

NEWS

Band's future in doubt

BY ANDREW BROWN

A COUNCIL plan to increase the hiring fees of community halls is threatening the future of a musical institution in The Hills.

The Hills Music Academy could be forced out of their rehearsal venue at Thompson Hall in Baulkham Hills, with hiring fees increasing at The Hills Council-owned hall by 800 per cent.

The concert band's musical director Garry Clark said the price hike would force the organisation to lose up to 70 per cent of its members.

"It's a huge increase, members at the moment only pay about \$40 per quarter," he told the *Courier*.

"Nobody is happy about this," he said.

The fee increase applies to council-owned halls on Friday and Saturday nights, with The Hills Music Academy using Thompson Hall on a Friday night.

While it has been proposed the concert band changes the day of their rehearsals to a Thursday, Mr Clark said that would result in the organisation losing a



LOSING MEMBERS: (From left) Joshua Clark, Garry Clark and Kate White at Thompson Hall, where hiring fees will rise up to 800 per cent. Mr Clark said the band could lose 70 per cent of its members. **Picture:** Isabella Lettini

majority of its members.

"There isn't another day that would work for everyone," he said.

"There is no good night. If it was held on a Thursday, we would lose 60 to 70 per cent of our 110 members."

It has also been suggested the band move to nearby Stamford Hall, which is not subject to the fee increase.

However, the band's musical director said the hall is far from suitable to be used as a rehearsal space.

"It's a small hall with a wooden floor and brick walls and no acoustic treatment," Mr Clark said.

"It sounds as if you're playing in a bathroom."

The Hills Music Academy has been using Thompson

Hall as a rehearsal venue since the concert band was formed in 1980.

The current hiring fees for the venue will remain in place until January 2017, when the fees will increase.

Negotiations are under way between the concert band and The Hills Council.

Deputy mayor Yvonne Keane said she hopes a

compromise between both parties can be reached.

"The value Hills Music Academy brings to the community can't be quantified," she said.

"There are meetings happening between myself and the general manager [of The Hills Council]," Mr Clark said.

"After that, we will see what happens."