

METROPOLITAN BOROUGH OF KNOWSLEY

To: The Mayor and Members of the Council

Meeting: 6 March 2019

Wards Affected: Borough-wide

Executive Remit: All

Non-Key Decision

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (RESOURCES)

2019/20 FEES AND CHARGES

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises the key issues which were considered by the Cabinet on 13 February 2019 relating to the 2019/20 schedule of fees and charges for Council services. The information in this report can now be used to inform the Council's budget considerations.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members of the Council are recommended to note the Cabinet's approval of fees and charges for 2019/20 as set out in the Fees and Charges report on 13 February 2019.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Fees and charges are reviewed at least annually by the relevant Head of Service in consultation with the Executive Director (Resources) and the relevant Cabinet Member. The Cabinet agreed a full schedule of fees and charges for 2019/20 on 13 February 2019 for implementation with effect from 1 April 2019 (unless otherwise specified).

3.2 Each service determines the degree to which an activity recovers its costs, and the resultant price at which an activity will be charged. The full cost of a service takes into account all of the costs incurred by the Council in delivering that service, including service overheads and the relevant share of Council-wide costs. Full costs are recovered wherever possible, but Heads of Service have also considered why this might not be appropriate for social, policy, or market reasons.

- 3.3 Some of the fees charged by the Council are set out in statute and therefore the Authority has no discretion to vary them. In addition, some fee levels are set in accordance with national guidelines based on best practice. In the latter cases, there is still the option to increase or reduce fees in line with the Corporate Charging Policy principles.
- 3.4 In setting fees and charges, there is a general assumption that each Head of Service will ensure that relevant cost inflation pressures for the coming year are recovered through an equivalent inflationary increase to discretionary fees and charges. Where discretionary fees and charges are not increased in this way (for example, where such an increase is considered inappropriate due to market conditions, forecast levels of demand for the service, or where the service is, or has recently been, subject to review), cost inflation increases will have to be managed within existing resources to avoid unfunded budget pressures.

4. KEY ISSUES RELATING TO THE PROPOSED 2019/20 FEES AND CHARGES

- 4.1 All of the fees and charges proposed to the Cabinet were set out at Appendix A to the associated report on 13 February 2019. In considering overall proposals for the Authority's 2019/20 budget, the Council may wish to note a number of particular issues which were reported to the Cabinet and are detailed in the following paragraphs.

4.2 Registrar Service

On 30 November 2018, a series of regulations were laid in Parliament in order to take effect from 16 February 2019. Those regulations make the following changes to certificate fees, which have been agreed with the national panel for registration:-

- The three-tier certificate fee system will be removed and replaced by a single (standard) fee of £11 regardless of when an application is made. This £11 fee also applies to a short birth certificate; and,
- The introduction of a statutory priority certificate fee of £35 for a 24-hour service.

4.3 *Legal Services*

Fees for providing property search information have been reviewed to ensure that the costs involved in providing the service are fully recovered and to reflect increased income targets for 2019/20. The Cabinet agreed increases in the fees ranging from 9.4% and 11.8%. The fees have been benchmarked against other local authorities in the Liverpool City Region and the North West. A number of authorities currently charge fees which are significantly higher than those agreed for 2019/20.

4.4 *Adult Social Care*

4.4.1 A new charge is proposed for termination fees as part of the administration of deferred charges. A deferred charge agreement is an arrangement with the Council which lets people use the value of their homes to help pay care home costs. The Council has operated deferred charges for a number of years, but has never charged for termination fees. The Cabinet agreed to make an additional charge from 2019/20 to cover the legal and administrative costs when terminating such agreements.

4.4.2 If someone loses the capacity to manage their finances and has not made arrangements in advance, the Council can become an Appointee to take responsibility for that person's financial affairs. As part of this service, the Council is proposing to introduce prepayment cards. This will provide clients with more flexibility and independence to manage aspects of their finances. This new facility is anticipated to be introduced during 2019/20 once technical arrangements have been completed with the relevant bank. The Cabinet agreed a new charge to recover the cost of the card and ensure that there is no impact on the Council's revenue budgets.

4.4.3 As Appointee, the Council can also charge for the costs incurred in managing the individual's finances. The service has reviewed its charges for management of Appointeeship accounts and has benchmarked the charges against neighbouring authorities. On this basis, the Cabinet agreed to increase the fee from £20 to £40 every four weeks so that the charge is in line with those of neighbouring local authorities.

4.5 *Licensing*

Under the Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1976, all charges for street trading, hackney carriages and private hire licences must be set to recover the estimated cost of operating the associated service. Any increase or reduction in fees can only be made to address any under- or over-recovery of such costs over a three-year cycle. All other licensing fees are set in line with legislative requirements. Under the Council's Constitution, licensing fees were agreed by the Licensing Committee at on 17 January 2019 in order to provide for a statutory consultation period before they are implemented.

4.6 *Libraries*

Fees and charges relating to the Libraries service are reviewed each year to ensure that they are appropriate in the Knowsley context and in comparison to charges made by neighbouring local authorities. The latest such review has taken into account reductions in the opening hours and access to Knowsley libraries, some small differences compared to neighbouring library services and the potential negative effects on Knowsley residents. The Cabinet noted that the Council generates very low amounts of income through fees and charges; a 10% increase in fines would generate only £220 a year (assuming that there was no impact on customer behaviour). In this context, the Cabinet agreed not to increase fees and charges for 2019/20.

