

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

LEISURE and ARTS ADVISORY BOARD

10 December 2012

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 2013/14

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 2013/14 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 2013/14 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 charges in respect of Tonbridge Sportsgrounds and Poulton Wood Golf Centre are acceptable."

1.3 Poulton Wood Golf Centre

- 1.3.1 In bringing forward the charging proposals for 2013/14 particular consideration has been given to 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:
 - Usage at the Golf Centre in 2012 has been significantly lower than in previous years as detailed later in these papers. This has primarily been due to the impact of weather conditions and major sporting events.

- The reduction in usage this year has affected all golf courses nationally, with independent market research of the golf market indicating a decline of 13% in the south of England.
 - The golf market has continued to see an increase in competition, with many local courses now offering society and group packages at weekends as well as offering significant discounts and incentives. These include “two play for the price of one”, food and drink offers and discounted season tickets. Private sector courses have also continued to target golfers without handicap certificates.
 - Poulton Wood Golf Centre has continued to offer good quality, for a good price. Despite the extremely poor weather and challenging market conditions, there have continued to be 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 another year. The clubhouse also continues to attract customers to the Centre for functions and meals.
 - The pricing strategy for Poulton 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 new free membership card has recently been introduced which encourages golfers to return to Poulton Wood with small golf gifts and green fee offers collected after five and ten rounds through a stamped card.
- 1.3.4 Golfers can now also sign up to an e-newsletter for the latest news, hints and tips as well as offers and promotions for tuition, in the shop, restaurant and on the course.
- 1.3.5 The free membership has the added benefit of being able to track golfers’ usage and, together with the e-newsletter, enables targeted promotions and actions in order to increase usage and income.
- 1.3.6 The charging proposals in respect of Poulton Wood Golf Centre, together with comparative charges at neighbouring public and private competing facilities, are outlined at **[Annex 2]**. It is proposed not to raise the charges for either the 18-hole or 9-hole courses in the current market, and to continue to introduce initiatives to retain customer loyalty. It is also the intention to introduce a membership scheme for the junior golf academy and offer a limited weekend society package on a trial basis.
- 1.3.7 Members of the Poulton Wood Golf Centre Customer Panel are being consulted individually on the proposals, and their views will be made available at the meeting.

1.3.8 Poult Wood Golf Centre now exists in a very competitive market. This, together with other economic factors, clearly represents a challenge to Poult Wood, and the proposed freeze on charges for 2013/14 reflects 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 2012 was 3%.

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 2013/14

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 3% to reflect the 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 2013/14 revenue budget reported to the Finance & Property Advisory Board on 9 January 2013.

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 facilities provide an opportunity for temporary mooring of boats, on a short-term basis, for vessels passing through or visiting Tonbridge.
- 1.6.2 A review of mooring charges was reported and approved by Members of the Leisure and Arts Advisory Board on the 28 February 2012 and it is not proposed that charges be increased for the 2013/14 financial year.

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 11 January 2012 (Decision LAA 11/055) 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 £125.

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 £685 for weddings in the Chamber and £1030 for weddings in the Gatehouse for 2013/14. Charges of £700 and £1050 respectively were also agreed for 2013/14.
- 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 2013/14. It is, therefore, necessary to consider a charge for implementation from 1 April 2015, as Members have already agreed the

charges for 2013/14. The Central Services Director has proposed an increase of around 5% for the following charges in 2014/15, which will generate additional net income of approximately £750:

	Current Charge 2011/12 (£)	Agreed Charge 2013/14 (£)	Proposed Charge 2014/15(£)
Weddings			
• Chamber	685	700	735
• Gatehouse	1030	1050	1100
Renewal of Vows/Baby Naming			
• Chamber	495	525	540
• Gatehouse	820	850	875

NB: Non-returnable deposit - £100

1.9 2013 Summer Playscheme Charges

1.9.1 Attached at **[Annex 10]** is a copy of the 2012 charges. Income from the Summer Playscheme charges in 2012 was £29,929.50.

1.9.2 Members will note from **[Annex 10]** that the full weekly charge for the Summer Playscheme in 2012 was £36. This entitled children to 20 hours of supervised activities, equating to £1.80 per hour. Registration levels were high with 93% of the places booked, and a number of venues reaching full capacity. Encouragingly, 94% of the parents completing the 2012 Summer Playscheme market survey felt the scheme offered good value for money.

1.9.3 In order to meet the needs of those parents who are considered to be financially disadvantaged, significant reductions are offered to Leisure Pass holders. In 2012 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 resulted in 28% of the children registered benefitting from the scheme.

1.9.4 In order to support large families, parents are only required to pay for their first two children, and children referred by Social Services are funded by the County Council. Discounts are also offered to parents booking two weeks (5%) or all three weeks (10%).

1.9.5 A proposed list of charges for 2013 is shown in **[Annex 10]** showing an increase of £1 on the weekly charge. It is felt that in the current financial climate, only a minimal charge in line with the rate of inflation should be applied. An increase of £1 on the Leisure Pass rate is also proposed, continuing to ensure that the Playscheme remains socially inclusive, with cost not presenting a barrier to those families most in need. With regard to the daily standby charge it is proposed to

increase this by 50 pence, retaining the policy of encouraging parents to book for the full week.

- 1.9.6 It is anticipated that additional income of £850 will be generated from the proposed increase in charges, which will be reflected in the 2013/14 revenue budget reported to Finance & Property Advisory Board on 9 January 2013.

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 5**] 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 2013;
- 2) the proposed pitch hire charges for Tonbridge Sportsgrounds as detailed at **[Annex 3]** be agreed and implemented with effect from 1 April 2013;
- 3) the proposed charges for Tonbridge Cemetery as detailed at **[Annex 5]** be agreed and implemented with effect from 1 April 2013;
- 4) the proposed charges for Tonbridge Castle Chamber as shown at **[Annexes 8]** be approved, and implemented from 1 April 2013;
- 5) the proposed charges for Weddings in 2014/15 at Tonbridge Castle be agreed as detailed in the report **[Annex 9]**;
- 6) the proposed charges for the 2013 Summer Playscheme as detailed at **[Annex 10]** be approved.

Background papers:

Nil

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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.