



Sturminster Newton Town Council

Facilities Hire Fees and Charges Benchmarking Report

1. Purpose and scope

The purpose of this report is to assess whether Sturminster Newton Town Council's recreation-ground, event-hire and room-hire fees should be increased for 2026/27. It compares SNTC's 2025/26 charges with average prices calculated from usable published Dorset comparators. Individual councils are not identified in the table because facilities, session lengths and charging structures vary.

2. Comparison with Dorset benchmark averages

Charge	Sturminster Newton 2025/26	Dorset benchmark average	Usable published comparators	Position
Football/cricket pitch	£42 local / £47 non-local per game	£104 per adult game or equivalent booking	2	Well below the limited published benchmark
Croquet pitch	£8 per game per pitch	No reliable average available	No close published comparators	Use local cost and affordability evidence
Local or charitable outdoor event	£65 per day	£45 per day or comparable session	2	Above the limited benchmark; categories vary considerably
Other / commercial outdoor event	£100 per day	£157 per day or comparable session	2	Below the limited benchmark
Council Chamber / comparable room: standard	£35 per session	£89 per four-hour session	7	Substantially below the benchmark average
Local non-profit / community room rate	£5 per session	£40 per four-hour session	6	Substantially below the benchmark average
Rixon Recreation Ground	£40 per day	No reliable average available	No close published comparators	Use cost and inflation evidence instead

Method: The benchmark averages use only published Dorset prices that could be converted to a broadly comparable basis. Hourly room rates were converted to a four-hour session. Figures were rounded to the nearest pound. The sample is not every town in Dorset: many councils do not provide the facility, manage it through another body, use annual leases, price by quotation or do not publish a current tariff.

Interpretation: The room-hire comparison is the most reliable because it uses six or seven published prices. The pitch and outdoor-event averages use only two comparators each and should therefore be treated as indicative rather than as a Dorset-wide market price.

3. Overall assessment

The comparison supports an increase in SNTC's Council Chamber charges. The £35 standard fee is substantially below the calculated benchmark of about £89 for a four-hour session, while the £5 community rate is substantially below the calculated community benchmark of about £40.

The evidence for recreation-ground and outdoor-event charges is weaker. The available pitch benchmark is much higher than SNTC's fees, but it is based on only two published comparators. The local-event result is affected by different definitions and facilities. Moderate increases remain reasonable, but should be supported by SNTC's own maintenance, utilities and administration costs rather than the averages alone.

4. Recommendations

- **Increase the Council Chamber standard rate from £35 to £40/50 per session.** This remains comfortably below the calculated Dorset benchmark of about £89.
- **Increase the local non-profit Sturminster Newton community rate from £5 to £10 per session.** This remains highly subsidised and well below the calculated community benchmark of about £40. Chamber hire remains free of charge for the Allotments Association and the Heritage Trust who manage Council assets.
- **Increase the local football/cricket fee from £42 to £45 per game and the non-local fee from £47 to £50/55 per game.** The published benchmark is higher, but the limited sample supports a cautious rather than a large increase.
- **Increase the croquet pitch charge from £8 to £10 per game per pitch.** This is a modest cash increase and remains an affordable charge for use of the facility. It is still heavily subsidised considering the amount of maintenance and line marking paint.
- **Increase the local and charitable event fee from £65 to £75 per day and the other-event fee from £100 to £115 per day.** These moderate changes recognise the weak comparability of published outdoor-event charges.
- **Retain the refundable damage deposit at £200.** Review it against the Council's own damage and recovery experience because no reliable Dorset average was available.
- **Charge utilities at £25 per day where applicable.** Apply this separately when a booking uses chargeable utilities, with the booking terms making clear when the charge is due.
- **Consider an increase for Rixon Recreation Ground from £40 to £45 per day.** No close published comparator was available. It is seldom hired.
- **Consider whether the Youth Club at Unit 2 should be made available for hire when it is not being used for the Youth Club.** Before introducing hire, confirm availability, terms of hire and charges.