

Feedback from Overview and Scrutiny Committees on Fees and Charges 2021/22

Housing O&S 17th November 2020

The report was presented by Dulal Ahmed.

The Committee questioned why fees for travellers' sites had increased and sought clarification on selective licensing. The Committee requested detail on the mobile homes charges which would be provided by email. Officers explained that the 2.97% fee increase in travellers' sites was for the maintenance of the sites, repairs and engagement service with tenants. Selective licensing was a new scheme to be introduced by the Council that would apply to licensing all private rented properties in Thurrock and not just HMOs.

Councillor Worrall said that carbon monoxide alarms had to be installed in rented private homes by landlords and HMOs but questioned why this was not a requirement in social homes. Carol Hinvest explained that this was the law for the private housing sector but a recent White Paper Bill was proposing to equalise this in social homes as well. The Council had been installing carbon monoxide alarms in their tenants' homes since Councillor Worrall had raised this issue last year and would provide an update on this progress.

RESOLVED:

That Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the revised fees, including those no longer applicable, and that Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee comment on the proposals currently being considered within the remit of this committee.

Children's O&S 1st December

The report was presented by Michele Lucas.

Noting the three main categories outlined in the report, the Chair questioned how Thurrock compared to other Local Authorities (LAs) on pricing. Michele Lucas answered that Grangewaters's pricing was deliberately charged lower than competitors as the service aimed to support families instead of just trying to recover costs. Nurseries were priced in line with competitors as it linked to the national funding formula and Thurrock's nurseries did not attract fee paying parents which was why the service had the nurseries in Tilbury to support parents on low income. The TACC had come into the service last year and prices had been kept at a reasonable level as small community groups preferred to use council owned spaces so the service wished to continue to support the community to ensure costs were covered.

The Committee commented that the increase in fees were needed and that they were small and fair. Councillor Muldowney sought more detail in regards to paragraph 3.5 and the operation hours of the 30 hours of childcare which she expressed concern about. She sought reassurance that parents who needed this provision would still have this. She also noted that although the increases were small in this service, there were increases across all services in the Council which would add up and raised concerns of financial hardships for some people who would be affected by the increases overall. Michele Lucas said that the nurseries in Tilbury and Grays were targeted towards single parents and the service liaised with employers to ensure that the 30 hours provision covered hours outside the core hours of 9am to 5pm particularly for jobs that were worked in shift patterns. The service intended to ensure that there was a strong Early Years provision to support parents who wanted to get back into work.

RESOLVED:

1.1 That Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the revised fees and charges proposals including those no longer applicable.

1.2 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.

[Cleaner Greener and Safer O&S 3rd December](#)

The report was presented by Jahir Ali

The Appendix shown in the agenda had set out the fees and charges in relation to services within the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from the Environment and Highways directorate. The fees and charges in relation to services within the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from the Place directorate had been omitted from the agenda to which Jahir Ali stated there had been a few increases and would provide details. The fees and charges that were charged fell into three categories – statutory – regulatory and discretionary. There was one increase within the statutory area which was the COMAH emergency planning charge which had three charges in that area. Two of those charges were being recommended for removal and the remaining charge to be increased to allow re-charges to cover the staff member costs who undertaking that service.

There were 74 increases within the discretionary charge related to services the Council provided. The anticipation would be to make sure that all discretionary services broke even and became cost neutral. Members were referred to the following areas of interest - outdoor sports and open spaces – with proposals to increase the fees and charges between 4% and 5%. This was one area that was not cost neutral at this time but a lot of work was being undertaken to try and reduce those costs with it potentially taking Thurrock three years to become cost neutral in those areas. Other areas to have small increases were allotments from 4% between £2.50 and £5.00 and burials with a 1% to 3% increase between £2 and £56. There were other areas that were statutory charges which had been set by government legislation. That out of the 551 items within this overview and scrutiny remit only 75 had been increased with the overall majority of the charges not changing.

These charges would take effect from the 5 April 2021 unless otherwise stated. In preparing the proposed fees and charges, directorates had worked within the charging framework and commercial principles set out in Section three of the report. Also taken into account was the

effect that Covid-19 had and would continue to have on services, residents and the local economy.

Councillor Redsell questioned the proposed increase in burials to which Jahur Ali stated this had been increased in line with inflation and that a benchmark exercise had been undertaken with neighbouring boroughs and Thurrock was in line with those. Councillor Redsell stated that she felt this increase was inappropriate at this time.

