

YOUTH CLUB FACES 'CRISIS'

Doubling of hall rent may force a shutdown

FOUNDER CALLS FOR COUNCIL ACTION

TENTERDEN'S flourishing six-month-old youth club which meets once a week in the Drill Hall is likely to face a crippling rent rise from £2 5s. a week to £5 a week. The rise could mean the winding up of the club and its 120 members once more being at a loose end.

The landlords, The Territorial Authority at Maidstone, hinted at the rent rise to two founders of the club—Dr. Hugh Gompertz and Mr. Gordon Miller—at a recent meeting. Since then a confirmatory letter has

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Rent increase: Youth club protest

TENTERDEN Youth Club, which was inaugurated last October, has become so successful that it is now likely to be "penalised by an outrageously high-handed method of restriction on the use of what, when all is said and done, is a hall that was built and maintained by public funds."

The quoted part of that sentence is an extract from a letter sent to the Town Clerk of Tenterden by Dr. Hugh Gompertz on behalf of the club and the Adult Advisory Committee.

The hall referred to is the Drill Hall, where the club meets once a week.

In his letter, Dr. Gompertz says that the club pays a rent of £2 plus 5s. for the caretaker when they meet there on one night each week.

Now they have been informed that the Territorial authorities intends increasing the rent to £5 for one night and £7 for two nights each week. Should the club wish to hire the hall for an extra night for the purpose of holding a dance to raise funds the cost would be between £10 and £15.

The reason given for the increase is that more persons are using the hall than was anticipated and that it was being used for music and dancing.

Dr. Gompertz says: "The replies to these points are that any number the authority might have anticipated using the hall was purely

their own conjecture as we had at no time suggested what our membership might be—how could we? We had no idea either.

"With regard to the use for music and dancing, they were aware that the hall was booked for a youth club and one wonders what activities they thought we would indulge in.

"I would at this juncture point out that all we have to attract the members are two tennis tables, two darts boards and a record player. Yet we maintain an average weekly attendance of 70 to 80 members. Does this not clearly demonstrate the demand among our young people for a club of this type? The club just pays its way now.

"We would like to open more than one night a week but we cannot afford to do so and we shall not be able to open even one night a week on the increased rent. Should this club be doomed to fail and close, not because of lack of members or lack of enthusiasm, not from lack of dedicated adults and helpers to help run and encourage the club, not from lack of public support, but purely because the rent for a virtually unused hall is raised to an absurdly high figure?

"I firmly believe that it would be a catastrophe of some magnitude if the club were forced to close."

At the council General Purposes Committee meeting on Monday it was revealed that the rateable value of the hall was £26. The council decided to send a letter to the Territorial authority asking them to review the position with regard to the rent.

been received.

This says that the rent remains the same until the end of the contractual agreement in September; that the club would be allowed to use the cellars for stage; and that the rent review would be likely to increase the cost of a weekly meeting to £5, and to £7 a week for two nights a week.

And if the club wants to hold a members' dance on an extra night the cost will be between £10 and £15.

Dr. Gompertz wrote for advice and action to the borough council and on Monday the general purposes committee decided to ask the Kent Territorial and Auxiliary Forces Association for more favourable terms for the club, which, it says, is of value to the youth and the town as a whole.

The matter will be referred to Mr. William Deedes, the Ashford M.P., if no satisfaction is obtained.

Uphill battle

Dr. Gompertz said in his letter that the club organisers felt it was fighting an uphill battle against officialdom but that he did not feel the battle was yet lost.

During the six months the club had been running there had been a noticeable improvement in the behaviour of some of the less desirable of the members.

He also pointed out the limited amenities at the Drill Hall: washing and lavatory facilities were little short of primitive, there was only one exit cum entrance and the state of decoration and electrical wiring left much to be desired.

The club attracted 70 to 80 regular members despite having only two table tennis tables, two dart boards and a record-player.

Dr. Gompertz said this demonstrated the demand among young people for this type of club.

"Why should they be penalised by such an outrageously high-handed method of restriction on the use of what, when all is said and done, is a hall which was built and is maintained by public funds?

"It would be a catastrophe of some magnitude if the club was forced to close."