

Fees and Charges 2024/25

Report of the Finance and Resources Portfolio Holder

Recommended:

1. That the fees and charges for 2024/25, as set out in the annexes to the report, be approved.
2. That Heads of Service be authorised to increase relevant fees and charges in line with statutory levels should they change following this report.

SUMMARY:

- Fees and charges are set annually for the forthcoming financial year and are presented for approval.
- Significant increases and changes from 2023/24 are explained in the body of the report.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Fees and charges are reported annually to Councillors as part of the budget process. This report provides information on proposed fees and charges for 2024/25.
- 1.2 By reporting fees and charges separately, as an individual component of the budget process, Councillors can provide direction on the level of charges across the Council.
- 1.3 Proposed increases to existing charges and charges for new services are attached in the annexes to this report for approval.
- 1.4 The main inflation index is the Consumer Prices' Index. This is currently (October 2023) running at 4.6%. This is the lowest it has been since October 2021. In preparing the fees and charges, services have been advised to take into account increases in staffing and other costs with an inflationary guide of 5% - 6%.
- 1.5 At its meeting in July 2023, the Budget Panel indicated that as far as possible, increases in charges within the control of the Council should be minimised unless increases in associated costs justified it.

2 Background

- 2.1 Heads of Service were asked to provide details of the fees and charges they wish to levy in 2024/25 for the services they provide.

2.2 The attached Annexes show, in Budget Book format, the level of charges in 2023/24, the proposed charges for 2024/25 and the percentage change between the two.

3 Consultations/Communications

3.1 Heads of Service and managers have been asked to provide details of the charges they wish to make in 2024/25.

4 Fees and Charges – changes by Service

4.1 The following paragraphs give explanations of any charges that are recommended to be increased by more than inflation or where the basis for charging for an item has changed.

4.2 Community and Leisure (Annex 1)

For sporting activities, there was an HMRC decision earlier this year that VAT was no longer chargeable on sports pitches and facilities. This reduction (16.67%) has been passed on to users during 2023/24 and the comparative rates shown in Annex 1 reflect this saving, where applicable. The recommendation for 2024/25 is to increase charges by approximately 6%. This will still leave the Council's charges lower than neighbouring venues.

In addition:

- Charge the same rate for weekdays and weekends as the cost of providing the facilities does not differ.
- All under 18 charges to state 'charged at 50% of the full fee'.
- Charges for floodlights at each site are recommended to be increased by above inflationary amounts to reflect utility costs.
- At Charlton Sports Centre, a new charge for the BMX floodlights is to be introduced at £20 per hour, with a reduction of £7 per hour for Andover BMX Club who contributed towards the capital cost of the floodlights.
- At Ganger Farm, charges for 9v9 Hockey and Mini football are to be deleted as these are not used, and kitchen and bar hire will not be available when the community café opens later this year.

At the Lights, the majority of charges are to be frozen. The exception is:

- An increase of £10 for the use of the grand piano due to the increase in costs of a piano tuner.
- A new Performing Rights Society (PRS) fee is recommended to be introduced to recoup the cost of PRS charges levied on the Lights.

In Cemeteries, the charge for the Transfer of Exclusive Right of Burial to a new owner is to be increased by 15.38% (£6) to cover the cost in the increased amount of work involved in the arrangement of a transfer.

4.3 Corporate (Annex 2)

The charges shown in the Corporate section remain unchanged from 2023/24.

4.4 Environmental Service (Annex 3)

The majority of charges are to be increased by approximately 5% - 7% to reflect the increased cost of staff and fuel.

Bulky waste charges are to be increased by 8.2% - 8.82% due to the low volume and level of resource required.

Charges for shopping trolley returns and MoT Tests remain frozen.

4.5 Finance and Revenues Service (Annex 4)

Summons costs have increased by 4.35% whilst Liability Order costs have reduced by 8.7%. This reflects an updated forecast of the estimated costs to the Council of taking recovery action against unpaid Council Tax, business rates and BID levy.

4.6 Housing and Environmental Health Service (Annex 5)

The majority of licence charges have been increased by 5% - 6% to reflect the increase in staff costs. Street Trading Consents and Caravan Site Licences have been frozen.

