

Appendix 3 - Feedback from Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Provided below are the Feedback's from the respective Overview and Scrutiny Committees meetings held during November and December 2018. These are extracts from the minutes in relation to the Fees and Charges item discussion's only.

Cleaner, Greener and Safer (CGS)

Item 7 – 6 December 2018 meeting

Provided below is the relevant extract from the meeting draft minutes.

Fees & Charges Pricing Strategy 2019/20

Julie Rogers, Director of Environment and Highways, presented the report that set out the charges in relation to services within the remit of the Cleaner Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee that will take effect from the 1 April 2019. Julie Rogers stated that the fees and charges crossed over with a number of directorates including housing, health and place, she would do her best to answer but where she couldn't, she agreed to take any questions away and provide follow up responses.

The Chair questioned Enforcement Fees – Fly-Posting – no discount for early repayment. Julie Rogers stated this was an automatic policy charge that had resulted in a slight decrease in payment but the Council continued to prosecute and advertised those court cases. Julie Rogers was pleased to advise a very high, if not 100% success rate on prosecutions.

The Chair questioned Cultural Services – Internet and Word Processing – Use of the Internet – per subsequent hour. The Chair stated that young people used the library as not everyone had the facility to access the internet at home and stated she was not happy about the new charge. Julie Rogers stated that Wi-Fi in libraries was currently provided by a code which entitled users 2 hours free Wi-Fi service, on their own devices or library PC's. To ensure fair access to all users the charge had been introduced to manage the risk of people staying logged onto library PC's without really using the PC and preventing someone else from having access.

The Chair questioned whether the charge would be applied to those residents who only used the Wi-Fi through their own devices. The Chair asked for further clarification from Officers and a meeting would be arranged for next week.

Councillor Rigby and Councillor Abbas agreed that as the Council was encouraging more residents to use on-line services it was unreasonable to ask residents to start paying for Wi-Fi in libraries and that further clarification was required.

The Chair questioned all the new charges for Cultural Services – Thameside Theatre and Central Complex. The Chair had concerns how these extra charges would affect smaller groups such as dancing and art groups in paying for facilities and questioned whether they had been consulted. Julie Rogers referred Members to page 133, paragraph 13.3 of the agenda which referenced the fees and charges that was undertaken for the 2017/18 financial year. The Chair thanked the Officer but stated further clarification was required and a meeting would be arranged for next week.

The Chair questioned the new charge Heritage - School Visits (Coalhouse Fort or Thurrock Museum) - per class and asked should the Council be charging schools for this facility. Julie Rogers stated that this was not a new charge to schools and was already been paid.

Councillor Abbas pointed out that no charges had been made to services such as adult gambling services and licensing but those local services for residents appeared to have been increased. Councillor Abbas felt that this was not fair and unreasonable.

Councillor Abbas questioned why there had been an increase in charges to the Residents Services – Registration of Marriage and Birth Certificates. Julie Rogers stated further clarification from Officers was required and a meeting would be arranged for next week.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That Members asked for clarity on a number of areas and a meeting would be arranged for next week before the recommendations are agreed.**
- 2. That the Cleaner Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the revised fees, including those no longer applicable and commented on the proposals currently being considered within the remit of this committee.**
- 3. That the Cleaner Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted that director delegation authority will be sought via Cabinet to allow Fees and Charges to be varied within a financial year in response to commercial requirements.**

Planning, Transport and Regeneration (PTR)

Item 6 - 6 November 2018 meeting

Provided below is the relevant extract from the meeting draft minutes.

Fees & Charges Pricing Strategy 2019/20

Presented by the Corporate Director, the report outlined the proposed charges which would take effect from 1 April 2019 unless otherwise stated. Councillor Piccolo stated that the appendices accompanying the fees and charges report were too small to read. He thought it would have been useful to have used a colour coded system to highlight what charges had increased or decreased.

Agreeing with Councillor Piccolo's comments, Councillor Potheary mentioned struggling to see the charges as well. She went on to ask who would be impacted by the increased fees and charges. The Assistant Director for Planning, Transport and Public Protection gave examples of where fees had been introduced. This included scooter training in schools which had been funded previously but schools now requested this. In the National Planning Policy Framework, informal discussions had taken place to acquire money to drive planning applications forward. The service may review those charges in a year's time. However, the planning charges were necessary to drive development schemes, such as the Purfleet Regeneration scheme, forward. Overall, very few fees had increased. In response, Councillor Potheary said the scooter fee had been one that she had been concerned about but could see the cost was small which was £30 for 10 children.

Referring to the licenses for highways, the Vice-Chair sought an explanation on the increased charges. The Assistant Director for Highways, Fleet and Logistics explained that the fees and charges had been benchmarked against other local authorities and were in line with current market value. These charges would also encompass staff costs and retained costs for possible damage to highways from vehicles as a result of works or activities undertaken in relation to the license.

