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To: Cabinet
Date: 13 December 2023
Status: Key Decision
Head of Service: Lydia Morrison, Interim Director, Governance and Finance Services
Cabinet Member: Councillor Tim Prater, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Governance

SUBJECT: FEES AND CHARGES 2024/25

SUMMARY: This report focuses on the proposed fees and charges for 2024/25 which will contribute towards meeting the council's 2024/25 budget objectives and Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

The Council's Fees and Charges Policy was revised and agreed by Cabinet on 15 November 2017 (report C/17/54) and was last re-approved in December 2022 (see appendix 1, report C/22/70).

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Cabinet is asked to agree the recommendations set out below because the fees and charges are essential to support the delivery of the MTFs and Budget Strategy.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note report C/xx/xx.
2. To receive and note the Fees and Charges Policy for 2024/25 at Appendix 1.
3. To approve:
 - (i) The 2024/25 fees and charges which are set at the discretion of the Council for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account, as outlined in Appendix 2;
 - (ii) The parking charges in Appendix 3;
 - (iii) The statutory charges subject to discretionary fees in Appendix 4.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Fees and Charges Policy sets out the Council's charging framework. The Policy is outlined within Appendix 1 in full. It is felt that the policy remains relevant and no changes to the policy are proposed at this time.
- 1.2 As has been the practice for a number of years, the proposal for 2024/25 is to apply the June CPI rate (for 2023: 7.9%) as the benchmark for price increases. There are exceptions to this principle where an inflationary increase is anticipated to have an adverse impact on demand or where it would place the charge out of line with comparable services in neighbouring councils.
- 1.3 The proposed discretionary fees and charges for 2024/25 are detailed at Appendices 2 to 4. A high level summary of the fees and charges areas are highlighted below.

2. DISCRETIONARY FEES AND CHARGES – APPENDIX 2

3.1 Corporate Services

- 2.1.1 Court Costs – no increase proposed as it is an exception to the Fees & Charges policy. Any increases must be justifiable in court.
- 2.1.2 Legal Fees – proposed increases are to bring the fees in line with the market and remove the previous 'bracketed' charging structure for development/planning agreements which was a set fee for the first 10 hours, followed by an hourly rate thereafter. Fees can be varied depending on value of transaction by the Monitoring Officer as sometimes the legal fee is more than the transaction to which it relates.

2.2 Housing & Operations

- 2.2.1 Housing – Most fees to rise in line with inflation, save specific exceptions such as refundable deposits.
- 2.2.2 Leaseholder Services – Fees have been benchmarked and there are no proposals to alter the management fees. Other administrative fees to rise in line with inflation.
- 2.2.3 All HRA resident charges to be increased by the inflation rate in line with the agreed policy. Rent setting will be considered separately through the January HRA Cabinet paper and is not subject to these inflationary increases.
- 2.2.4 Housing revenue account – new charge proposed for 'dispersed' Lifeline alarm service compared with those for a hardwired service.
- 2.2.5 Gas Safety Controlled Entry Visit – The Council's Gas Safety Policy includes a provision for gaining entry to a tenanted property to complete mandatory gas checks, where access has been denied by the tenant. The Council will be

recharging tenant regarding the cost of changing locks and completing the work at a cost detailed within Appendix 2 – attached.

2.3 Operations

2.3.1 Parking services – proposed increases in line with inflation.

2.3.2 Hire of Land – Fees have been increased with inflation, save for refundable deposits.

2.3.3 Public toilets, shingle extraction and corporate transactions – proposed increases in line with inflation.

2.3.4 Outdoor Sports and Recreation – proposed increases in line with inflation.

2.3.5 Beach huts – ancillary charges proposed to increase in line with inflation. Rental is covered separately by the lease agreements.

2.3.6 Memorial Benches & Trees – proposed increases in line with inflation. New charge proposed for new or additional plaques which are added to existing benches.

2.3.7 Private Lifeline – no proposed increases in order to remain competitive in the market.

2.4 Place

2.4.1 Planning Pre-Application Charging Schedule – all fees proposed to increase in line with inflation and then rounded to the nearest £5. The fees proposed are in line with the market.

2.4.2 Sale of documents – proposed increase in line with inflation for fixed charge items (local plan, core strategy review). However, variable costs for miscellaneous documents, based on staff time.

2.4.3 Waste & Recycling – it is proposed to add inflation to most waste charges, however there are 2 exceptions to this. Bulky household collection; the recommendation is the bulky waste collection fee is increased to £53 for 24/25 for up to three eligible items. The additional items collection fee is proposed to remain at £9 per item. Previous charges for a single item only would be below cost to the Council and only where multiple items were collected on the same visit would costs be fully covered. Second, for garden waste the annual subscription fee is currently £53. It is proposed that the annual subscription is increased for 24/25 to £60. This additional revenue would help offset some of general increases in the main contract costs due to recent high inflation.

