

Appendix 3 - Overview & Scrutiny Committee minutes:

Fees and Charges 2023/24

Cleaner Greener Safer Overview & Scrutiny Committee minutes:

The Assistant Director for Street Scene and Leisure presented the report to the Committee, he confirmed it covered the fees and charges for all services in the remit of this Committee.

The Chair queried whether all boules' clubs are paying the same.

The Recreation and Leisure manager confirmed the fees and charges for bowls are the same for all. There may be a difference in the price if they lease the building. He confirmed that most of the bowls clubs in Thurrock are now self-managed and pay a £1 peppercorn rent to the Council as they maintain the bowls greens themselves.

The Assistant Director for Street Scene confirmed the Council are trying to regulate the use of Thurrock's Parks and open spaces. Fitness companies or personal trainers can register for a license to use the parks and open spaces and in return the Council will help them with social media and promoting their business.

The Recreation and Leisure manager raised that the challenge Thurrock has is they don't have enough pitches. On grass you can only play for 8 hours a week to protect the grass. There are no flood lights for evening play. 3G pitches allow for more hours of play.

Councillor Muldowney commented that the Council are supposed to be encouraging people to be more active yet they are imposing rises above inflation for those who do use the facilities in a cost of living crisis. Councillor Muldowney raised that the fees and charges for bowls for over 60's has gone up 20%. Councillor Muldowney also noted the goal posts have been removed.

The Recreation and Leisure Manager confirmed that none of the bowls teams pay this as they are almost all self-managed however they do still need to include the figure in the spreadsheet. Previously, the bowls clubs paid the fees and charges and the Council maintained the boules green. This wasn't cost effective for the Council therefore the Bowls clubs decided to take this over. He also confirmed that on football sites when goal posts are left out there is a lot of damage so they have to remove them to stop this. If they made a surplus they could keep the goal posts out and re-seed the area around the goal post. He also confirmed that Thurrock Council's fees and charges are lower than other boroughs. If clubs book using the seasonal rate they get around 3 games free. Clubs want the pitches to be high quality and this takes time and investment. The pitches are oversubscribed. He also confirmed that a recent Sport England Active Life survey has shown a 0.5% increase in the borough of people who are active. Thurrock has previously been one

of the most inactive boroughs in Essex. If Thurrock had more sites, physical activity of residents could increase.

Councillor Byrne responded that most personal trainers have 4 clients who they charge around £5 a session for, therefore they are only earning around £20 for an hour and may not be able to afford the license fee.

The Assistant Director for Street Scene and Leisure clarified that individuals can exercise in the park for free however, if people are charging others for training this would be different. The fees allow for a one year subscription.

Councillor Arnold stated there is a difference where small businesses are using parks and open spaces for free. He queried if the increases are more about cost recovery than profit and if there is a surplus he asked what happens to it.

The Assistant Director for Street Scene and Leisure confirmed the main goal is cost recovery. They would like to increase the quality of outdoor sports for residents to encourage them to do more. For those who the licenses will apply to, the money recovered will go into improving facilities.

Councillor Muldowney queried in relation to the recommendation 1.2 whether they are anticipating the Director Delegated Authority will be needed?

The Assistant Director for Street Scene and Leisure responded that it was difficult to say however it is in there in case it is needed.

Councillor Muldowney confirmed that she is not in favour of any prices above inflation.

The Chair queried the wording of recommendation 1.2.

The Assistant Director for Street Scene and Leisure confirmed he would take this back for the wording to be looked at.

Councillor Muldowney confirmed she also did not agree to recommendation 1.1 and requested a vote on both recommendations.

Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the revised fees, including those no longer applicable; and comment on the proposals currently being considered within the remit of this committee.

In relation to recommendation 1.1 Councillor Byrne, Councillor Muldowney and Councillor Chukwu did not agree. Councillor Redsell, Councillor Arnold and Councillor Pearce agreed with the recommendation.

1.2 That Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee note that director delegated authority will be sought via Cabinet to allow fees and charges to be varied within a financial year in response to legal and regulatory requirements.

In relation to recommendation 1.2 all members of the Committee confirmed they did not agree with the recommendation.

Councillor Jefferies left the meeting at 21.10

Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee Minutes:

The Assistant Director for Education and skills presented the report. She confirmed that there had been some quite large increases last year as they completed a benchmarking exercise. She confirmed that they haven't taken the route of raising charges in line with inflation this year. In relation to Grangewaters they have looked at what other outdoor centres are charging. She commented that music services have stayed much the same.