On the mention of highways licenses, Councillor Potheary queried the charge for skip licenses. She sought clarification on whether the charge would have an impact on companies and went on to say that the service did not want to be discouraging people from hiring skips. Councillor Potheary also asked whether it was the people hiring skips or the companies that would absorb the cost. The Assistant Director for Highways, Fleet and Logistics answered the charge had been introduced to help control unauthorised skips on the highway. It was uncertain whether this charge was passed on by companies.

The Vice-Chair felt the Committee had not had the opportunity to pick up the smaller details of the fees and charges due to the format. He asked if comments could be provided to Officers in the next day or two. The Corporate Director answered comments could be picked up via email through Democratic Services but the recommendations could be agreed subject to comments by Members.

Councillor Piccolo asked for a colour coding system to which the Corporate Director answered that a method would be used to highlight the increase and decrease of charges.

The recommendations had been agreed subject to Members' comments. Following PTR meeting, Members were given the amended appendices and another week after the meeting to look at these. Councillor Piccolo had come back with no further comments but there was no response from other Members. This will be brought back to PTR on 8 January 2019 (not as an agenda item or briefing note) just for Members to agree the recommendations.

RESOLVED SUBJECT TO MEMBERS' COMMENTS:

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

Childrens Services

Item 12 - 4 December 2018 meeting

Provided below is the relevant extract from the meeting draft minutes

Fees & Charges Pricing Strategy 2019/20

Presented by the Corporate Director, the report highlighted changes to nursery charges and Grangewater fees which had risen with inflation.

The Church of England Representative sought clarification on recommendation 1.2. Explaining that Fees and Charges reports were similar, the Corporate Director said these all passed through Overview and Scrutiny before arriving at Cabinet. Some of the fees within the report did not necessarily apply to Children's Services but would apply to other departments within the Council. These enabled Directors to vary the charges if required.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the revised fees and charges proposals including those no longer applicable**
- 2. That Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted that director delegated authority will be sought via Cabinet to allow Fees & Charges to be varied within a financial year in response to commercial requirements**

Housing

Item 5 - 18 December 2018 meeting

Provided below is the relevant extract from the meeting draft minutes.

Fees & Charges Pricing Strategy 2019/20

The Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health presented the report and explained it was a brief update on the Fees and Charges pricing strategy for 2019/2020 which would also be presented at all other Committee meetings and will be going to Cabinet in February 2019.

The proposed fees and charges related to those that affected the General Fund and not the HRA. Councillor Redsell asked whether the Mobile Homes site licensing fees and charges were referring to traveller sites.

The Housing Enforcement Manager, explained that the Council has a statutory duty to inspect mobile home sites with planning permission. The new fees covered the licensing function to inspect, monitor and enforce license conditions at mobile home sites. The three Council run traveller sites in Thurrock are:

- Ship Lane, Aveley,
- Gammons Field site, Grays,
- Pilgrams Lane Site, North Stifford

Their rent charges cover the Council's management and revenue costs to manage these sites. The Committee explored fees and charges for traveller sites as they seem to have increased.

Councillor Pothercary asked why the report had a Housing Benefit table. The Director confirmed the fees and charges report would be updated before the report is presented at Cabinet in February 2019.

RESOLVED:

- 1. The Committee note the revised fees, including those no longer applicable, and that Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee comment on the proposals currently being considered within the remit of this committee.**
- 2. The 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 commercial requirements.**

Health and Wellbeing (HWB)

Item 9 - 8 November 2018 meeting

Provided below is the relevant extract from the meeting draft minutes.

Fees & Charges Pricing Strategy 2019/20

Roger Harris, Corporate Director Adults, Housing and Health presented the report that set out the charges in relation to services within the remit of the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee with any new charges taking effect from 1 April 2019.

Councillor Holloway thanked Roger Harris for the report.

Councillor Redsell questioned whether meals on wheels were still being used. Roger Harris stated the contract with RVS was due to expire at the end of 2018/19 financial year and that options would be reviewed on how the service should be run following this date.

Councillor Redsell stated that the on-line application for Blue Badges was not working well. Roger Harris stated that the Blue Badge application was a national online form that Thurrock Council could not change but agreed to take back and look at how support could be provided where required.

Councillor Holloway stated her concern for domiciliary care workforce and questioned whether charging more would generate more funds to pay the workforce more. Roger Harris stated that the rates paid to providers were favourable.

Councillor C Kent referred to the £1.4 million target to be secured through the demand increases from residents and ask whether this would be profit to the Council. Roger Harris stated that no profit would be made as services were heavy subsidised.

Councillor Holloway questioned whether a wide budget report would be presented to the committee. Roger Harris agreed to let the chair know of any planned reports and timescales.

Councillor Redsell questioned the Transport fees. Roger Harris explained that these were the core permanent in house service at Elizabeth Gardens provided by Care Watch at £40 per week to which the Council subsidised a further £40.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the revised fees and that Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee commented on the proposals currently being considered with the remit of the committee.**
- 2. That the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted that Director delegated authority will be sought via Cabinet to allow Fees and Charges to be varied within a financial year in response to commercial and legal requirements.**