2.4.4 Hythe Swimming Pool – no changes are proposed in the charges.

- 2.4.5 Taxi Licensing – most fees are proposed to increase by inflation but vehicle licenses, and single and multiple operator licences would otherwise require a formal consultation (under statute) and it is not proposed that these specific items are increased at this time.
- 2.4.6 Miscellaneous Licensing – most fees are proposed to rise in line with inflation which means fees will be broadly comparable to the mean averages calculated in a benchmarking exercise. There are a few exceptions to this. i) In order to ensure full recovery of costs for the ‘Application Fee for a Zoo Licence’, it is proposed that the current fee is increased by £792.40 which would increase the application fee to £1453.40 (rounded up to the nearest 10p) and this increase to be spread over 2 years. Increased to £1083.30 in 2024/25 and to £1453.40 in 2025/26. This increase has been calculated using the current hourly on costs of the Specialist who undertakes this work and the average number of hours spent on each of the 2 informal inspections including pre-inspection and post-inspection work, which is estimated to be 12 hours per inspection. The increase would ensure full cost recovery and bring the fee more in line with the calculated mean average. ii) Pavement Licenses – no increase is proposed as this is the statutory maximum.
- 2.4.7 Scrap Metal Licensing – proposed increases in line with inflation.
- 2.4.8 Personal & Premises Licenses - proposed increases in line with inflation.
- 2.4.9 Dog Control – All fees are proposed to increase by inflation, save the kennelling fees which are proposed higher in order to ensure cost recovery.
- 2.4.10 Pollution Environmental Health – proposed increases in line with inflation.
- 2.4.11 Food and Safety – most increases are proposed in line with inflation, save the ‘Food Export Certificate’; the initial fee for this does not include the examination of the consignment, which is required in order for the Certifying Officer to issue a certificate. It is proposed the fee structure and amounts are reconfigured: charging £109 for a Food Export Certificate & renaming the fee 'Export Health Certificate' to reflect the change in legislative requirements since the UK left the EU plus altering the name of 'additional charge per consignment where inspection is required' to 'Food export certificate - Additional charges' and charging £101 per hour of Officer time or part thereof.
- 2.4.12 Private Water Supply Sampling – proposed increases in line with inflation.
- 2.4.13 Caravan Site Licensing - proposed increases in line with inflation.
- 2.4.14 Cemeteries – all charges are proposed to rise in line with inflation, save for the removal of the existing charge for ‘Deed of grant’ and replacing this with 3 separate charges for different term lengths (as with other local authorities).
- 2.4.15 Hiring of council meeting rooms for all non-Folkestone & Hythe District Council meetings/functions – the time from which charges apply for evenings and

Saturdays is proposed to change to 7pm which is the usual time closing time for the Civic Centre. The remaining room charges are proposed to rise in line with inflation. For use of the drinks machine for 30 persons or more, this fee is based on a maximum of 60 drinks total.

2.4.16 Lost/unreturned ID cards – proposed increases are in line with inflation.

2.4.17 Life verifications – a new charge has been proposed for proof of life of certificates which is currently provided free.

3. PARKING CHARGES 2024/25 – APPENDIX 3

3.1 The majority of these charges have been increased by inflation and rounded up to the nearest 10p and/or uplifts as proposed by the service manager, with full details provided in the appendix attached to fully detail the proposed changes. Key matters to highlight are as follows:

i) For the Coastal Park, it is proposed to extend the chargeable hours from 6pm to 8pm.

ii) Proposed new evening charges for the Sandgate Road car park from 6pm-9pm.

iii) Parking suspensions: the admin charge is proposed for an inflationary increase which has been rounded up to the nearest £10, and the additional per day charge has increased above inflation to discourage lengthy suspensions (the suspended parking space daily charge should be more than the regular cost of a parking space).

iv) A new 3 month 'Folkestone & Hythe District Car Park Resident Permit' is proposed with a linear cost compared to the annual charge.

4. STATUTORY CHARGES SUBJECT TO DISCRETIONARY FEES – APPENDIX 4

4.1 Housing – proposed increases are in line with inflation.

4.2 Local Land charges – The majority of fees have been proposed to increase by inflation.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

5.1 A summary of the perceived risks follows:

Perceived risk	Seriousness	Likelihood	Preventative action
Income targets are not achieved resulting in a budget	High	Medium	All fees and charges and income budgets are reviewed in detail each year to ensure

Perceived risk	Seriousness	Likelihood	Preventative action
deficit			that they are reasonable and achievable.

6. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

7.1 Legal Officer's Comments (NM)

As a general rule, the Council is under a duty to act fairly in its decision-making, including exercising its discretion to increase relevant fees and charges. The Localism Act 2011 gives the Council a wide ambit of power to charge for its services and section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 gives the Council capacity to charge for relevant services; on the basis it is doing so without 'trading' (or making a profit).

7.2 Finance Officer's Comments (JS)

The financial implications are set out in the main body of the report.

7.3 Diversities and Equalities Implications (GE)

The budget report to Full Council in February 2024 will include an Equality Impact Assessment of the budget recommendations for 2024/25.

7.4 Climate Change Implications

As this report only presents the proposed fees and charges for 2024/25 there are no climate change implications arising from it.

8. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting.

Jonathan Smith – Chief Accountant
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 E-mail: jonathan.smith@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report:

Budget working papers

Appendices:

- Appendix 1 - Fees and Charges Policy
- Appendix 2 - Discretionary Fees and Charges Schedule
- Appendix 3 – Parking Schedule
- Appendix 4 - Statutory Fees Subject to Discretionary Charges Schedule

General Fees and Charges Policy

All fees and charges are subject to the following general policy.

1. There shall be full cost recovery so that general council taxpayers are not subsidising the costs of an optional service. Any exceptions to this rule can only be agreed by cabinet. Where there is a substantial change between the current charge and the full cost recovery amount, the increase can be staggered over a period of up to three financial years.

In addition:

2. Fees and charges are increased by the current rate of inflation (generally rounded up to the nearest 10p).

The main exceptions to this rule are:

- Court fees
- Room bookings at the civic centre – voluntary organisations
- Car parking – as subject to review in the Car Park Strategy
- Building control – subject to full cost recovery of building control chargeable element.
- Contract charges with other organisations which are subject to separate negotiations.
- Commercial activities - where fees and charges need to respond to market conditions or their ability to compete effectively for tenders. These will be discussed with the relevant portfolio holder at the appropriate time but will be on the basis of covering all costs at a minimum.
- Statutory charges - over which the council has no control and will be introduced as per the respective guidance and will not be subject to this policy.