

8 November 2022		ITEM: 6
Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Fees and Charges Pricing Strategy 2023/24		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Accountable Assistant Director of Service: Leigh Nicholson - Assistant Director - Planning, Transport and Public Protection Daren Spring – Assistant Director - Street Scene and Leisure David Kleinberg – Assistant Director - Counter Fraud and Enforcement Tracie Heiser – Assistant Director - Customer Services Gerard McCleave – Assistant Director - Economic Growth and Development		
Report of: Accountable Directors of Service: Julie Rogers - Director of Public Realm Karen Wheeler – Director of Strategy, Engagement and Growth		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report specifically 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 have worked within the charging framework and commercial principles set out in section three of this report. We have also taken into account the effect that the increase in interest rates and the cost-of-living crisis has had on the local economy and our services and the continued implications from Covid-19.

Further Director delegated authority will 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 will be brought back to Cabinet via the service Director for transparency.

The full list of proposed charges is detailed in Appendix 1, and the proposed deletion of current fees and charges are detailed in Appendix 2 to this report.

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1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the revised fees, including those no longer applicable; and comment on the proposals currently being considered within the remit of this committee.

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.

2. Background

2.1 This paper describes the fees and charges approach for the services within the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee remit for 2023/24 and will set a platform for certain pricing principles moving forward into future financial years.

2.2 The paper provides narrative for the Cleaner, Greener and Safer areas:

- Arboricultural
- Outdoor Sports and the Commercial Hire of Open Spaces
- Allotments
- Domestic Waste
- Burials and Memorials
- Environmental Enforcement and Abandoned Vehicles
- Registrars
- Theatre
- Heritage Service
- Public Protection

3. Thurrock Charging Policy

3.1 The strategic ambition for Thurrock is to adopt a policy on fees and charges that ensures that all discretionary services will fully cost recover wherever possible.

3.1.1 For future years, while reviewing charges, services will also consider the level of demand for the service, the market dynamics and how the charging policy helps to meet other service objectives.

3.1.2 Rather than a blanket increase across all service lines, when considering the pricing strategy for 2023/24 some key questions were considered:

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- Where can we apply a tiered/premium pricing structure
- How sensitive are customers to price (are there areas where a price freeze is relevant)
- Consideration with regards to Covid-19 and the impact on fees and charges locally and nationally
- What new charges might we want to introduce for this financial year
- How do our charges compare to neighboring boroughs and private sector competitors (particularly in those instances where customers have choice)
- How can we influence channel shift
- Can we set charges to recover costs
- What do our competitors charge
- How sensitive is demand to price
- Statutory services may have discretionary elements that we can influence
- Do we take deposits, charge cancellation fees, and charge an admin fee for duplicate services (e.g. lost certificates)

3.2 The key following points should be noted for 2023/24 fees and charges:

- **Outdoor Sports and open spaces** - Increased fees and charges by a range of between 0%-20%, (£0-£120).
- **Allotments** - Fees and charges have not increased for 2023/24.
- **Domestic Waste** - Fees and charges will increase by 11% (£1.10) for additional bulky waste items and 0%-18% £0-£77.60 for wheeled bins new/replacements. There will be an additional charge introduced for the general supply or replacement of wheelie bin for Managing Agents.
- **Burials and Memorials** – Fees and charges for 2023/24 will be increased broadly in line with forecast inflation, the burials service does not make a surplus from fees and charges and these increases take into consideration the increases in costs to the service to make sure that the service is cost neutral going forward. To enable residents the opportunities to intern their loved ones ashes in Thurrock we have added Memorial Trees, Sanctum Vaults, (Panorama Vaults, Double Sanctum Vault, Family Sanctum Vault) and Nepalese Memorial for burials cemeteries offering.
- **Environmental Enforcement** – Fees and charges are set by legislation, with Council charging the maximum permitted, in line with policy.
- **Registrars** – Following the relocation of the Registrars Service into the new premises the charges have been changed to reflect this along with benchmarking against neighbouring boroughs.
- **Theatre** – Fees and charges for 2023/24 have increased between 0% - 30% (£4.70) to bring Thurrock's charges more in line with neighbouring boroughs.
- **Public Protection** – Civil Enforcement charges have not increased for 2023/24. Environmental protection charges have increased, alongside health and safety charges.

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(Licensing fees and charges that are set through the licensing committee have been removed from the fees and charges as these are set via licensing committee and cannot be amended via this process).

