

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

LEISURE and ARTS ADVISORY BOARD

12 December 2011

Report of the Chief Leisure Officer and the Director of Finance

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Key Decision

1 LEISURE SERVICES – REVIEW OF CHARGES 2012/13

Summary

This report outlines charging proposals in respect of Poult Wood Golf Centre, Tonbridge Cemetery, moorings in Tonbridge, Tonbridge Castle Council Chamber and weddings, the Summer Playscheme and pitch hire for Sportsgrounds in Tonbridge. The proposed charges for the Council's indoor leisure facilities are reported separately in these papers.

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 In bringing forward the charging proposals for 2012/13 consideration has been given to a range of factors, including policy objectives for each facility/service in the Leisure and Arts Strategy 2008-13, the Council's overall financial position in light of changes in the national economy, market position, trading patterns, the current rate of inflation, competing facilities and customer feedback. The Board is reminded of the Council's Leisure Pass Scheme which enables financially disadvantaged residents to participate in leisure activities at concessionary rates. A copy of the Leisure Pass Scheme leaflet is attached at **[Annex 1]**. Members will also be aware that significant concessions are also given to specific groups including senior citizens, young people, and people with disabilities, ensuring that the Council's leisure facilities are accessible to all.

1.1.2 The proposed charges for 2012/13 have also taken into account the set of guiding principles for the setting of fees and charges approved by Members of the Finance and Property Advisory Board and reproduced below for the benefit of the Board:

- 1) *Fees and charges should reflect the Council's key priorities and other corporate aims and priorities recognising there may be trade-offs as these are not mutually exclusive.*
- 2) *Fees and charges should have due regard to the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.*

- 3) *If there is to be a subsidy from the council tax payer to the service user this should be a conscious choice.*
- 4) *The Council should look to maximise income subject to market conditions, opportunities and comparable charges elsewhere, in the context of its key priorities and other corporate aims and priorities.*
- 5) *Fees and charges should normally be reviewed at least annually (unless fixed by statute or some other body).*
- 6) *Fees and charges should not be used to provide a subsidy from the council tax payer to commercial operators.*
- 7) *There should be consistency between charges for similar services.*
- 8) *Concessions for services should follow a logical pattern so as not to preclude, where appropriate, access to Council services on the grounds of ability to pay.*

1.2 Consultation

- 1.2.1 The views of the public and existing customers are important in considering leisure charges. Various techniques are used to receive feedback including market surveys, customer panels, customer comment cards and mystery shoppers. Due consideration is also taken of the charges at local competing facilities both in the public and private sectors.
- 1.2.2 Detailed liaison with the management contractors at Poulton Wood Golf Centre has taken place, so the charging process reflects current circumstances, and is unlikely to have a detrimental impact on the Centre's market position. The contractors are supportive of the proposals brought forward within this report.
- 1.2.3 Proposed charges in respect of facilities used by Tonbridge sports clubs are the subject of consultation with the Tonbridge Sports Association. The Chairman of Tonbridge Sports Association has stated that "the proposed increase in charges in respect of Tonbridge Sportsgrounds is acceptable. In respect of Poulton Wood Golf Centre I consider the increases to be appropriate".

1.3 Poulton Wood Golf Centre

- 1.3.1 In bringing forward the charging proposals for 2012/13 consideration has been given to a range of factors, including the Centre's policy objectives, market position, trading to date, competing facilities and customer feedback.
- 1.3.2 There are a number of key issues which have affected the proposals brought forward:
 - According to independent market research the golf market has shown recovery following an average decrease of 5.5% for the South of England

last year. The research shows April to September up 6% on last year for the South of England and a 4.6% increase nationally.

