

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8th December 2015

FEES AND CHARGES REVIEW 2016/17

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor John Fisher, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Jayne Pickering
Wards Affected	All Wards
Ward Councillor Consulted	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

To present the proposed fees and charges for 2016/17 for the Council's chargeable services.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider the fees and charges as included at Appendix 1 and recommend to the Executive Committee any changes to the fees proposed.

3. KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Comments relating to the individual services are shown in the appendix where the fees and charges have reduced or remained the same.
- 3.2 It is proposed that the fees and charges be increase from 1st January 2016, where an invoice has not already been raised covering the last quarter of the financial year or if there is a contractual notice period preventing this.

Financial Implications

- 3.3 The Council's Financial Regulation D11 requires an annual review of fees and charges to be undertaken. Traditionally, this review is carried out as part of the budget preparation cycle.
- 3.4 Officers have been asked to review all their Fees and Charges and a general increase of 3% has been applied following approval by Council.
- 3.5 A review has been undertaken of a number of charges to enable officers to understand the link between demand and price. Therefore some prices have reduced / not seen any increase, due to the impact on demand. These include

- Arrow Valley Astro Turf Pitch Hire (reduction in price)

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- Abbey Stadium Centre memberships (retain current price)
- Golf charges (retain current price)
- Land Charges (retain current price)
- Regulatory Services (retain current price)

There are a number of charges that have been increased at a different rate to that approved by Council due to officers reviewing these in more detail to enable additional increases that can be evidenced and justified. These are detailed below:

3.5.1 Leisure

Party Events –Officers have undertaken benchmarking across similar Leisure Centres that are located within a reasonable drive time to our facilities e.g.- Studley , Bromsgrove, Droitwich to enable comparison with the indicate the current price charged by our services in 15/16. For parties the charge is lower than comparable prices within other centres. The charge proposed for 16/17 (5% - 10% increase) will bring the service to a comparison with the average price charged.

Swimming Lessons – the rates for swimming lessons remain below other providers in the area. It is therefore proposed that an increase of 5% is applied to this service. There is a current level of demand for the lessons that cannot be met due to difficulties in recruiting teachers and therefore officers are considering other ways of ensuring the service has teachers for the lessons.

Palace Theatre – cost per week has increased to reflect the additional staff time to provide appropriate levels of support to the performance organisation

Allotments – the allotments with water have been increased to reflect the cost associated with having a standpipe within the individual allotment.

Community Centres – there are increases in the charges applicable to private organisations using the Councils facilities to better reflect the rate that would enable the Council to achieve best value from the rental of our facilities. In addition a number of benchmarking exercises have been undertaken to ensure the Council is charging a reasonable rate.

3.5.2 Planning and Regeneration

Building Control - Improving on efforts to maintain and increase market share, a further reduction in the number of published building control fees is proposed. Increasing numbers of rival private sector firms have used the publication of local authority fees as a vehicle to

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increase their own market share. In 2014 / 2015 a number of more mainstream work categories had their published fees withdrawn in favour of providing site specific quotations. This revised way of working has now bedded in amongst both officers and customers, many of whom are repeat customers and has proven to be beneficial. With the exception of the publication of archiving charges and the optional consultancy based hourly charge, it is now proposed to remove all the remaining published fees. The invitation to the customer to seek a site specific quotation is within the provisions of the Building (Local Authority Charges) Regulations 2010 and allows early contact with the customer to ensure the best possible chance of receiving a building regulations application. These final few work categories amount to around just 5% of fee earning applications. The increase in archiving and optional consultancy is to reflect the true cost to the Council of the administration time in delivering this service.

3.5.3 Private Sector Housing

Lifeline - installation charges have been increased to more accurately reflect the true cost of the service. The proposed fee of £35.00 is a reflection nearer to the true cost in officer time that it takes to complete an installation visit. There is more emphasis in that visit to profile our customers and find a holistic solution that meets their needs and sign post and refer on residents to other services where appropriate. This takes time and care and the charge remains up to 20% less than some other providers in the region.

3.5.4 Revenues – Court costs for Council Tax and Business Rates have to be calculated based on specific guidance on cost recovery and therefore the revised rates reflect this charge.

3.5.5 Cemetery / Crematorium- a separate report is included in this agenda item to propose changes to the crematorium charges. In relation to burial fees , it is proposed that the age for a child interment will be until the age of 17 not 16 as in previous years.

3.5.6 Licensing – legislation has ruled that taxi drivers should be given the option of a 3 year license and therefore the new proposed fees takes this into account.

Legal Implications

3.6 A number of statutes governing the provision of services covered by this report contain express powers or duties to charge for services. Where an express power to charge does not exist the Council has the power under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 to charge where the activity is incidental or conducive to or calculated to facilitate

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the Council's statutory function. The details of the powers to levy particular charges may be obtained from the author of this report.

Service/Operational Implications

- 3.7 The fees and charges will be applied to all services with effect from 1st January 2016.

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.8 No implications have been identified.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

If the Council's fees and charges are not increased at least in line with inflation each year then the level of subsidy will increase which has a direct impact on the level of Council Tax or the Housing Revenue Account.

5. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Fees and Charges

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

There were no background papers identified.

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