

3 ASSESSMENT PROCESS

This section looks at the process of assessing applications for a lease and the criteria by which Council officers will make decisions. Leases are evaluated as either new or fresh leases.

It will be important that enough information is available to make robust decisions. The provision of this information is the ultimate responsibility of the applicant but the process should occur in partnership.

3.1 ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

By asking a number of questions Council officers will be able to develop a picture of how well the application supports Council's objectives for strengthening communities. Appendix One provides further detailed information on interpreting the assessment criteria.

The following criteria will be used to assess the activity or activities that the lease application is for.

Strategic Fit

Criteria 1: Are the group or organisation's activities consistent with the Council's strategic direction?

Activity sustainability

Criteria 2: Will the group be sustainable in terms of membership or users of the service and its financial position for the period of the lease?

Optimal use of Resources

Criteria 3: At what level is it intended that the resource (land and/or buildings) will be used?

Environmental Impact

Criteria 4: Does the activity have the potential to adversely effect open space values or other legitimate activities?

Demonstrated Need and Support from the Community

Criteria 5: Is there demonstrated support and need within the community for the activity?

Need for a Lease

Criteria 6: Are other options available instead of a lease?

The outcome of this assessment process is a decision whether or not to recommend that a lease is supported.

3.2 ASSESSMENT OF FRESH LEASES

Fresh leases are those where the current lessee is seeking to renew the existing lease. The Council recognises that most groups have made investments in assets and this is a key consideration in the evaluation of a fresh lease. The applications for lease renewal will involve the applicant providing such information to the Council as is necessary for officers to be satisfied that they can knowledgeably assess the application. This will include information on financial matters, historical patterns of use and future prospects.

The assessment process will be used to check that the:

- lease will continue to be consistent with Council’s objectives (**only assessment criteria 1 and 2 apply**),
- terms and conditions of the previous lease were met consistently.

Unless there is evidence that the above are not met to a significant extent a fresh lease will be available to the lessee. If the activity that the lease was originally for has changed significantly the Council may require an application for a new lease.

Officers will document any decisions and will communicate these to the applicant. Communication prior to and during the process of assessment, as well as past information sharing on the group’s activities (such as annual returns), will assist this process.

3.3 ASSESSMENT OF NEW LEASES

New leases apply in instances where either:

- The land and/or buildings have not previously been leased; or
- There has been an existing lease, but the lessee has not elected to renew it and it is available to be leased to another group.

New leases will be looked at more critically than fresh leases, as they are an opportunity to use the lease resource in a different way. **All the assessment criteria apply for new leases.**

New leases will have a greater degree of stringency and critical appraisal (particularly those anticipating constructing new buildings where Criteria 4 and 6 will be important). The qualitative assessment will be more difficult and officers will need to take a careful approach to the assessment.

Consideration of the criteria will be in terms of future potential rather than past performance. For example:

- Criteria One becomes “What is the likely contribution that the stated aims of the applicant will make to delivering Council’s community or recreation objectives?”

- Criteria Two becomes “How likely is it that the group will be sustainable in terms of membership or users of the service and its financial position for the next X years?”

Criteria Four (Environmental Impact) may require consultation with the community to establish whether a lease is appropriate or whether there may be particular concerns associated with neighbouring or potentially conflicting uses.

The experience of the performance of similar groups will assist in assessing new leases. If the applicant/activity was previously in operation elsewhere and is changing sites or amalgamating with another group, then the information on past performance will be useful for the assessment.

Officers will need to satisfy themselves that the information provided is robust and that any predictions are as accurate as is relevant to the situation.

The assessment will be undertaken and officers will then make a recommendation as to whether a lease should be granted and what terms and conditions may be relevant. The uncertainty associated with a new group’s performance may be reflected in lease tenure. For example, it may be felt that a five-year trial period may be useful².

Officers will document any decisions that have been reached by the Council and will communicate these to the applicant. Communication prior to and during the process of assessment will assist this process.

Where an established building has become vacant the lease will be advertised to the community as being available.

² Potential capital investment will also be taken into account in such a situation.