

Appendix 2: Feedback from Overview and Scrutiny Committees regarding Fees and Charges

A report on the relevant sections of Fees and Charges was presented to each of the six Overview and Scrutiny Committees in late December 2015 and January 2016. Feedback from each of these committees is captured in the draft minutes; the relevant sections of which can be found in this appendix.

Health and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Roger Harris briefly presented the report and explained that similar Fees and Charges Reports were being presented to all overview and scrutiny committees and referred Members to the Appendix 1, the Fees and Charges Booklet. The Appendix identified the proposed changes to charges.

It was further explained that the items under consultation were discussed at the HOSC tonight and the remaining other items were at their maximum therefore no increase could be made.

RESOLVED

That the Committee considered the proposed charges as detailed in the Appendix.

Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Officer briefly presented the report and explained that similar Fees and Charges Reports were being presented to all overview and scrutiny committees and referred Members to the Appendix 1, the Fees and Charges Booklet. The Appendix identified the proposed changes to charges.

Lynn Mansfield asked Officers who the fee for the Communal Hall Hire would be applicable to. The Officer needed to clarify this point and will inform the Committee once known.

The Chair asked the Officers why only a £2 increase had been made to the Housing None Statutory Work. The Officer confirmed that this was a standard charge which had been set nationally.

Councillor Ojetola asked Officers what the reasons were for the increase in the Sheltered Housing Visitor's Room and why this increase had not been tapered in over the forthcoming years. The Officer confirmed that this was benchmarked nationally against other authorities in Essex. The increase to £12 was still considered to be a reasonable cost.

Councillor MacPherson asked Officers how many houses in Multiple Occupation Mandatory Licences (MOML) there were in Thurrock. The Officer confirmed that after an assessment undertaken last year on three storey properties with five bedrooms or more he can confirm there were five MOML Licences. Although with new guidelines

in the pipeline this could have an effect on over 400 licences if regulations dropped to two storey properties.

The Officer confirmed that the proposal by Councillor Worrall to look at two storeys MOML was still under consultation and feedback would be provided to the Committee once available.

Councillor Ojetola questioned Officers on the Thurrock Charging Policy, particularly when considering charges, services that will consider the level of demand for this service and why had this not been done this year. The Officer needed to clarify this point and will inform the Committee once known.

Councillor Ojetola asked Officers if Right to Rent checks on immigrants was the responsibility of the Council and could this be a means of raising funds. The Officer confirmed this was not currently being undertaken and would be the Landlord responsibility. The Officer agreed to look into this suggestion and report back to the committee.

Members agreed that the wording to the recommendation should be changed to read "That the committee consider the proposed charges as detailed in the Fees and Charges Booklet Appendix and provide feedback to Cabinet".

RESOLVED:

That the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider the proposed charges as detailed in the Fees and Charges Booklet Appendix and provide feedback to Cabinet.

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Head of Corporate Finance informed the Committee that the report sought approval to revise fees and charges for Thurrock Council with effect from 1 April 2016. It was explained that the report provided a narrative for all discretionary charges for each directorate, it was added that there was a wider review of commercial opportunities across the Council in progress. Members were informed that any proposed price changes proposed as part of the wider review will be managed under the delegated authority of the Chief Executive and relevant Cabinet Member.

Councillor Stewart suggested that a RAG status would enable a better understanding of the percentage tolerances in relation to target reaching and the discretionary services that were recovering cost. The Head of Corporate Finance confirmed that using a RAG status would be investigated.

RESOLVED:

That the committee considered the proposed charges as detailed in the appendix.

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Senior Finance Officer briefly introduced the report and advised that the full Fees and Charges document would be referred to Cabinet for a decision in February 2016, following feedback from all six Overview and Scrutiny Committees which would be included within the report.

Councillor J. Halden observed that increased fees and charges were set out within the report for Grangewaters Outdoor Education Centre, which was soon to be commissioned outside of the Council and staff transferred across to the organisation under TUPE, the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations. He questioned whether the staff affected had been consulted and were in agreement with the proposed fees and charges, to which the Learning and Skills Manager provided assurances that the proposed fees and charges had been set in consultation with affected staff and that a benchmarking exercise in the competitive market had been undertaken.

Councillor Gupta highlighted that initial concerns regarding library fines totalling odd amounts, such as 11 pence had been resolved, and welcomed the fact that all fines were now rounded up or down to make for easier cash transactions.

RESOLVED:

That the committee consider the proposed charges as detailed in the appendix.

Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Head of Corporate Finance informed the Committee that the report sought approval to revise fees and charges for Thurrock Council with effect from 1 April 2016. It was explained that the report provided a narrative for all discretionary charges for each directorate, it was added that there was a wider review of commercial opportunities across the Council in progress. Members were informed that any proposed price changes proposed as part of the wider review will be managed under the delegated authority of the Chief Executive and relevant Cabinet Member.

Councillor Gledhill questioned why the statutory temporary access licences were marked as 'POA'. The Head of Transportation & Highways explained that the price of the application varied on the site and nature of what was required. It was agreed that the committee would be informed of the different statutory licence charges.

The report highlighted that the car parking charges were to be approved by the Committee. Members were confused what Committee these charges were to be approved by, the Head of Transportation & Highways agreed to investigate and feedback to the Committee.

Councillor Gledhill questioned the parity of street parking charges across the borough. The Head of Transportation & Highways informed the Committee that fees had been increased by 5% across the borough, and that it was not appropriate to

charge high fees in some areas of the authority as the Council were mindful not to undermine the regeneration aspirations when setting charges. The Committee were informed that Thurrock Councils fees were average when compared to neighbouring boroughs.

Councillor Gledhill asked for clarification on the annual admin fee. The Head of Transportation & Highways explained that this fee was used to reimburse the cost of applications.

Councillor Gledhill highlighted that the street light usage fee was not included within the report. The Head of Transportation & Highways explained that residents were not charged for street light usage and that this would need to be reviewed and brought back to Committee in the future.

The Committee were informed that an additional fee to enable businesses to have tables and chairs on highways was added to the Highways Fees and Charges section of the report. Members of the Committee felt that they were not given enough information regarding the additional fee. Members were also concerned that there was no consultation for residents and businesses. The Head of Corporate Finance agreed that the concerns raised would be incorporated into the Cabinet report.

RESOLVED:

That the committee considered the proposed charges as detailed in the appendix

Additional note regarding charge for chair and table arrangements on the public highway

In terms of the proposed additional charge for table and chair arrangements on the highway; the committee was not comfortable supporting this charge at the current time based on the supporting information which was available to them. Members of the committee are seeking that this charge not be included in the Fees and Charges for 2016/17, but that instead it should come back to the committee in the course of the year with additional information to support it.

Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Finance Officer introduced the report to the Committee explaining that the fee and charges for the Council were received on an annual basis and were broken down to be presented at the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

He continued to notify Members that the report highlighted the proposed new fees and charges for the Public Protection and Environment directorates. It was mentioned that when reviewing the fees and charges for 2016/2017 benchmarking against neighbouring authorities was undertaken.

The Finance Officer explained the difference between statutory and discretionary charges; in that statutory charges were predetermined by the government and discretionary charges meant that the Council had a say in the amount that was

charged. Members were advised that given the nature of some public protection fees such as licences, such fees would be agreed by the Licensing Committee.

Members commented they felt that certain fees had not been increased adequately such as the flyposting and dog fouling. Clarification was sought as to the fee setting for abandoned vehicles; Members further commented that vehicles were left in laybys and on roundabouts seeking sales.

The Environmental Health and Trading Standards Manager explained with vehicles which were left to be sold on the highway, unfortunately there was a weakness within the legislation; as councils would have to prove that a seller had sold two vehicles. He continued to advise the committee that officers undertook a lot of work in relation to abandoned vehicles. Members were further advised that if a vehicle was to be reclaimed the council could charge a storage fee.

It was commented that the discretionary fees allowed the Council to make a profit as these were set by the Council; however Members were informed that the Council could be open for challenge if it was deemed the Council was over charging.

Members were advised court cases had been taken against Local Authorities and fees had been paid back.

The Committee enquired as to fees being part of a comparison with other Local Authorities within the area. The Environmental Health and Trading Standards Manager confirmed that the fees and charges were subject to a benchmarking exercise with other authorities in the area, he explained that this kept the fees in check and sought that the Council received the best income.

Councillor Jones, Chair of the Committee stated he felt the charges for Burial grounds was a steep raise, he queried if the Council was on target with other Local Authorities.

The Finance Officer clarified the Council's fees had been significantly lower than other authorities in the local area; he confirmed the Council was now in the same boundary as its neighbours.

It was queried as to how many officers the Public Protection department had to deal with the fineable offences such as dog fouling. Officers informed the committee that there were 2 full time officers; however this would shortly become one. It was commented that it was hoped the post would be refilled accordingly; however budget savings over the last 3 years had affected staffing levels.

The Chair of the Committee commented upon the filming sponsorship, the Finance Officer explained that if an area was deemed to be available then the Council could charge for filming to take place an example of this was Coal House Fort.

RESOLVED:

That the committee consider the proposed charges as detailed in Appendix 1.