

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE and PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

07 January 2009

Report of the Central Services Director

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Key Decision

1 REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES 2009/10

This report brings forward for consideration as part of the budget setting process for 2009/10 proposals in respect of those fees and charges that are the responsibility of the Cabinet Member for Finance, and also those fees and charges where there is no appropriate Advisory Board.

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out on a Service by Service basis for 2009/10 the proposals for those fees and charges which fall within the remit of this Board and also those fees and charges where there is no appropriate Committee or Advisory Board.

1.1.2 The budgetary guidance issued to Chief Officers for the 2009/10 budget cycle, and approved by this Board and endorsed by Cabinet, reiterated the objective to maximise income subject to market conditions, opportunities and comparable charges elsewhere. In bringing forward proposals officers have paid due regard to the guiding principles for the setting of fees and charges, and the sorts of questions that need to be considered when formulating proposals approved by this Board in October and endorsed by Cabinet.

1.1.3 The proposals regarding fees and charges outlined in this report are incorporated within the Revenue Estimates to be found elsewhere on this agenda. Any changes required following this meeting will be incorporated before the Estimates are presented to Cabinet on 3 February 2009. The proposals are set out on a Service by Service basis with the recommendations at the end of each section.

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

1.2 Photocopying Charges

1.2.1 A photocopying service is offered for members of the public calling at the council's main offices or requiring copies of Council documents sent by post. The current charges are :-

- 1.2.2 10p for each page of the same document or additional copies of the same page plus postage as appropriate.
- 1.2.3 These charges are intended to cover the costs of the photocopy meter charge (including toner), paper, and an allowance towards the staff time in looking out documents and postage where appropriate.
- 1.2.4 The level of charge was reduced in 2007/08 after remaining static for a number of years to comply with Freedom of Information requirements. The marginal cost per copy (including paper) is now approximately 1.5p per copy. The income to the Authority for 2008/09 is £172 to date (November). Comparative charges in neighbouring authorities have been somewhat difficult to ascertain and appear to vary considerably. It is, however, considered appropriate to retain a charge in cases where copies of documents cannot be provided by email or fax but it is suggested that the current charge be maintained.

It is **RECOMMENDED** that Cabinet be recommended to retain the current photocopying charges of £0.10 (inclusive of VAT) for each page of the same document or additional copies of the same page plus postage as appropriate.

1.3 Charges for Agendas and Reports

- 1.3.1 Agendas and reports are made available free of charge to the public where single copies are requested. Some private individuals and commercial organisations request posted copies of particular agendas and reports on an annual basis and for these a charge (to cover production costs and postage) is made. The current charge for one (municipal) year's supply is £41.69 (36.25 + VAT) for Area Planning Committees and £28.88 (25.11 + VAT) for all other meetings. **[Annex 1]** shows comparative charges for neighbouring authorities.
- 1.3.2 Demand for pre-purchased supplies of agendas remains relatively low and relates mainly to Area Planning Committees although a limited number of copies of other agendas are also supplied. The income to this Authority for such sales in 2008/09 is estimated at £230 and can be anticipated to decrease further as more people access agendas via the Council's website. The cost of production and postage of an average agenda remains similar to last year but our charges appear low in comparison with some neighbouring councils. Members may therefore consider it appropriate to introduce a modest increase in charge.
- 1.3.3 It is, therefore, **RECOMMENDED** that Cabinet be recommended to increase the annual charges for agendas and reports supplied via the post to £45 (inclusive of VAT) for Area Planning Committees and £32 (inclusive of VAT) for all other meetings.

1.4 Concessionary Fares Scheme 2009/10 – Discretionary Travel Concessions

- 1.4.1 Members will be aware that a nationwide free bus travel scheme was introduced in April 2008. Individual travel concession authorities (TCAs) continue to have the

discretion to offer as an alternative to the standard bus pass an off-peak companion pass which allows severely disabled people to travel with a companion free of charge.

- 1.4.2 Whilst all Kent authorities now offer companion passes, efforts to standardise the criteria for issue and charging policy were not successful. There remains a considerable variation in charging policy in the County from no charge among our immediate neighbours to annual charges of £10 in Tonbridge and Malling and from £5 to £75 in four other Kent councils [**Annex 2**]. Around 59 companion passes have been issued to date in this borough in 2008/09.
- 1.4.3 At present there are limited cross-border reciprocal arrangements between Ashford, Canterbury, Shepway, Swale and Tunbridge Wells. Elsewhere the person accompanying a companion pass holder travels free only for journeys starting within the boundary of the issuing TCA. Bus operators are unhappy with the varying levels of validity and it is almost certain that TCAs are already paying for cross-border travel by companions of pass holders from other authorities because it is too complicated to be enforced by bus drivers. Following the Annual General Meeting of the Kent TCAs the County Council has circulated a discussion paper seeking a countywide validity of companion passes and, if possible, a common approach to charging and issuing practice. This advocates a £10 charge and endorsement of an application for a companion pass by a recognised medical practitioner, confirming that the applicant cannot travel unaccompanied.
- 1.4.4 In recognition of the difficulties experienced in respect of companion travel where reciprocal arrangements between TCAs do not exist, Kent County Council has subsequently confirmed that it will meet the cost of companion journeys in Kent starting outside the pass holder's home district.

