

3 December 2020		ITEM: 7
Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Fees and Charges Pricing Strategy 2021/22		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Accountable Assistant Director of Service: Leigh Nicholson - Assistant Director Planning and Growth Daren Spring – Assistant Director Street Scene and Leisure Tracie Heiser – Assistant Director – Customer Services		
Report of: Accountable Directors of Service: Julie Rogers - Director of Environment, Highways & Counter Fraud Andy Millard - Director of Place Karen Wheeler – Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report specifically sets out the charges in relation to services within the remit of this Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Charges will take effect from the 1 April 2021 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 the report. We have also taken into account the effect that Covid-19 has and will continue to have on services, residents and the local economy.

Further director-delegated authority will be sought via Cabinet to allow Fees and Charges to be varied within financial year in response to commercial requirements.

The full list of proposed charges is detailed in Appendix 1.

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- 1.1 That Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the revised fees, including those no longer applicable; and comment on the proposals currently being considered within the remit of this committee.**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

2. Introduction and 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 2021/22 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 are aligned to the wider commercial strategy and ensure that all discretionary services cost recover.
- 3.2 Furthermore, 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.
- 3.3 When considering the pricing strategy for 2021/22 some key questions were considered:
- 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)

3.4 The key following points should be noted for 2021/22 fees and charges:

- **Outdoor Sports and open spaces** - have increased fees and charges by a range of between 4%-5% (£1-£50 (£50 per season)) to reflect moving towards a cost neutral approach.
- **Allotments** - fees and charges have increased by around 4% (£2.50 - £5) for 2021/22
- **Domestic Waste** - fees and charges have increased slightly for 2021/22
- **Burials and Memorials** – fees and charges have increased slightly for 2021/22 between 1% - 3% (£2 - £56) and a new charge has been added for Muslim Burials.
- **Environmental Enforcement** – fees and charges are set by legislation, with Council charging the maximum permitted, in line with policy.
- **Registrars** – these charges remain unchanged for 2021/22 due to the adverse impact Covid 19 has had on this area.
- **Theatre** – one charge has been increased due to deep cleaning costs related to Covid 19, all other charges remain unchanged for 2021/22 due to the adverse impact Covid 19 has had on this area
- **Public Protection** - licensing fees and charges are set through the licensing committee and have remained unchanged for 2021/22. Other Public Protection fees and charges remain unchanged for 2021/22 with the exception of those relating to the Control of Dogs. These have been restructured in line with the charges levied by a new contractor. The above inflation rate increase enables the council to be cost neutral in this area.
- **Heritage Service** – these have increased between 1% - 2% (5p-£2.50) for 2021/22.

3.5 Proposals and Issues

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

3.5.2 To allow the Council services to better respond to changes in the commercial environment for fees and charges; delegated authority will be sought through Cabinet to permit the Director of the Service Area jointly with the Director of Finance to vary service charges within 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 the consultation with, and agreement of, the relevant Portfolio Holder.

3.5.3 Unless indicated otherwise, fees and charges for 2021/22 can increase in line with forecast inflation (subject to rounding).

3.6 Outdoor Sports and the Commercial Hire of Open Spaces

3.6.1 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.

3.6.2 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, fees and charges will need to increase over the next three years. Therefore, all sports pitch fees, season tickets and other charges will be increased for 2021/22. 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.

3.7 Allotments

3.7.1 Thurrock Council currently provides 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.

3.7.2 The income received from allotments contributes towards the ongoing running costs that they incur. Due to the increased take up of allotment plots during Covid-19 lockdown, we have increased the fees and charges for 2021/22. This is to help cover the additional costs to maintain and manage the sites and provide a better service for residents.

3.8 Domestic Waste Charges

3.8.1 After a review of neighboring authorities' last year, charges for Bulky waste will remain unchanged for 2021/22

Services will continue to explore if there are further commercial opportunities

3.9 Burials and Memorials

3.9.1 Thurrock Council maintains five cemeteries providing a range of burial services and graves for cremated remains. Following a thorough previous benchmarking exercise where we were found to be competitive with other

local authorities, it been decided that this year all burial fees will be increased to be broadly in line with inflation between 1.89% - 3.39%. A new Charge has also been included for Muslim Burials, we are including a new charge because it's a new service, introduced at the height of the first peak of the Covid-19 pandemic recognising the need within the local community.

3.10 Registrars

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

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

3.10.3 Customer engagement throughout the year allows us to take into consideration local reaction and address any concerns to changes in the fees and charges. Given the adverse effect that Covid 19 has had on our area and the restrictions it imposes on us, we will not be increasing any fees and charges in 2021/22.

3.11 Theatre Services

3.11.1 A thorough review of fees and charges takes place each year and some new charges were put in place last year. Unfortunately due to Covid-19 the Theatre currently remains closed. Many hirers for this year have agreed to move their bookings to the next financial year and therefore we are not proposing to increase most fees and charges for 2021/22. We have however increased our performance surcharge by 33% cover additional costs incurred for deep cleaning as a result of Covid-19 and Government guidelines on cleaning performance spaces.

3.12 Heritage Service

3.12.1 Thurrock Heritage Service charges for a number of services:

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

Charges have been increased for 2021/22 between 0.7% - 2%.

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 to vary these charges within financial year will allow the Council to better respond to commercial challenges.

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

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Joanne Freeman**
Finance Manager

The effect of any changes to fees and charges on individual income targets will be determined as part of the 2021-22 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 set out the 2021-22 targets across all directorates

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**
Deputy Head of Law and 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.

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 2021/22.

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