

Overview & Scrutiny

No Direct Ward Relevance

Committee

15th October 2008

10. Charging for Non-Statutory Planning Services

(Report of Acting Head of Planning)

1. Purpose of Report

To detail proposed charging procedures and amounts, following agreement in principle in April 2008.

2. Recommendation

The Committee is asked to RESOLVE that:

1. The schedule of charges at appendix 1 be reported to full Council for adoption and subsequently implemented by planning services from 1st January 2009; and
2. The co-ordination of the remainder of the planning teams across the County be encouraged by Officers in an attempt to reach a Cross-County consistent approach to fee charging.

3. Financial, Legal, Policy and Risk Implications

Financial

- 3.1 The fees and charges proposed in this report cover existing services, namely permitted development enquiries, pre-application advice and post-decision amendments, that are currently provided to customers free of charge, and would generate additional income within Planning Services. There may be a small loss due to internal charging for the processing of payments, but this would be minimal.

Legal

- 3.2 The authority cannot make profit from charging for services. However it is able to cover the administrative and overhead costs of service provision providing this is made clear at the point of charging. Therefore, the proposed fees would not be charging for the advice provided.

Policy

- 3.3 It has been the policy of Planning Services to provide these services because they are perceived to be of benefit to customers, the wider

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community, Officers and the overall quality of the built environment of Redditch Borough. However, this good practice of service provision, being at a level above that required through the statutory planning function, comes at a significant cost to the authority.

Risk

- 3.4 In adopting the proposed fees and charges, there may be a small risk that some people would not seek advice prior to implementing developments, and that this could lead to additional enforcement caseload. However this risk is considered to be minimal, and could be covered by existing arrangements.

Report

4. **Background**

- 4.1 At the instigation of the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group, the Planning Services team have been reviewing their existing service provision and the associated scale of fees and charges. The Planning Services team have also researched the rates and types of charges levied by other local planning authorities, to inform these proposals.
- 4.2 Planning Services currently provide a range of high quality customer services associated with but not required as part of its statutory function. For a small number of these services, a charge is already levied, for example for Local Land Charge Searches. A small fee is also charged for copies made at the request of the public. These existing charges are reviewed and updated annually, and it is the intention of officers that the charges proposed here would also be reviewed in the same way and at the same time.
- 4.3 The previous report proposed charging for three types of services:

Permitted Development Enquiries

These are enquiries frequently received from residents of the Borough who wish to carry out minor developments, mostly to their residential properties, where advice is sought on whether the submission of a planning application is required prior to carrying out the works, or whether they benefit from 'Permitted Development'.

Pre-application advice

These are enquiries relating to whether proposed developments which require planning permission are likely to gain favourable recommendations or not. Discussions over details of proposals and

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their compliance or otherwise with current planning policy aid the applicant and the LPA when the application is submitted.

Post-decision amendments

In situations where planning permission has been granted, but then the applicants have sought to implement a slightly different scheme, a post-decision amendment to a planning application is proposed. Officers receive such proposals and consider them against the legislation and the planning history of the site, and respond confirming whether or not the amendment is acceptable. If it is not acceptable, advice on making a further planning application is also provided.

5. Key Issues

- 5.1 Charges are proposed in order that they go some way to recovering the Council's cost of providing these services, without making any profit (which would be illegal) and without discouraging members of the public from using the services.
- 5.2 To that end, information regarding the costs of the various services has been compiled and analysed, and a discussion amongst officers regarding reasonable levels of fees has taken place.
- 5.3 To ensure that people are aware of the services on offer, what is required and what will be charged, an information leaflet has been drafted which would be provided on the website and in hard copies in reception, as well as in a mail-shot to regular local agents. Training of front line staff will also be provided in order to assist members of the public when making initial enquiries. A copy of the proposed leaflet is provided at appendix 2 for information.

6. Other Implications

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|------------------|---|---|
| Community Safety | - | This is a key issue in the planning process, and its early identification and consideration should assist in improved outcomes. |
| Human Resources | - | none known |
| Social Exclusion | - | This is a key issue in the planning process, and its early identification and consideration should assist in improved outcomes. |
| Sustainability | - | This is a key issue in the planning process, and its early identification |

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and consideration should assist in improved outcomes.

7. Conclusion

7.1 The proposals for fee-charging would result in a more structured and clear process with regard to the delivery of permitted development, pre-application and post-application advice for the public and planning Officers. Furthermore, it would allow for service users to be sure about the service being provided and the timescales in which they can expect contact.

7.2 The charges proposed are minimal when considered in the context either of the amount expended on even a small development project, or relative to the imposed planning fees for applications. They are therefore considered to be reasonable charges to cover some of the costs of providing a good quality service in line with best practice guidance.

7.3 The proposals would assist in providing additional income to the planning service, as well as more certainty over informal responses from officers.

8. Background Papers

8.1 The previous report to exec was sent on 2nd April 2008.

9. Consultation

There has been no consultation other than with relevant Borough Council Officers.

10. Author of Report

The author of this report is Ailith Rutt (Development Control Manager), who can be contacted on extension 3374 (email: ailith.rutt@redditchbc.gov.uk) for more information.

11. Appendices

Appendix 1	-	Charging Schedule as proposed
Appendix 2	-	Information leaflet proposed for publicity purposes

APPENDIX 1: PROPOSED CHARGING SCHEDULE

Type of enquiry	Size of proposal	Charge
PD Enquiry	Householder	£15
	Other	£35
Pre-application discussions	Householder	£25
	Minor/other	£50
	Major (small scale)	£100
	Major (large scale)	£250
Post-decision amendments	Householder	£15
	Minor/other	£25
	Major	£50

Additional charges:

Cost of a meeting	£50
Cost of additional correspondence	£20
PPA	To be agreed by relevant parties as part of process

All charges to include VAT for simplicity and clarity