Councillor Fletcher questioned whether the members of the committee this evening were being expected to note or challenge the report. Jahur Ali confirmed that the fees and charges were being presented to members this evening and Daren Spring stated this was part of the committee's role to scrutinise the report and to comment accordingly.

Councillor J Kent agreed that all would like to see cost neutral if possible but stated he could not agree those above inflation increases. That the Council should be encouraging sport, exercise and healthy activities not making it more difficult by increasing the charges.

Jahur Ali mentioned the support for sports clubs and groups provided by the Council. Over £50,000 had been secured for local clubs and were supported to apply to Sport England, ECB grants and other discretionary grants to which Councillor Redsell confirmed clubs mentioned had received support.

Members had a discussion on recommendation 2 in regards to the director delegated authority being sought via Cabinet to allow Fees and Charges to be varied within a financial year in response to commercial requirements. Members stated their disagreement with this and agreed the recommendation should be refused and reworded.

Jahur Ali confirmed that any new charges being brought in would need to follow the process of being presented at this committee. The director delegated authority was for charges that happened in year and for these items that needed urgent decision.

The Chair referred Members to the recommendations to which Members agreed to recommendation 1 and disagreed with recommendation 2 and have therefore reworded to reflect their comments.

RESOLVED

- 1. That Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the revised fees, including those no longer applicable; and comment on the proposals currently being considered within the remit of this committee.**
- 2. That Cleaner, Greener and Safer 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 commercial requirements. The Cleaner Greener and Safer Committee considered this recommendation and ask Cabinet to refuse this recommendation as the committee were not in agreement.**

Health and Wellbeing O&S 14th January

Roger Harris introduced the report that had been presented to this committee on two other separate occasions and stated the only discretionary charge where there was any increase proposed for 2021/22 charges and had the biggest impact in terms of finances was domiciliary care. That the

Council needed to look at possible ways to maintain the current level of service which had the least impact on those people who received the service.

Catherine Wilson detailed the outcome of the consultation that had been supported by the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 3 September 2020 and agreed by Cabinet on the 16 September 2020, together with the three options for charging for domiciliary care and asked for any comments on the recommendation to introduce a phased increase in charging for domiciliary care.

Members agreed that the response rate was good and had highlighted the good work that carers undertook and the value of the services being paid for. It was also noted that by all members that it was sad that the Council had to raise these charges and that it was inappropriate and unfair this had been put on Thurrock residents at this time of their lives.

At 9.15pm, Councillor Ralph suspended standing orders.

Members discussed the recommendations and how this transition could be made smoother and suggested that this could be phased over four years. Members agreed to add a further recommendation which would be put forward to Cabinet. That recommendation read as follows:

“For the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee to recommend the introduction of a phased increase over four years”.

RESOLVED

- 1. For Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review the results of the Consultation regarding proposed charges for Domiciliary Care Services detailed in section 2.4.**
- 2. For Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review the three options for charging for Domiciliary Care detailed in section 3.1.**
- 3. For Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee to comment on the recommendation to introduce a phased increase in charging for Domiciliary Care Services detailed in section 4.1.**
- 4. For the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee to recommend the introduction of a phased increase over four years.**

[Planning, Transport and Regeneration O&S 8th December](#)

The report was presented by Andy Millard.

Councillor Anderson questioned how often fees and charges changed throughout the year through Director delegated authority. Andy Millard answered that this was quite infrequent and if fees or charges had to change, it was discussed with the Portfolio Holder beforehand. He went on to say that the last financial year had one fee changed which was Build Control fees as it was necessary to ensure the service remained competitive against neighbouring Local Authorities (LAs). Councillor Gerrish commented that any changes in fees that occurred through Director

delegated authority be brought to Committee for checking before implementation to which Andy Millard answered the comments would be fed back to Cabinet.

Councillor Gerrish sought more detail on the bus timetable changes outlined in the report. Councillor Kerin questioned why there was a charge for a third resident parking permit; and what the process of the benchmarking exercise for the resident parking permits was as this was not evidenced within the report. Peter Wright explained that the charge related to the A3 paper bus timetable display which would be removed as there was not enough space for these to be displayed. The A4 paper bus timetable displays would still be in place. Regarding the resident parking permits, Peter Wright would feed back to the relevant Officer to provide the Committee with more information on the benchmarking exercise that had taken place.

RESOLVED:

1.1 That Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted 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 Planning, Transport and Regeneration 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.