Replacement Charge

- 1.4.5 The Council's current charge for replacement of lost passes is £10 other than if a person's purse/wallet is stolen and they provide a crime number when no charge is made.
- 1.4.6 During the past year the number of replacements necessary (aside from those "lost in the post") for which a charge has been made was around 50. Details of charges made by the Kent TCAs are given at [**Annex 2**].

Rail Concessions

- 1.4.7 As a further alternative to the statutory free bus pass, the Council offers a £10 voucher towards the purchase of the £24 Senior Railcard or the £24 Network Card or a reimbursement of £10 towards the £18 Disabled Persons Railcard. The rail concession continues to be popular, with around 1,500 issued annually. ATOC (the Association of Train Operating Companies) has been consulted on any

proposed changes in price in 2009/10 but indicates that none are planned at this stage.

- 1.4.8 A letter has been received from a recipient of a rail concession requesting that the Council consider increasing the value of the voucher on the grounds that it has remained at £10 for a number of years while railcard costs have risen.
- 1.4.9 In the past the Council has made representations to the Government to extend the statutory minimum concession to rail travel and provide compensatory funding to local authorities. This has not happened so Members may consider it inappropriate in the present financial climate to offer a more generous alternative to the statutory concession without corresponding support from the Government. For comparison purposes details of discretionary travel concessions currently offered by neighbouring authorities are set out in **[Annex 2]**.
- 1.4.10 It is **RECOMMENDED** that Cabinet gives consideration to:
- 1) the price to be charged for the Companion pass in 2008/09 and endorsement of the reciprocal arrangements for travel by companions throughout Kent as indicated in paragraphs 1.4.3 and 1.4.4;
 - 2) whether to maintain the charge for replacement of lost passes at £10; and
 - 3) continuing to offer a £10 contribution towards the Senior Railcard, the Network Card or the Disabled Persons Railcard as an alternative to the free bus travel pass.

LEGAL SERVICES

1.5 Legal Fees Payable by Third Parties

- 1.5.1 From time to time it happens that the Council's legal fees can be recovered from third parties, for example costs in connection with section 106 agreements. Our level of fees follows the rates published by the Department of Constitutional Affairs which are reviewed regularly and are currently as follows:

Solicitors with over 8 years post qualification experience including at least 8 years relevant experience	£203
Solicitors and legal executives with over 4 years post qualification experience including at least 4 years relevant experience	£180
Other solicitors and legal executives and fee earners of equivalent experience	£151
Trainee solicitors, paralegals and fee earners of equivalent experience	£110

1.5.2 It is **RECOMMENDED** that the Council's charges continue to follow the rates published by the Secretary of State.

1.6 Administrative Charges for Postal Addresses (Street Naming and Numbering)

1.6.1 We are continuing to find considerable resistance to the level of our fees for this service, the more so as our fees are currently about three times the local average. This has led to a reduction in the number of requests and, in consequence, our fee income.

1.6.2 For naming a new street and numbering properties on it, we are recommending that the fees be increased on the same basis as before, namely by 3%, rounded up to the nearest whole £1 for fees under £100 and £5 for fees over £100, with a higher increase for dealing with new streets with more than 65 new dwellings on them. This reflects the actual cost of dealing with such applications.

1.6.3 In previous years we have made a charge for weekly information bulletins on new address information. This information is now distributed via the National Land and Property Gazetteer and so this service is discontinued.

	Existing	Proposed
For new developments, to name new street/s and allocate numbers and addresses to new properties:		
Up to 30 new properties	295.00	304.00
31 - 65 properties	440.00	454.00
Over 65 properties	590.00	608.00
To name/number new properties on existing streets:		
New commercial developments for sale or rent	150.00	155.00
Rename/number existing residential property	39.00	42.00
Rename/number existing commercial property	110.00	114.00
To issue a duplicate statutory certificate of (re-) naming and/or numbering	70.00	73.00

1.6.4 It is **RECOMMENDED** that Cabinet be recommended to adopt the table of proposed charges set out above with effect from 1 April 2009.

1.7 Legal Implications

1.7.1 As set out above.

1.8 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.8.1 As set out above.

1.9 Risk Assessment

1.9.1 As part of the review of fees and charges Chief Officers will consider the risks associated with any proposals.

Background papers:

Nil

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