

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 21st October, 2014

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Jane Potter (Chair), Councillor Gay Hopkins (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Joe Baker, Michael Braley (substituting for Councillor Paul Swansborough), David Bush, Andrew Fry, Carole Gandy, Alan Mason, and Nina Wood-Ford (substituting for Councillor Pat Witherspoon)

Also Present:

Councillor Phil Mould

Officers:

S Hanley, J Pickering, J Godwin, J Willis, L Tompkin, A Wyre and C Walker

Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and A Scarce

EXTRACT FROM THE MINUTES

40. FEES AND CHARGES REPORT - PRE-SCRUTINY

Members received the Fees and charges Report for pre-scrutiny and were advised that the Heads of Service had been invited to attend and would highlight any fees and charges which had increased outside of the standard 3 per cent. It was anticipated that these new rates would be set with effect from 1st January 2015 and in future would be reviewed every calendar year as opposed to financial year. The average 3 per cent increase would provide a total income of around £100,000 which would be included within the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Leisure and Cultural Services

Officers highlighted a number of areas where an increase of slightly more than 3 per cent had been put in place and informed Members that often this was purely to round up (or in a small number of cases down) the amounts charged to make this manageable, particularly

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for reception at the leisure centres, when providing people with change. A number of items in respect of block booking had increased by around 5 per cent, and it was explained that as these bookings involved between 10-12 people, the increase per head equated to only a relatively small amount.

Members questioned the increase in Swimming Lessons, particularly those for Juniors, in light of the recent water related fatalities. It was felt that by holding the price of at least the Junior Swimming Lessons that the Council could show that they were acknowledging the concerns around water safety and acting on them. The Committee discussed whether the potential to make no increase had been considered and the role of the schools in teaching young people to swim. Officers explained that under Key Stage 2 there was a level of competence which pupils were expected to reach (to be able to swim 25m). It was understood that the schools had various funding streams available to them to provide this activity, but each school had different arrangements and it was often the cost of transporting pupils to the swimming baths, which had an impact on the lessons they provided. It was believed that parents often used the swimming lessons provided by the Council to supplement those provided by the schools.

The following areas were highlighted and discussed in respect of Leisure and Cultural Services fees and charges:

- The use of the rounding up and rounding down process.
- Charges for Sports Development services in order for people to be given the opportunity to participate in leisure activities in the community.
- The new pricing policy for community centres implemented in order to encourage new groups to develop and grow by initially paying a reduced rate. A sampling exercise had been carried out as part of this process.
- Increase in allotment charges. It was confirmed that discussions with users and allotment groups had taken place.
- Increase in civic suite commercial charges and the overhead costs incurred when hired out at the weekend.
- Reduced hire rates for community groups.

Community Services

The Committee was informed that all increases were within the 3 per cent threshold. It was noted that there had not been an increase in the fees for the Dial a Ride service. Members were advised that it had been agreed with service users that an increase would be implemented every three years in line with inflation.

Environmental Services

Officers highlighted the following points within the report:

- For the bulky household waste service an instance quote could be provided.
- The lack of space within the cemetery. There was confusion in respect of the interment of cremated remains and Officers agreed to provide further clarification for Members outside of the meeting.
- Reduction in charge for use of chapel for burial service at off peak times.

Worcestershire Regulatory Services

Officers highlighted the following matters in relation to the fees and charges for Worcestershire Regulatory Services:

- The increases for Pet Shops, Dog Breeding and Animal Boarding were 6 per cent and this was to ensure they were comparable with the rates charged by the rest of the County.
- In respect of Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles a charge had been introduced for the Knowledge Test to cover administration.
- The remainder of the charges were set by statute and therefore no changes had been made.

Corporate, Customer Access and Legal and Democratic Services

Members were informed that there were no changes to the Corporate Charges. In respect of the Customer Access and Financial Support charges, Surveyors Fees had increased by 3.9 per cent to reflect the cost of the service.

It was highlighted that there was now a charge for a Deed of Variation which referred to complex s106 agreements and this charge had not previously been made.

Housing Services

Officers informed Members that there were no significant changes to the charges for Housing Services other than those in respect of St David's House, which had previously been agreed.

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Planning and Regeneration

Officers highlighted the following matters:

- The move to charging the actual cost of providing documents, for example the schedule of buildings of local interest for less than the current cost.
- The availability of documents via the internet free of charge.
- The inclusion of an additional charge in respect of domestic extensions to a single building. This charge related to the need to employ an outside contractor to certify for example electric work which had not been fitted by a professional electrician.
- The increase in charges for archived applications was above 3 per cent and due to remote storage of these documents.
- Members were reminded that the Building Control department was not able to either make a loss or a profit from the charges it made for services.

In respect of recommendation 2 in the main report, Officers explained that due to the commercial nature of the business of Leisure and Cultural Services by granting the Head of Service delegated powers to change the fees it enabled him to ensure that for example the Sports Hall at the Abbey Stadium could be utilised at a reduced rate on a Friday evening, thereby allowing the Council to maximise usage of the facility.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the rate for Junior Swimming Lessons remain at the current 2014/15 rate;**
- 2) the fees and charges for 2015/16 as set out in Appendix 1-9 of the report be approved, subject to the recommendation detailed above, other than in the cases where;**
 - (a) Fees or charges are statutory,**
 - (b) Fees and charges are set externally, or**
 - (c) Other Council approved circumstances apply; and**
- 3) the Head of Leisure and Cultural Service be given delegation to alter the leisure fees and charges by a variation of up to 30%.**

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.37 pm