirement to inform the Service's insurers if costs are recovered for the use of facilities, to ensure that the public liability risk is insured. It is anticipated that any resultant increase in insurance premium would be a nominal amount.
- 8.2 Additional risk comes from the potential for negative publicity as a result of the extension of charging. This risk has been mitigated by not pursuing cost recovery for the more emotive incident types relating to animal rescue and incapacitated persons and by implementing concessionary, or no charges, for the hire of rooms by in certain circumstances. The risk will be further reduced with a targeted communications campaign to raise awareness of the changes amongst affected parties.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 9.1 Implement the proposed new charges for special services, as set out in Appendix B.
- 9.2 Implement the recovery of costs for attending special service incidents within the framework set out in Paragraph 2.5 of the report.
- 9.3 Implement the proposed new charges for the hire of rooms, as set out in Appendix C.
- 9.4 Implement charging for the use of facilities for all Service premises.
- 9.5 Approve the proposal to fully review fees and charges every three years, and to amend fees and charges to reflect inflationary changes in the interim years.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)

None

John Buckley
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

APPENDIX A

Initial Equality Impact Assessment.

This questionnaire will enable you to decide whether or not the new or proposed policy or service needs to go through a full Equality Impact Assessment.

[illegible]

3.	<p>Please explain the impact you have identified.</p> <p>The neutral impact on colleagues has been identified because, while some additional work is required in administering the policy in its updated form, it now acknowledges and reflects work that was already involved and recovering costs appropriately will allow the service to resource such activities appropriately.</p> <p>The neutral impact on the public reflects the fact that the Service has not been recovering costs from groups or individuals whose objectives are either commercial or not aligned to the risks the Service addresses through its work. By recovering costs from those it should be doing, the Service will be better able to target its resources at those who needs we address through the service we deliver or those who have objectives aligned to those of the Service. Community groups with a genuine need and who provide activities that help create safer communities as per the priorities of our IRMP will still have free access to facilities, where there is some but not full alignment we will implement a partial cost recovery system and where groups or individuals are using facilities for their own / separate priorities we will recover full costs and a fair, appropriate and consistent decision-making process will be implemented as part of the policy update if it is agreed.</p>				
3a)	<p>Please explain any steps you have taken or may take to address the impact you have identified.</p> <p>Please see the above: cost recovery will be applied fairly and consistently through centralising booking process and providing colleagues involved in the process with decision-making tools, models and training.</p>				
4.	<p>Identify the individuals and organisations that are likely to have an interest in, or be affected by the policy, function, theme or service. <i>This should identify the persons/organisations that may need to be consulted about the policy or service and its impact.</i></p> <p>Users of rooms at NFRS locations – community groups, businesses and partner organisations. Other departments responsible for elements of maintaining facilities such as estates, ICT and finance.</p>				
5.	<p>Has consultation (with the public, managers, employees, TUs etc) on the policy, function, theme or service been undertaken?</p>	<p>Yes</p>		<p>No</p>	<p>X</p>

5a.	<p>Please provide details for your answer including information regarding when consultation will take place if you have ticked yes.</p> <p>Advice to users of NFRS facilities have been advised on booking space at our main sites for the six months to a year that it is the intention to begin recovering costs. Consultation with the internal stakeholders described above has taken place formally at management groups such as SMF and informally during the process of updating the policy and creating the cost recovery structure.</p>			
6.	Has the Equality and Diversity Officer been contacted?	Yes	X	No
6a.	<p>If Yes please outline below the outcomes/concerns highlighted in the discussion.</p> <p>The E&D Officer advised that the impact is likely to be neutral across the board based on the details presented to him in the paper and the policy update. However, it is anticipated that as the decision-making model is designed to ensure groups in the IRMP are given discounted or free use of NFRS rooms then there may be some positive affects for groups identified as being at increased risk of being involved in an incident or as being a priority for NFRS to work with through the equality and inclusivity strand of the Service plan.</p>			
<p>If No please ensure that the Equality and Diversity Officer is contacted.</p>				
<p>If Yes, Please record here the date the Equality and Diversity Officer was contacted regarding this initial equality impact assessment.</p>				
<p>Date: 23 March 2015</p>				

SPECIAL SERVICES – SCALE OF CHARGES

	Existing Charges	Proposed New Charges
Personnel: per hour, or part of an hour:		
Full Crew	-	£268.80
Station Manager and above	£46.82	£60.00
Watch Manager	£31.12	£49.20
Crew Manager	£30.89	£46.80
Firefighter	£27.38	£44.40
Appliances and Vehicles: per hour, or part of an hour:	-	£39.60
Above 6 tonne operating cost	£66.26	-
Above 6 tonne standby cost	£60.62	-
Below 6 tonne	£32.42	-
Portable Pumps: per hour, or part of an hour:		
Above 1,000 lpm	£62.04	-
Below 1,000 lpm	£35.24	-
Loan Salvage Sheet:		
Charge for fitting	£210.47	£268.80
Charge for removing	£210.47	£268.80
Daily charge	£14.42	-
Charge for salvage sheet	-	£86.39
Copy of a Fire Report	£34.98	£66.00

APPENDIX C

USE OF FACILITIES – SCALE OF CHARGES

	Existing Charges	Proposed New Charges
Hire of Meeting Room: per day or part of a day		
Standard Charge	£204.00	
Charge if setting up required out of normal hours	£228.00	
Hire of Meeting Room		
Full day		£225.60
Half day		£116.40