Councillor Kerin raised concerns that groups will be outpriced of using Grangewaters.

The Assistant Director for Education and Skills confirmed that many of the charges have stayed the same. There has been a 17% increase for the hiring charge of one of the units for the day which is often hired by external partners. She agreed that they don't want to stop people being able to use the facility and reassured the Committee that they had completed market testing work.

Councillor Arnold sought reassurance that this is not about making money but cost recovery.

The Assistant Director for Education and Skills confirmed that Grangewaters is a full cost recovery model.

RESOLVED

1.1 That Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the revised fees and charges including those no longer applicable; and comments on the proposals currently being considered within the remit of this committee.

1.2 That Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee note that Director delegated authority will be sought via Cabinet to allow Fees & Charges to be varied within a financial year in response to legal and regulatory requirements.

Health & Wellbeing Overview & Scrutiny Committee Minutes:

The report presented sets out the fees and charges in relation to services within the remit of this overview and scrutiny committee. Charges will take effect from the 1st of

April 2023, unless otherwise stated. In preparing the proposed fees and charges, directorates had worked within the charging framework and commercial principles set out in Section 3 of the report. Considered the effect that the increase in interest rates and the cost-of-living crisis had on the local economy, services and the continued implications from Covid. Further Director delegated authority would be sought via Cabinet to allow Fees and Charges to be varied within financial year in response to changes in government legislation, all other changes in year would be brought back to Cabinet via the Service Director for transparency. Members were referred to the updated proposed charges detailed in Appendix 1, and the proposed deletion of current fees and charges in Appendix 2 to this report.

Councillor Potheary thanked officers for the report and was pleased and encouraged that library members were still being given two hours free internet access. Councillor Potheary referred to individual charging prices and questioned whether there was any further information or progress in putting adult social care onto a funding model which had some parity with health funding to Catherine Wilson stated she was not aware that any progress had been made but agreed to check and let members know.

Councillor Polley referred to recommendation 1.1, consultation, to which Catherine Wilson stated there was nothing in the report at this stage that would need to be consulted on. The only item that would need consultation on was the report this evening on assistive technology, for the increase in residential charges each individual would be individually financially assessed. Members were informed this was just a point in the report that should consultation need to be undertaken a report would be presented to committee. Catherine Wilson reiterated the adult social care charges outlined in appendix 1 there would be nothing to consult on because nothing had increased apart from the domiciliary care which had already taken place.

Councillor Ralph recognised that recommendation 1.1 had been added to the report in error. Officers confirmed the recommendation had been added in error and that no consultation would take place. It was noted that members of the committee were given the opportunity to comment on the report and all members noted the contents of the report and appendices. Therefore, resolved item 1, reflected the above.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the revised fees and charges including those no longer applicable; and commented on the proposals currently being considered within the remit of this committee.**
- 2. That Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted that Director delegated authority would be sought from Cabinet to allow Fees and Charges to be varied within a financial year in response to legal or regulatory requirements.**

Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee Minutes:

The report presented set out the fees and charges in relation to services within the remit of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee with charges taking effect

from 1 April 2023, unless otherwise stated. In preparation the proposed fees and charges, directorates had worked within the charging framework and commercial principles set out in section three of this report. Also taken into account were the effect that the increase in interest rates and the cost-of-living crisis had on the local economy, our services and the continued implications from Covid. Further Director delegated authority would be sought via cabinet to allow fees and charges to be varied within financial year in response to changes in government legislation, all other changes in year would be brought back to Cabinet via the service director for transparency. Members were referred to the full list of proposed charges in Appendix 1, and the proposed removal of current fees and charges detailed in Appendix 2 to this report.

Councillor Redsell stated the general public would not necessarily understand the spreadsheets and that an explanation on how it worked would be a good idea. Dulal Ahmed thanked Councillor Redsell for the feedback and the format and structure had been looked at on how best to present the information. It was agreed that for next year's report an explanation of the tables should be included. Councillor Mayes agreed this would be a good ideal going forward.

Councillor Hebb agreed the spreadsheets presented a lack of clarity on who the targeted audience would be and questioned whether the fees and charges set out on the two appendices were targeted towards landlords and not private housing users to which he was informed they were.

