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|  | Wilton Town CouncilTennis Courts: Access System |
| Report of the Town Clerk |
| **Legal context**Wilton Town Council has authority to consider this matter under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 s 19.**The purpose of this report**To consider the introduction of an electronic access system for the Council’s tennis courts at Minster Street**Report Author:** Town Clerk2nd July 2019 |
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**Introduction**

1. The Amenities and Planning Committee (now Environment and Amenities Committee) instructed the Clerk to seek quotations for the provision of an electronic access system for the tennis courts at Minster Street. The Committee suggested that the system should be capable of
2. Providing secure gate access
3. Facilitating online court bookings
4. Facilitating the introduction of charges
5. Managing users and use of the courts
6. In accordance with these instructions the Clerk has sought advice from a wide range of potential suppliers. Each system was assessed against the Council’s criteria (1 above).
7. There are many companies that provide club management software, but relatively few that offer online court bookings with integrated gate access systems for smaller scale operations.
8. The Clerk has sought expressions of interest from several companies including Clubspark, Park Tennis and Clubnet. Of the companies evaluated, Clubnet offer the most suitable solution and were the only company to submit a detailed quotation that meets the Council’s requirements.

**The Clubnet System**

1. Clubnet offer a modular solution that provides integrated gate access, online court booking, club administration and payments modules. Because of the location of the courts this system requires a 4G connection to the mobile network.
2. Users of the system obtain a membership card and that provides access to the web interface where they can book courts, make payments and interact with other court users. Payments can be made annually, monthly or by ‘pay-as-you-go’ top ups (like the TFL Oyster Card). Members can only book courts if they have a credit balance on their membership card (unless courts are free).
3. The system allows the Council to manage court time. For example, it can close the courts for repairs and maintenance or during inclement weather. It can also allocate court time for activities such as junior coaching.
4. Having assessed the system the Clerk feels that the Clubnet system offers the most comprehensive solution based on the Council’s requirements.
5. The Clerk will provide a demonstration of the system at the meeting.

**Costs**

1. The Council has already installed an access ramp and electricity supply in readiness for installation of the access system. These costs were met in part by Section 106 (R2) funding (final figures awaited due to revised quotation).
2. The quotation provided by Clubnet is summarised below:
3. Hardware and set up fees £1,633
4. Annual fees £887
5. In addition, the Council will need to pay for installation, connection to the power supply, purchase an EE 4G Sim Card and any ancillary works. Based on similar installations elsewhere, these costs are estimated at £1,250.
6. Therefore, the total ‘up front’ cost is around £4,500 with annual costs of around £900 per annum (depending on the modules purchased) The Council has budget provision of £2,500 earmarked for the system, so this leaves a shortfall of £2,000 which could be met from current underspends in the recreation grounds maintenance budget and from income from fees and charges.

**Fees and charges**

1. The Council has charged for use of the courts in the past and, when managed by Wilton Tennis Club, charges applied. Charges were discontinued when the courts were refurbished in 2017/18.
2. Introducing fees and charges will help the Council recoup the access system costs, recover annual running costs and make a contribution to the ongoing maintenance of the courts. However, charges may discourage some users, particularly those on lower incomes.
3. It is difficult to predict income, and this will of course depend on the charges set. However, based on 10 bookings per week at £4 per hour with tiered membership fees, the Council might expect to generate over £2,000 pa.
4. Comparisons for court hire across the UK undertaken by ECL International in 2017 show that, on average, court fees span the range of £9 per hour in the north to £12 per hour in London. However, charges vary hugely, with some parish councils providing free tennis.
5. The online booking system operates most effectively with a single court fee, and tiered membership structure. For example, working adults in full time employment would pay a higher membership charge than young people under 18 or students. In this way, the Council can make the courts more accessible for those on lower incomes.
6. Should the Council wish to introduce charges, it is suggested that these be set below the UK average to encourage use and offer accessible leisure opportunities for all. A flat court fee of £4 per hour is suggested.
7. To use the system, members must have an access card or key fob and this can be offered with an annual Wilton Community Tennis Club membership fee. The following tariff is suggested:

Adults £40
Seniors (65+) £30

Concessions £15

1. Concessions may apply to juniors under the age of 18, students in full time education, the unemployed and possibly individuals referred from a GP or other health and care provider as part of a social prescription.

**Future management**

1. The introduction of a court access and booking system, with its associated user database will generate data about the use of the courts. This will enable the Council to manage the facility more proactively in the future. For example, if there are low usage periods, the Council could make these free for users.
2. The system also facilitates the creation of a ‘community club’ approach. Members can be involved in the running of the courts, providing feedback to the Council. This will give users a feeling of ownership and responsibility for the courts.
3. Because of the simplicity of the Clubnet system and the self-service nature of payments, administration can be managed in-house by the Clerk and Assistant Clerk.

**Recommendation**

1. It is recommended that the Council agrees to accept the quotation from Clubnet and the fees and charges outlined in paras 19 and 20 above.