- Whilst income at Poult Wood Golf Centre is currently £38,000 below profile to the end of October, it is £46,000 up on the same 7 month period last year, an 11% increase. The 9-hole short course has also traded well, up £12,000 on the same period last year.
 - The golf market remains highly competitive, with private sector courses continuing to target golfers without handicap certificates, and offering an increasing number of discounts and incentives including “two play for the price of one” and discounted season tickets.
 - Poult Wood Golf Centre has continued to offer good quality, for a good price. There have been a number of positive comments received on the standard of the course and its condition has enabled the grass tee season to extend into November for a second year. The refurbished clubhouse also continues to attract customers to the Centre for functions and meals.
 - The introduction of a four ball price last year has proved popular with nearly 500 sold to date, introducing new golfers and increasing utilisation of tee times.
 - Golf buggies for customers have also been introduced at the Centre and are proving to be popular with a number of customers mentioning that they would not have been able to play the 18-hole course without the assistance of the buggies.
 - The pricing strategy for Poult Wood Golf Centre rewards customer loyalty, with reductions for discount card holders and discounts to senior citizens, juniors/students and leisure pass holders, reflecting the Council’s policy of fair access for all.
- 1.3.3 A trial of online tee time booking agents over the winter period generated a small number of additional bookings at quieter times. It is suggested that the bookings are monitored again this winter and booking agents used if quiet periods are identified.
- 1.3.4 The staggered twilight price introduced to address the quiet period between standard price and the reduced twilight price has shown an increase in bookings through the afternoon. The introduction of the half an hour before twilight at half the discounted rate achieved the desired affect of golfers being less tempted to wait for the discounted price.
- 1.3.5 The charging proposals in respect of Poult Wood Golf Centre, together with comparative charges at neighbouring public and private competing facilities, are outlined at **[Annex 2]**. The proposed charges represent an increase of just over 2% for the 18-hole course. It is not felt that a greater increase in price for the 18-

hole course can be made in the current market and a higher increase could have a negative impact on income. With regard to the 9-hole short course an opportunity exists for a slightly higher increase (generally in line with inflation) based on usage levels, and the quality of the course compared to local competition. Improvements have been made to the condition of the course through the new irrigation system and the new temporary tee mats.

- 1.3.6 Children and young people are a key corporate priority and Poult Wood Golf Centre continues to work to promote participation in golf by children and young people with its junior section, the Poult Wood Panthers. This includes tuition sessions and the annual Junior Open attracting over 100 young people. An agreement has also recently been made with the prestigious London Golf Club to add to the promotion and development of junior golf with Poult Wood Golf Centre. In advance of the additional junior golf development planned for 2012 it is proposed to hold the charges for juniors at existing levels and to consider the potential of the introduction of a junior season ticket.
- 1.3.7 Should the proposed increases in green fee charges be agreed they will be incorporated into the charges for golf societies together with increases to the charges for the food element which the clubhouse contractor operates. Par 4 Catering is suggesting increases to account for inflation.
- 1.3.8 Members of the Poult Wood Golf Centre Customer Panel are being consulted individually on the proposals, and their views will be made available at the meeting.
- 1.3.9 The proposed increase in charges for green fees outlined in the report will generate additional income of £10,500, which will be reflected in the 2012/13 revenue budget reported to the Finance & Property Advisory Board in January 2012.
- 1.3.10 Poult Wood Golf Centre now exists in a very competitive market, with a number of local public and private golf courses chasing a limited number of customers. This, together with other economic factors, clearly represents a challenge to Poult Wood, and the proposed charges for 2012/13 reflect this position. The focus for Poult Wood Golf Centre remains retention of existing market share, rewarding loyalty from users, maintaining the quality of facilities and service, and focusing on increasing usage by key target groups, particularly juniors.

1.4 Tonbridge Sportsgrounds – Pitch Hire Charges

- 1.4.1 This Council has an agreed policy with Tonbridge Sports Association of amending pitch hire charges to local sports clubs by the October Retail Price Index and rounded to the nearest pound. The Retail Price Index for October 2011 was 5.4%.
- 1.4.2 A copy of the existing and proposed pitch hire charges is shown at **[Annex 3]**.

1.4.3 The sports pitch income is credited to the Leisure Services Business Unit. The Leisure Services Business Unit manages the pitch hires in liaison with Tonbridge Sports Association, through the Angel Leisure Centre.

1.5 Tonbridge Cemetery – Proposed Charges 2012/13

1.5.1 As Members may be aware, there is a decreasing availability of new graves at Tonbridge Cemetery. The charging strategy, therefore, takes into account the longer term management of the Cemetery's capacity.

