

Outline of the Assessment Procedure for 'Community Benefit rent reduction'.

The Assessment process allows both the Council and voluntary or community sector organisation, to properly investigate whether the organisation applying for the 'Community Benefit Rent Reduction' meets the eligibility criteria, standards, is legally compliant, can manage the asset well, will contribute to local wellbeing and the Council's strategic priorities and is financially sustainable. The process will be supportive, flexible and proportionate to the scale of the proposed reduction.

Step 1 – Offer of lease (as per the agreed council process for the letting of council assets)

- Community Group secures the offer from Tower Hamlets Council of a 3 to 5 year lease at Market Rent for D1 usage.

Step 2 – Expression of Interest for 'Community Benefit Rent Reduction'

- Expression of Interest for a 'Community Benefit Rent Reduction' submitted by the community group.
- On receipt of the Initial Expression of Interest a council link officer (from the Third Sector Team) working with the CVS, will be nominated as the contact person for throughout the process who will, at this stage review the EOI application and any documentation received. If this application and documentation appears to provide a *prima facie* case for offering a 'Community Benefit Rent Reduction' they will then arrange to meet with the organisation and explore their application more fully. If the organisation's Expression of Interest does not meet the criteria to be eligible to apply for the Community Benefit rent reduction the link officer will write to the organisation setting out the reasons that their EOI was not approved. The organisation will have the opportunity to ask for the decision to be reviewed by the Council and the Appeals Panel will review the decision.
- For those organisations that are considered eligible to apply for the Community Benefit Rent Reduction, the meeting arranged by the link officer will be to discuss the full requirements of the standards the organisation will need to meet so they are clear from the outset of what is involved; the link officer will note and discuss any particular challenges the group might face in meeting the standards and will confirm the support available from THCVS or another relevant body as appropriate; they will note from the organisation any information that the council will need to supply to enable them to complete the required work such as figures for utility usage or other costs relevant to the business plan;
- If they feel the application does not merit progressing the link officer will give full feedback to the group. This provides learning not just to the group but also for other groups who are thinking of applying. Accessibility, transparency and accountability throughout the process will be key.
- Following the meeting with the applicant the appointed link officer will make a report to the Assessment Panel. This will summarise the information gathered to date, identify any potential benefits, needs or concerns, and identify the specific support needs of the applicant going forward if the application is to be progressed positively. A copy of this report will be provided to the organisation and an opportunity offered for them to correct any factual inaccuracies before submission to the Assessment Panel.

- If the EOI is rejected by the Assessment Panel, reasons for the decision will be provided and the community group will have a right of appeal via written representations.

Step 3 – Meeting the Standards for ‘Community Benefit Rent Reduction’

- If the EOI is accepted then the next stage is for the organisation to demonstrate that they meet the eligibility criteria set out in the policy for being offered a ‘Community Benefit Rent Reduction’:
 - **Testing the skills, knowledge and capacity**
 - **Testing the business case**
 - **Testing the social, economic, and environmental value**

Throughout this stage of the assessment process the council link officer will remain in regular contact with the organisation, encouraging and motivating the group, providing guidance on how to meet the criteria, signposting to help and support as required, and helping the group to access information they may need from the council.

- To **Test the skills, knowledge and capacity** the [preVISIBLE](#) tool will be used. *preVISIBLE* is a nationally available legal compliance tool developed originally by Community Matters and now hosted by [Advising Communities](#). Once the organisation has completed the tool they will need to request and pay for **a review and report to be conducted by the independent national VISIBLE assessors**. The final report will provide not just a clear assessment of the legal compliance of the group but supportive advice and guidance on how to meet the requirements of the law and best practice where those have not been met.
- A timetable will be agreed with the organisation to provide sufficient time to deal with any issues raised by the *preVISIBLE* report before it is submitted to the Assessment Panel.
- To **Test the business case** a completed business plan will need to be provided by the group. A standard format will be required from all groups though some flexibility will be exercised where a group already has a well developed business plan in an alternative format so long as it can be shown that it essentially covers all aspects of the standard format. The business plan should be proportionate in scope and detail to the size and scope of the organisation’s operations.
- To **Test the social, economic, and environmental value** whilst keeping the assessment process proportionate to the size and scope of the organisation a two-tier process will be used. For organisations where the potential value of the ‘Community Benefit Rent Reduction’ they are applying for is equal to or less than £20K it is recommended that a simple table linking charitable/social objects of the group to their activities and in turn linking these activities to the council’s strategic priorities be used.

For groups where the potential value of the ‘Community Benefit Rent Reduction’ they are applying for is greater than £20K the independent [Your Value](#) tool will be used. This tool was developed by Community Matters to help community groups demonstrate their social, economic, and environmental value. It is now also hosted by Advising Communities and cost £100 including VAT to set up an account for 1 year.

Step 4 – Assessment and decision to award a ‘Community Benefit Rent Reduction’

- Once the community group have provided a *pre*VISIBLE report (with a commentary on work done to meet any issues raised in the report), a business plan, and either the Outcomes table or a Your Value report, the council link officer will produce a report and recommendation for the Assessment Panel with regards offering a ‘Community Benefit Rent Reduction’ with the supporting documentation.
- The Assessment Panel meets and reviews the report and recommendation of the council link officer.
- At this stage the Assessment panel may request further information or work before confirming the ‘Community Benefit Rent Reduction’. In this case full feedback will be provided and clear guidance and what further is required to meet the criteria will be.
- If the Assessment Panel makes a final decision not to award the ‘Community Benefit Rent Reduction’ full reasons will be provided to the organisation. The organisation will have the right of appeal. The Appeals panel will consider and review the decision of the Assessment panel and any further information provided by the organisation and will make a final decision on the award of the Community Benefit Rent Reduction. The organisation will be notified of the Appeals panel’s decision in writing.
- The recommendations of the Assessment Panel (and where relevant the Appeals panel) will be presented to the Grants Decision Meeting setting out the reasons and evidence for the decision.

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