4.7 *The Venue*

4.7.1 Charges for food and drink at The Venue are continually reviewed in the light of changing market conditions and prices, and the charges agreed for 2019/20 reflect the latest such position. The charges will continue to be monitored throughout the year in the light of cost recovery and sales volumes and adjusted accordingly.

4.7.2 The Cabinet agreed that the charges for Wedding Packages should remain unchanged. The Cabinet also agreed to increase Room Hire rates and additional charges in order to reflect demand and an estimated increase in premises costs.

4.8 *Town Centres*

A new charging regime for the use of promotional space in each of the Borough's town centres was approved in consultation with the Regeneration and Economic Development Portfolio Holder on 20 June 2018. The new policy included a charge for commercial and promotional activities in town centres (such as promotional stands set up by private companies). As these are relatively new charges, the Cabinet agreed not to increase them at this time. Charges for future years will be reviewed and benchmarked against other town centre locations.

4.9 *Tower Hill Community Centre*

4.9.1 The Cabinet agreed to increase charges for room hire at the Tower Hill Community Centre between 8.00am and 8.00pm from £17 per hour to £20 per hour (with a 50% reduction for agreed concessions). This would bring the charges into line with the charges at other community centres in the Borough. The Cabinet further agreed that the evening rate (after 8.00pm) and weekend rate of £23 per hour would remain unchanged as there is very little demand for this service.

4.9.2 The previous health support provider at the Centre has now ceased its use of the facility, and local community groups plan to set up their own health-focussed support instead. These groups have approached the Council with a view to making a block booking to carry on their work. To help to establish the new arrangements in the Centre, the Cabinet agreed that the charge for block bookings should remain at £15 per hour in 2019/20.

4.10 *Highways*

4.10.1 The cost and duration of the Council's skip permits have been compared with those offered by neighbouring local authorities. This comparison has revealed that charges range from £10 in Liverpool to £25 in Halton for two-weekly permits, while Sefton charges £17 for a weekly permit. For Knowsley, the Cabinet agreed to increase the weekly permit charge from £15 to £17 in 2019/20, which would be in line with the charge made by Sefton. It is considered that a weekly charge provides more incentive for companies to remove skips in a timely manner.

4.10.2 No change was made with regard to Penalty Charge Notices, which are set in accordance with national guidance and are currently comparable with those charged by other local authorities in the Liverpool City Region.

4.10.3 Some parking bays in the Borough have limited parking or waiting restrictions. Applications are made to the Council for the suspension of these restrictions (e.g. by builders for the siting of skips or contractors carrying out traffic management works). A charge of £75 for suspensions was introduced in 2018/19. Further analysis across other neighbouring local authorities suggests a graded charge (based on length of occupation) would encourage minimal occupation time of highway kerbside space. The Cabinet therefore agreed to introduce various graded charges in 2019/20 (as set out at Appendix A to the Cabinet report) based on the length of the suspension and to cease the standard £75 charge.

4.11 *Town Centre Car Parking*

Town centre car parking charges were reviewed by the Economic Growth and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee in 2018, and the charges for 2019/20 reflect the outcome of that review. The Cabinet agreed that there should be no increase in charges in 2019/20. Members are reminded that an increase in the duration of stay from 2 hours to 3 hours for the same charge of £1.20 (including VAT) was introduced from August 2018 in line with the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review.

4.12 *Building Control*

4.12.1 On 21 November 2018, the Cabinet agreed to the establishment of a shared service arrangement for Building Control services for Halton and Knowsley Councils, with a joint structure to be hosted by Knowsley Council until March 2020. The shared service arrangement commenced on 1 January 2019. Building Control charges in Knowsley and Halton are currently identical and it is intended to retain this approach. The current charges are considered to be competitive and in line with other North West Building Control bodies. As the new collaborative service becomes established, charges will be reviewed so that they remain competitive in the market.

4.12.2 A comparison of charges for the provision of Building Control information found that Knowsley was charging significantly less than other authorities in some instances. This imbalance has been addressed in the charges agreed for 2019/20, resulting in a significant increase in some instances.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Resources

The expected impact of the agreed changes to fees and charges has been included in indicative service budgets for 2019/20. The financial position of the services will be monitored and any unplanned ongoing impact will need to be reflected in each service's future year budget proposals.

5.2 Other Resources

There are no other resource implications arising from this report.

6. EQUALITY AND SOCIAL VALUE IMPACT

6.1 Equality and Diversity

There are no issues arising from the Equality Impact Assessment for this report, which is attached at Appendix A. The full schedule of Fees and Charges was approved by the Cabinet on 13 February 2019.

6.2 Social Value

There are no social value implications arising directly from this report.

7. COMMUNICATION ISSUES

The fees and charges will be communicated to employees and service users so that they are in place with effect from 1 April 2019.

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Executive Director (Resources)

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Appendices:-
Appendix A Equality Impact Assessment

Background Documents:-
None

APPENDIX A

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Service Area: Financial Management Service	Head of Service: Head of Financial Management	Completed by: Tracy Burgess	Date: 15 February 2019
Title:	2019/20 Fees and Charges		
Brief Description:	This report provides a summary of the schedule of fees and charges agreed by Cabinet on 13 February 2019.		
Give details, with evidence, of the impact of the policy/plan/project on each of the protected characteristics in relation to the general duty:-			
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation2. Advancing equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and those who don't share it3. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't			
Does the proposal have a direct impact on people?	No. The full schedule of fees and charges was approved by the Cabinet on 19 February 2019. An Equality Impact Assessment for this report is not necessary as there are no decisions which impact directly on people of different groups and the decisions do not discriminate against any particular group of people.		