Councillor Hebb stated the report did not overly contextualise the volume of use and that it was not clear what the actual total income per fee line and what the total number of transactions per fee line were, as these had not been set out in any context. Dulal Ahmed stated he did not have the broken transaction lines to hand but in terms of HMO licence fees, £80,000 had been generated in 20/21, £31,000 in 21/22 and in 22/23 to date was £23,000. The average licence fee was just over £1300. What had been seen over the last three years was a decline in the number of licensed application forms. However, what we had seen was the number of landlords that were being detected as unlicensed had increased therefore the CPN income had gone up as a result. Also, in terms of improvement notices, in 20/21 17 notices had been served, 21/22 36 notices and in 22/23 at the end of October only 10 had been served. In terms of housing enforcement, it had seen an increase in the number of complaints made to the team, therefore more education and more enforcement action had to be undertaken as a result of the number of landlords not carrying out works within specified times.

Councillor Hebb referred to paragraph 5.3 of the report and questioned what would not be reasonable to recover to which Dulal Ahmed stated this would be relation to the officer time that was unrelated to that activity, the council would not be able to generate extra income and charge unreasonable fees.

Councillor Worrall questioned whether there was a landlord group that would be consulted with on the increases as she had concerns that these costs would go straight to the people that were renting rooms in those HMOs. Dulal Ahmed stated a landlord forum event had taken place prior to the report being produced, the new charges were showcased during that event so there had been an element of

discussion with the landlords that attended. In future, engagement will be made closely with the national resident landlord association which would cover a range of housing issues in relation to landlord engagement, fees and charges and HMO licencing. Councillor Worrell stated that probably then not a lot of landlords know the 11% increase would be coming their way. Dulal Ahmed stated a second event had been planned for December which would be aimed and designed at HMO landlords.

Councillor Worrall questioned how many unlicensed HMO there were to which she was informed approximately 630. Councillor Worrall stated at a previous meeting it had been agreed that officers were targeted to increase the number that were licensed and questioned what was being undertaken to sort this and was the council improving year on the year the amounts that were licensed. Dulal Ahmed stated that in terms of the last two years, there had been a decrease in the number of license application forms, part of that reason was there had been a decrease in the staffing who carried out the licensing function. There had been an increase in the number of unlicensed properties that had been detected and civil penalties had been served for failing to license voluntarily. That this was ongoing, but work was currently being undertaken to detect unlicensed HMOs through a programme that checked electoral records, council tax and housing waiting list application for those registered under shared accommodation. There was also a campaign of reported unlicensed HMOs.

Councillor Worrall questioned if the team were still short staffed to which she was informed the team were one officer short.

Councillor Worrall referred to recommendation 1.1 – including those no longer applicable – and questioned whether these were no longer applicable or had just been moved across. Dulal Ahmed stated the accredited landlord fee had been removed which was now one fee which was clearer to landlords and reduced any confusion.

Councillor Redsell stated members need to know where the HMOs were in their wards to which Dulal Ahmed stated there was a public register that contained the list of all HMOs and addresses and agreed to populate that information and send to all members. Members were informed that the unlicensed information could not be shared as these were currently under investigation by the team. Councillor Redsell stated having 630 unlicensed HMOs in Thurrock was worrying and staffing needed to be addressed within the team.

Councillor Redsell referred to the 3-year license and stated this was too long as a lot could happen within that time and questioned whether this figure had been set by the government or the council. Dulal Ahmed referred to the 630 unlicensed and stated that a number of those properties would be exempt from licensing because they fell under the support care environment. The plan was to work closely with supported housing to ensure those care homes were properly managed and had the proper property standards within the dwellings in place.

Councillor Redsell stated the 3-year license felt wrong to be left open for that length of time especially when you have young people living in them, she recommended a 1-year license should be provided. Dulal Ahmed noted Councillor Redsell's comments and stated government recommended a 5-year license with Thurrock

recommending a 3-year license. If a 1-year license was to be introduced, which was within Thurrock's gift to do so, there would not be sufficient admin resource to manage that process.

Councillor Mayes agreed with the comments made and that discretion should be used if there were concerns. With the move to the 1-year license being looked into regardless of capacity for the safety of residents, this had to be a priority. Councillor Mayes recommended that a recommendation be added to have a 1-year option not necessarily used as default, but certainly have it there, not just a blanket 3-year because that was very concerning.

Councillor Hebb requested that a report on the HMO strategy be added to the work programme.