3.3 Proposals and Issues

3.3.1 The fees and charges for each service area have been considered and the main considerations are set out below.

3.3.2 To allow the Council services to better respond to changes in the commercial environment for fees and charges; the Director of the Service area jointly with the agreement of Cabinet may vary service charges within the financial year due to commercial considerations.

- This will allow service areas, providing services on a traded basis to vary their fees and charges to reflect commercial and operational considerations that impact the cost recoverability calculations.
- Any changes to fees and charges due to commercial considerations will require consultation with, and agreement of, the relevant Portfolio Holder.

3.3.3 Unless indicated otherwise, fees and charges for 2023/24 can increase in line with forecast inflation (subject to rounding).

3.4 Outdoor Sports and the Commercial Hire of Open Spaces

3.4.1 The strategic objective for charging for use of outdoor sports facilities is to provide quality services that are competitively priced, to encourage optimum use and consequently maximize income levels, while at the same time reducing net subsidy and encouraging the Councils wider health and leisure strategy.

3.4.2 Currently the cost of maintaining the pitches is not recovered from the income generated. To mitigate this the service has introduced technology to make efficiencies and reduce the costs where possible. Despite these efforts, there remains a gap. In order to get closer to a cost neutral position, as indicated in last year's report, fees and charges will need to increase over the next two years. Therefore, all sports pitch fees, season tickets and other charges will be increased for 2023/24. The Council will continue to offer a generous discount for block/season bookings to support our sports clubs in the borough who participate in leagues and competitions.

3.4.3 The majority of the bookings are season long bookings. The proposed increases in football pitch hire according to benchmarking against neighbouring authority Basildon still remain competitive.

3.4.4 There is an increase in the number of personal fitness instructors using our parks for business purposes and charging their clients. The council is

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proposing to pilot a license permit for personal trainers and sports/fitness groups that charge their clients/members.

3.4.5 This pilot permit licence will ensure:

- all visitors should have access to and use of public open spaces
- we must protect public parks for everyone to enjoy and benefit from various forms of fitness training in public spaces
- fitness operators must have appropriate qualifications (based on industry best practice)
- fitness operators must be fully insured and hold liability for participants' safety
- These license permit's will help to recover costs for this additional use and any damage caused to our parks by people trading on council land

3.4.6 The new charges proposed below have been benchmarked with other authorities. Whilst there is a more complex charging structure in most other councils, the fees charged by the majority of other councils exceed those proposed by Thurrock council. Most councils are charging over £1,000 for group fitness sessions on an annual basis. We have kept the costs low as this is a pilot scheme and the first time the charges are being introduced.

3.4.7 Individual instructors, will need to complete an application form along with their qualification, DBS check and other documents to ensure they are safe and capable to operate the business. The individual licence permit has two categories:

- i. Training two clients or less on a one-to-one basis - cost £100 per year
- ii. Training three clients or more on a one-to-one basis - cost £150 per year.

3.4.8 A proposal to introduce charging for the use of the open space by groups for bootcamp style sessions, yoga and other group sessions, including the use of outdoor gyms is set out below with four charging options:

- a) monthly fee for less than 6 people using the park / equipment - £50
- b) monthly fee for more than 6 people using the park / equipment - £75
- c) annual fee for less than 6 people using the park / equipment - £400
- d) annual fee for more than 6 people using the park / equipment - £600

3.4.9 The benefits to those registering for a licence, either personal or group, will be the promotion of their services via the council social media and website. This will increase their potential client reach and increase their business revenue.

3.4.10 The council will help promote the approved instructors via our communication team and ensure the service is regulated.

3.5 Allotments

3.5.1 Thurrock Council currently provide two allotment sites with all other sites in the borough being self-managed by community groups. The fees and charges in this report reflect Council managed allotments only.

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3.5.2 The income received from allotments contributes towards the ongoing running costs that they incur. There have been regular increases over the past 4 years. There is no increase proposed this year to support people growing food.

3.6 Domestic Waste Charges

3.6.1 After a review of neighbouring authorities, the fees and charges for the initial first three bulky waste items will remain the same, whereas additional items and wheelie bin replacements will rise to ensure full cost recovery for 2023-24. The increase for additional items is £1.10 (11%) and the increase for residential replacement bins whereby the resident has damaged their bin is 13% (£5.50) (*any damage caused by Refuse collectors would continue to be replaced free of charge*) the increase for commercial replacement bins for managing agents is 18% (£77.60) for a 1100L bin, a new charge has also been added for general supply/replacement of wheelie bins to managing agents at a cost of £60 for the smaller bins.