A new Eco Flex Declaration charge of £50 has been introduced. This is an energy efficiency scheme where customers can qualify for energy efficiency measures through their energy supplier, and the supplier/installer has to apply to the Council for a declaration that the customer meets the relevant criteria. The fee would be payable by the installer, not the customer.

Domestic pest control charges have been reviewed and charges for flea treatments are recommended to increase by 6% to reflect increases in staffing costs. Higher increases are recommended for wasps / native hornets, rats and mice, and bed bugs whilst still leaving the Council's charges at the lower end of the market:

- Wasp treatment failure rates are set to increase substantially due to the withdrawal of the most effective insecticides, which is likely to result in a second visit to ensure complete destruction of the nest. It is therefore recommended that the cost increases by 19.38% to £69 with additional nests increasing by 76.76% to £32.70 in order to ensure that costs are fully recovered.
- Treatments for rats and mice are on average taking longer and this is set to increase as further effective rodenticides are restricted or withdrawn and replaced by ones that require more visits to successfully treat. The recommendation is to increase the maximum number of visits to 4 (currently 3) and increase charges by 20% to £98.20 to reflect the additional resources required.

- Treatments for bed bugs are extremely resource intensive, and whilst cases are currently low, the current epidemic in France may lead to an increase in cases here. The recommendation is to increase charges by 15% with a 75% discount (currently 50%) to households who are exempt from Council Tax or in receipt of Council Tax Support.

Commercial pest control charges are recommended to increase by 6% - 75% in order to ensure that costs are covered.

4.7 Legal and Democratic Service (Annex 6)

The majority of fees in this service are statutorily set and remain the same as for 2023/24.

Some land charges fees have been increased primarily to allow for an increase in fees paid to Hampshire County Council. The LLC1 fee has been reduced to £15 ready for the transition of this element to the Land Registry sometime in 2024/25.

Scrap metal dealer licenses are proposed to increase by 7.41% to 13.64% in order to ensure that costs are fully recovered.

The Driver ID validation service has been renamed as Overseas criminal records check, with the price available on application due to the range of prices depending on each individual application.

4.8 Planning and Building Service (Annex 7)

Planning pre-application enquiry fees have been frozen at 2023/24 levels.

Planning application fees are statutorily set and have increased by 35% for major applications and 25% for all other applications from 6th December 2023.

Building control fees are increased by 2% - 3%. A new set of miscellaneous charges is to be introduced to recover costs that are not currently charged within building control, such as research, retrieval and copy/examination charges, and cancellation or withdrawal of application.

4.9 Property and Asset Management Service (Annex 8)

Car parking charges remain frozen and continue to be charged at levels last increased in 2020/21.

Room booking / hall hire charges have been reviewed as the current structure is very complicated with 3 different hire fees (private, commercial and concessionary) and within these 5 different rates to select from (daily, morning, afternoon, evening and hourly). A much simpler approach is recommended:

- Combine the commercial option with the private option
- Rename concessionary community (for community groups / registered charities)

- Remove the separate charge for Audio and Visual Equipment
- Introduce a one-off hourly rate for weekdays or weekends.

To ensure the least impact on community groups, charges have been rounded up to the nearest pound. For example, an increase of 50p at Crosfield Hall (3.4%).

5 Risk Management

- 5.1 An evaluation of the risks associated with the matters in this report indicates that further risk assessment is not needed because the changes / issues covered do not represent significant risks.

6 Resource Implications

- 6.1 The impact of the proposals will be considered when preparing Service estimates for 2024/25.

7 Equality Issues

- 7.1 An EQIA screening has been completed in accordance with the Council's EQIA methodology and no potential for unlawful discrimination has been identified, therefore a full EQIA has not been carried out.

8 Conclusion and reasons for recommendation

- 8.1 Heads of Service have considered the services currently available to the public and the Fees and Charges applicable to them.
- 8.2 Based on recommendations from Heads of Service, this report seeks approval of the rates of fees and charges for 2024/25.

<u>Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)</u>			
None			
<u>Confidentiality</u>			
It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.			
No of Annexes:	8	File Ref:	N/A
(Portfolio: Finance and Resources) Councillor M Flood			
Officer:	Jenni Carter	Ext:	8236
Report to:	Cabinet	Date:	20 December 2023