1.5.2 In bringing forward the proposed charges for Tonbridge Cemetery a number of key principles have been taken into consideration:

- The need to cover all costs, including some internal costs on new burials and services.
- The need to compare costs with other cemeteries in Kent **[Annex 4]**. It should, however, be noted that direct comparison with other cemeteries is difficult as pricing brackets, services and available grave space differ.
- The need for the charging strategy to support the management of the remaining capacity in the Cemetery.
- The need to provide some affordable options, whilst supporting the principles of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

1.5.3 The principles referred to above have been applied to the existing charges and are reflected in the proposed charges shown at **[Annex 5]**. In general, charges have been increased by 5.4% to reflect the RPI for October 2011 and reflect a comparable increase in grounds maintenance costs. An exception has been made in regard to burial of stillborn to one year olds, which have been retained at the present minimal level.

1.5.4 It is anticipated that these proposals will generate additional net income of £2,600, which will be reflected in the 2012/13 revenue budget reported to the Finance & Property Advisory Board on 4 January 2012.

1.6 Moorings in Tonbridge

1.6.1 The Borough Council currently manages casual boat moorings on an area of approximately 150 metres on the Medway river bank close to the Big Bridge on Tonbridge High Street. These moorings are provided alongside other similar facilities on the River Medway managed by the Environment Agency and neighbouring local authorities. These facilities provide an opportunity for temporary mooring of boats, on a short-term basis, for vessels passing through or visiting Tonbridge. Taking their anticipated use into consideration charges have previously been set accordingly and are highlighted below:

First 3 days - free of charge

Next 4 days - £2.00 per day

Thereafter - £10 per day

- 1.6.2 It has recently been drawn to the Council's attention by local residents that these casual moorings are being used in a more permanent way by individuals, and subsequently causing disturbance. It is proposed that the Borough Council reviews its rules, regulations and pricing structure in regard to the provision of these moorings with proposals being brought forward to a future meeting of the Board for consideration. The review will include liaison with the Council's Chief Solicitor, the Environment Agency and Maidstone Borough Council.

1.7 Tonbridge Castle Chamber – Hire Charges

- 1.7.1 The Council Chamber is used for a number of purposes, including Member and Officer meetings, weddings, private hire and concessionary use by a number of local organisations.
- 1.7.2 Several years ago a minimal charge was introduced for concessionary users. It is recognised that this concessionary charge is greatly valued by these organisations. It is proposed that a concessionary user charge be retained to reflect ongoing support for local organisations.
- 1.7.3 The list of concessionary users was agreed by Cabinet on 1 February 2011 (Decision D110013CAB) and no amendments are proposed **[see Annex 6]**. Concessionary use is subject to a number of restrictions as shown in **[Annex 7]**.
- 1.7.4 The Central Services Director has brought forward proposed charges for all users of the Chamber, which are set out at **[Annex 8]**. Annual income from the hire of the Chamber is approximately £2,500, and it is estimated that the proposed charges will generate additional income of £150.

1.8 Tonbridge Castle Wedding Charges

- 1.8.1 The current wedding charges were agreed by Cabinet on 1 February 2011 (Decision D110013CAB). Members agreed a charge of £650 for weddings in the Chamber and £980 for weddings in the Gatehouse for 2011/12. Charges of £685 and £1030 respectively were also agreed for 2012/13.
- 1.8.2 The current charges at a number of premises licensed for Civil Marriages are shown in **[Annex 9]**.
- 1.8.3 Weddings are often booked more than one year in advance and applications are now being received for 2012/13. It is, therefore, necessary to consider a charge for implementation from 1 April 2013, as Members have already agreed the charges for 2012/13. The Central Services Director has proposed an increase of

around 5% for the following charges in 2013/14, which will generate additional net income of approximately £750:

	Current Charge 2011/12 (£)	Agreed Charge 2012/13 (£)	Proposed Charge 2013/14 (£)
Weddings			
• Chamber	650	685	700
• Gatehouse	980	1030	1050
Renewal of Vows/Baby Naming			
• Chamber	470	495	525
• Gatehouse	780	820	850