3.7 Burials and Memorials

3.7.1 Thurrock Council maintains five cemeteries providing a range of burial services and graves for cremated remains. Following a thorough previous benchmarking exercise we were found to be competitive with other local authorities. To provide residents the opportunities to intern their loved ones ashes in Thurrock we have added Memorial Trees, Sanctum Vaults, (Panorama Vaults, Double Sanctum Vault, Family Sanctum Vault) and Nepalese Memorials to our burials and cemeteries offering and will continue to look at other ways to improve the offering to residents.

3.8 Registrars

3.8.1 The Registrars Office provides the statutory service of registering births deaths and marriages, alongside the non-statutory service of citizenship ceremonies on both a group and individual basis.

3.8.2 The fees and charges set by the Council are always reviewed against neighbouring authorities and take full account of any statutory charge limitations.

3.8.3 Customer engagement throughout the year allows us to take into consideration local reaction and address any concerns to changes in the fees and charges. Following the move into the new premises and customer feedback the number of ceremony options has been increased to meet demand and to accommodate the new room capacities. We are now in a position to offer more options in the Lacey Room, Mulberry Suite, Committee rooms and Council Chamber.

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3.9 Theatre Services

3.9.1 After a comparison of neighbouring boroughs, our charges now reflect that of other Theatres.

3.10 Heritage Service

Thurrock Heritage Service charges for a number of services:

- School visits to Thurrock Museum and school outreach.
- Talks given to other organisations.
- Informal educational sessions.
- Topic loan boxes for schools.
- Research and Readers tickets.

There have been minor changes for 2023/24.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 The setting of appropriate fees and charges will enable the Council to generate essential income for the funding of Council services. The approval of reviewed fees and charges will also ensure that the Council is competitive with other service providers and neighbouring councils. The ability to vary charges within financial year will enable services to more flexibly adapt to changing economic conditions.

4.2 The granting of delegated authority will only apply to legal or regulatory changes. If there is a need to alter fees during the financial year to enable the Council to better respond to commercial challenges, additional reports may be brought to Cabinet for approval.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 Consultations will be progressed where there is specific need. However, with regard to all other items, the proposals in this report do not affect any specific parts of the borough. Fees and charges are known to customers before they make use of the services they are purchasing.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 The changes in these fees and charges may impact the community; however, it must be taken into consideration that these price rises include inflation.

7. Implications

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7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jo Freeman**

Finance Manager

The effect of any changes to fees and charges on individual income targets will be determined as part of the 2023-24 budget setting process in which Corporate Finance and service areas will review anticipated level of demand, fee increases, previous performance and potential associated costs. Covid-19 has significantly impacted the Authority's ability to achieve current income targets, and this will be taken into consideration when setting future targets.

The Council wide draft budget report will include the 2023-24 income targets across all directorates.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Mark Bowen**

Deputy Monitoring Officer

Fees and charges generally fall into three categories – Statutory, Regulatory and Discretionary. Statutory charges are set in statute and cannot be altered by law since the charges have been determined by Central government and all authorities will be applying the same charge.

Regulatory charges relate to services where, if the Council provides the service, it is obliged to set a fee which the Council can determine itself in accordance with a regulatory framework. Charges have to be reasonable and must be applied across the borough.

Discretionary charges relate to services which the Council can provide if they choose to do so. This is a local policy decision. The Local Government Act 2003 gives the Council power to charge for discretionary services, with some limited exceptions. This may include charges for new and innovative services utilising the Council's general power of competence under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011. The income from charges, taking one financial year with another, must not exceed the cost of provision. A clear and justifiable framework of principles should be followed in terms of deciding when to charge and how much, and the process for reviewing charges.

A service may wish to consider whether they may utilise this power to provide a service that may benefit residents, businesses and other service users, meet the Council priorities and generate income.

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Decisions on setting charges and fees are subject to the Council's decision making structures. Most charging decisions are the responsibility of Cabinet, where there are key decisions. Some fees are set by full Council.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Price**
Team Manager, Diversity & Equality

The Council is responsible for promoting equality of opportunity in the provision of services and employment as set out in the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty. Decisions on setting charges and fees are subject to Community Equality Impact Assessment process and the Council's wider decision making structures to determine impact on protected groups and related concessions that may be available

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked after Children)

None

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

None

9. Appendices to the report

Appendix 1 – Schedule of Proposed Fees and Charges for 2023/24.
Appendix 2 – Schedule of Fees and Charges no longer applicable.

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