

Committee(s): Planning and Licensing	Date: 9 th December 2020
Subject: Fees and Charges	Wards Affected: All
Report of: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Director of Corporate Resources	Public
Report Author/s: Name: Margaret Donaldson, Interim Corporate Finance Manager Telephone: 01277 312500 E-mail: Margaret.Donaldson@brentwood.gov.uk	For Decision

Summary

Fees and charges made by the Council for various services are reviewed on an annual basis by the relevant Committees relating to the services provided. Recommended amendments to the fees and charges are incorporated into the budget setting process to take effect from the following financial year.

Services areas have reviewed their fees and charges and submitted schedules to finance to co-ordinate.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

R1. Approve the proposed charges for 2021/22 as attached in Appendix A, B, C, D and E subject to the annual budget setting process.

Main Report

Introduction and Background

1. The Council has a number of fees and charges relating to the services it provides. As part of the budget setting process, these charges are reviewed on an annual basis. Whilst some of the fees and charges are statutory, and therefore determined through legislation, the Council must also review its charges for discretionary services to ensure that they reflect the current costs of service provision.
2. The individual charges that are being proposed are set out in Appendix A, B, C D and E of this report

Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

3. The proposed fees are based on a calculation of the costs involved in administering the various areas of work, apart from where there is statutory charge or where the fees are set by Government.
4. The Council where possible will adopt a full cost recovery of fees and charges.
5. It is proposed that all current non statutory fees and charges are increased by inflation, which is taken as an average of CPI. This is estimated to be 1.9% and has been included in guidance to service managers. This is to reflect increase in costs to maintain the services. However, managers are able to increase fees and charges above this recommended percentage increase as long as the change can be justified within the supporting covering sheet to the appendix.
6. Within each appendix a covering sheet explains the following
 - Objectives and rationale behind the fees and charges
 - The proposed change in fee
 - Justification for this revision
 - Any benchmarking undertaken to aid in informing the level of charge
 - Whether any consultation needs to be considered
 - Expected income from the proposed fees and charges.
7. The fees and charges with proposed changes are:

Planning Development Management

- Pre app advice.
- Proposing to completely change the menu we offer and essentially this is a completely different service
- We have worked with our agents to understand exactly what they require from this service, reviewed internal resource and have built this service to cater accordingly.
- The cost is calculated on a cost recovery basis, taking into consideration staff time and cost of specialised consultees.

Land Charges

- The increase proposed is 1.9% in line with the council's corporate increase regarding fees & charges. This is based on the average CPI inflation increase

Building Control

- Fees are proposed to remain the same as 2020/21 charges
- The service has seen a Covid-19 related drop in income and so an increase in fees does not seem to be appropriate at this time.
- The service is not aware of other local authorities looking to increase their charges for 2021/22.

Licensing

- The fees are statutory set or based on cost recovery
- Fees based on cost recovery are proposed to remain the same as 2020/21 charges
- The service has seen a Covid-19 related drop in income, and so a full review of fees based on cost recovery will take place next year when the full impact of the pandemic can be fully assessed.
- The charge for the DBS check has been separated from the application fee for driver licenses to accommodate the need to use the DBS update service, in line with recent taxi guidance. There is no actual change to the total fee.

8. Proposed changes identified are explained within each covering sheet appendix.

Reasons for Recommendation

Officers review fees and charges annually and this will be used to inform the 2021/22 budget setting process.

Consultation

None required.

References to Corporate Plan

To ensure the provision of efficient and effective services of our residents and businesses.

Implications

Financial Implications

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All costs associated with providing chargeable services have been reviewed in order to ensure, fees and charges are fully cost recoverable. The fees referred to in this report inform the 2021/22 budget setting process.

Any proposed changes have been considered in terms of impact on the budgeted income levels along with usage/volume. With the ongoing financial challenges, the Council is facing, members and officers should have a clear understanding of what drives the service income, in order to maintain the level of service at reasonable rates for residents.

Economic impacts of COVID-19 have been taken into consideration by the service in reviewing the relevant fees and charges.

The VAT liability of each fee and charge have been reviewed by finance and are indicated on the appendices

Using discretionary fees and charges is one of the key income generating options available to local authorities. Section 93 of the 2003 Local Government Act allows authorities to charge for services that they have a power (not a duty) to provide. Income earned from these charges are restricted to the cost of providing them, there is no restriction on how these costs are calculated.

Legal Implications

Name & Title: Amanda Julian, Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

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The recommendations set out within this report are lawful and within the Council's powers and duties. There is an existing legal framework for charging for discretionary services including s93 Local Government Act 2003 and s1 Localism Act 2011 ('the general power of competence'). Where a fee is not prescribed by statute, the Council can set its own charges. Those charges should not exceed the costs of providing the service.

Decision makers must have due regard to the Council's statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010 to eliminate unlawful discrimination and advance equality of opportunity between applicants. This includes where the Council sets fees and charges.

The Council by publishing its fees and charges to satisfy the Transparency agenda

Economic Implications

Name/Title: Phil Drane, Director of Strategic Planning

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It is important that the Council maintain a robust budget. Setting fees and charges is an important part of this. These inform how the Council interacts with residents, businesses, partners and customers through the provision of certain services. This provision of services can have benefits to the wider local economy.

Background Papers

4th March Ordinary Council Budget report

Appendices to this report

Appendix A: Proposed fees and charges – Planning Development Management

Appendix B: Proposed fees and charges – Land Charges

Appendix C: Proposed fees and charges – Planning Policy

Appendix D: Proposed fees and charges – Building Control

Appendix E: Proposed fees and charges – Licensing