Councillor Hebb questioned how long it would take to process a single application to which he was informed the whole admin process would take approximately 10 hours. Councillor Hebb stated with the current trajectory it would take 102 weeks to get through the potential backlog. Dulal Ahmed stated there would be a program of inquiries, with follow ups as well as doing physical checks. There were a number of back-office checks that would need to be carried out to make sure that it was a licensable HMO, or it fitted under additional licensing schemes. Having officers undertake 630 visits was not a good use of staff time as there were other ways to eliminate a number of properties and that process which was already being undertaken.

Councillor Liddiard referred to the 630 unlicensed premises and questioned what that meant in terms of lost revenue. Dulal Ahmed stated that 630 x the cost of a licence fee would result in £800,000 of lost revenue. Councillor Liddiard questioned whether this was over three years to which he was informed the license fee had to be paid in advance with a two-part payment.

Councillor Worrall referred to the removed list and questioned why the sheltered housing visitor rooms had been removed. Ewelina Sorbjan stated this was HRA element that will go into the HRA rent setting report.

The chair thanked members for the comments.

RESOLVED

- 1. That Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the revised fees, including those no longer applicable, and that Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee commented on the proposals currently being considered within the remit of this committee.**
- 2. That Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted that Director delegated authority would be sought via Cabinet to allow fees and charges to be varied within a financial year in response to legal and regulatory requirements.**

3. **That Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted in regard to HMO an additional recommendation to grant a 1-year licence option, not necessarily default, but to have in place.**
4. **A report on the HMO strategy be added to the work programme.**

Planning, Transport & Regeneration Overview & Scrutiny Committee Minutes:

The Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection presented the report found on pages 9-32 of the agenda.

The Chair of the Committee thanked the Assistant Director for the report and sought clarification on resident parking permits reference within in agenda on page 11, that there was a proposal to introduce a £10 charge for residents when applying for their first parking permit and £20 for the second permit. The

Strategic Lead for Enforcement confirmed the proposal was to introduce a small fee of £10, payable by residents for the first resident permit and £20

pound for the second permit. He continued to advise the third permit was to be increase by £5 from £75 to £80 for 2023/2024. Members heard that Officers had benchmarked against neighbouring authorities and the proposal was still considerably lower for each permit, compared to other Local Authorities.

During discussions Members commented they did not feel comfortable charging residents a fee to enable them to park outside their own home. The Strategic Lead for Enforcement advised Members that any proposed increase in income was ring fenced to go back into the service for road signs, resurfacing etc. He continued by noting this part of the service, there had not been an increase in parking permits before for either the 1st or the 2nd permit for a household.

Councillor Watson enquired as to how much revenue was to be made from the proposal to charge a small fee for resident parking permits. The Strategic Lead for Enforcement noted if the proposal was to be approved, it would affect an average of 75% of residents and will be around £37,910 for the first permit, and the second permit would be around £15,160.

Following questions from Members it was highlighted that fees from pre-planning applications were ring fenced back into the Planning Department to support the planning team and grow the planning team where possible.

It was sought in terms of consultation, what considerations had been given in terms of consultation such as consulting Ward Members when proposing a fee for resident parking. Members heard that when producing the report, it has been consulted with the relevant Portfolio Holder, however Officers were unsure if Ward Members had been contacted.

Further to a question from Councillor Hebb, the Interim Strategic Lead Development Services advised the statutory fees for planning applications were set by National

Government and so Officers were not able to affect changes to those fees. The fees which they had the control over were the fees for the pre-application, which were set by the Council. He continued by saying officers believed that increasing those fees would provide increased revenue to provide extra staff, meaning Officers could provide a quicker and improved service.

Councillor Watson asked that further information could be provided to Members on Building Control referenced at 6.3 of the report. She commented she felt the report should be brought back to the Committee at the next meeting.

Councillor Hebb suggested the following additional recommendation, which was agreed by all Committee Members.

That Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee request the proposal to increase the fees relating to resident

parking permits is consulted with Ward Members and that further information on building control be reported back at the next meeting of the committee.

RESOLVED:

1. That Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the revised fees, including those no longer applicable, and comment on the proposals currently being considered within the remit of this committee.

2. That Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee note that Director delegated authority will be sought via Cabinet to allow Fees & Charges to be varied within a financial year in response to Legal or Regulatory requirements only.

3. That Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee request the proposal to increase the fees relating to resident parking permits is consulted with Ward Members and that further information on building control be reported back at the next meeting of the committee.