

Parties receive priority

Community groups to step aside for private functions in council venue overhaul



The Hills Music Academy senior band will be affected by the changes over council venue usage.

Angela Ranke

COMMUNITY groups using council-owned buildings on Friday and Saturday nights will be asked to leave the venues to make way for private functions.

As part of its proposed new fees and charges, the Hills Shire Council has set aside eight venues including Harvey Lowe Pavilion and Castle Grand Pioneer Room as function rooms on Friday and Saturday nights.

Council also plans to introduce increased fees for the venues, ranging from \$650 to \$2200 for a 4pm to midnight timeslot on those nights.

A council spokesman said the venues have been designated for functions such as birthday parties, fundraisers and weddings to meet the community demand for this type of space.

"From Sunday to Thursday nights they are still able to be used for community hire use," the spokesman said. "This ensures a certain number of venues are available for function purposes from either 3pm or 4pm until midnight (depending on the

venue) on Friday and Saturday nights.

"To enable this to happen, council may need to relocate a number of non-function bookings – which in many cases are just a few hours – that are currently restricting venues being available for full-evening functions by families and residents."

Hills Music Academy director Garry Clark said the changes meant HMA's rent of Thompson Hall, in Balcombe Heights Estate, on Friday night would rise from \$95 per week to \$850 per week.

"This represents a yearly increase in rent from \$3,200 to \$34,000," he said.

"Council is keen to find a solution but they are still booting us out of the venue after 35 years.

"In our case they've asked us to move out because they want to make money on groups using the venue for parties."

The council spokesman said the academy would be able to use Thompson Hall on Friday night for the rest of the year and can relocate to nearby Stamford Hall next

Affected venues



- » Castle Grand Pioneer Room 1 and 2
- » Castle Grand Rebellion Room 1 and 2
- » Harvey Lowe Pavilion
- » Thompson Hall (Balcombe Heights)
- » Box Hill Progress Hall
- » Dural Memorial Hall (excluding theatre block out times)
- » Rouse Hill Community Centre (Room 1 and 2)
- » Glenhaven Community Centre
- » Vinegar Hill Community Centre
- » West Pennant Hills Community Centre
- » Wrights Road Community Centre

year. Alternatively, it could change its rehearsal time.

But Mr Clark said Stamford Hall was too small and changing rehearsal nights would result in the academy losing up to 70 per cent of its members. The exhibition period to comment on council's proposed new fees and charges closed on Friday.