NB: Non-returnable deposit - £100

1.9 2011 Summer Playscheme Charges

- 1.9.1 Attached at **[Annex 10]** is a copy of the 2011 charges, together with a comparison with Maidstone Borough Council. Income from the Summer Playscheme charges in 2011 was £41,555.00.
- 1.9.2 Members will note from **[Annex 10]** that the full weekly charge for the Summer Playscheme in 2011 was £36. This entitled children to 20 hours of supervised activities, equating to £1.80 per hour. Registration levels in 2011 were down compared to previous years, with 80% of available spaces booked. Encouragingly, of the parents completing the 2011 Summer Playscheme market survey, 93% felt the scheme was good value for money.
- 1.9.3 In order to meet the needs of those parents who are considered to be financially disadvantaged, very significant reductions are offered to Leisure Pass holders. In 2011 a weekly charge of £11 per family was applied to Leisure Pass holders, with no limit on the number of children attending from the same family. This level of concession is generous compared to other leisure activities provided by the Council and exceeds the concessionary rate offered by Maidstone Borough Council.
- 1.9.4 In order to support large families, parents are only required to pay for their first two children, and children referred by KCC Social Services are funded by the County Council. Discounts are also offered to parents booking 2-3 weeks (5%) or all four weeks (10%).
- 1.9.5 A proposed list of charges for 2012 is shown in **[Annex 10]** showing no increase. It is felt that following the reduction in registration levels in 2011 and the current financial climate, there should not be an increase this year, particularly bearing in mind the proposal to review the Playscheme next year as detailed in my separate report in these papers.

1.10 Legal Implications

1.10.1 The Council's Financial Rules require that all fees and charges must be reviewed at least once a year, and be reported to the appropriate Advisory Board.

1.11 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.11.1 The proposals within this report have taken into account economic factors and Members will note that, in the main, they represent a relatively modest increase to the Council's revenue stream.

1.11.2 All proposed charges presented in this report are inclusive of VAT, with the exception of charges for the Cemetery **[Annex 4]** and the Summer Playscheme **[Annex 10]** which are exempt.

1.12 Risk Assessment

1.12.1 As highlighted in paragraph 1.1 to this report, the proposed charges take into account a range of factors including market conditions and customer feedback and have been brought forward within the context of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

1.12.2 There is clearly a risk in proposing increased charges that those people on a low income and from target groups will no longer be able to afford to take part in activities and benefit from a healthy lifestyle. The wide range of concessions available within the charging structure and the Leisure Pass scheme are, therefore, essential to ensure the Council's leisure facilities and services are available to all. There is also clearly a risk of increasing prices in light of current economic conditions.

1.13 Equality Impact Assessment

1.13.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report

1.14 Policy Considerations

1.14.1 Community, Equalities/Diversity, Healthy Lifestyles, Young People.

1.15 Recommendation

1.15.1 It is, therefore, **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET** that:

- 1) the proposed charges for Poult Wood Golf Centre as detailed at **[Annex 2]** be agreed and implemented with effect from 1 April 2012;
- 2) the proposed pitch hire charges for Tonbridge Sportsgrounds as detailed at **[Annex 3]** be agreed and implemented with effect from 1 April 2012;
- 3) the proposed charges for Tonbridge Cemetery as detailed at **[Annexes 4 and 5]** be agreed and implemented with effect from 1 April 2012;

- 4) the charges associated with the provision of moorings in Tonbridge be reviewed and reported to a future meeting of this Board;
- 5) the proposed charges for Tonbridge Castle Chamber and the associated list of concessionary users as shown at **[Annexes 6, 7, and 8]** be approved, and implemented from 1 April 2012;
- 6) the proposed charges for Weddings in 2013/14 at Tonbridge Castle be agreed as detailed in the report **[Annex 9]**;
- 7) the proposed charges for the 2012 Summer Playscheme as detailed at **[Annex 10]** be approved;

Background papers:

Nil

contact: Stephen Gregg
Darren Lanes
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Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	Not applicable
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	Yes	The proposed charges include a range of concessions for senior citizens, juniors, students, people with disabilities and those on low income designed to encourage access for all.
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		Not applicable

In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above.