

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

LEISURE and ARTS ADVISORY BOARD

12 March 2014

**Report of the Director of Street Scene & Leisure and the
Cabinet Member for Leisure, Youth & Arts**

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Key Decision

1 POULT WOOD GOLF CENTRE – CHARGES

Summary

This report outlines charging proposals brought forward by the Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust in respect of Poult Wood Golf Centre, together with details of proposed membership options and booking privileges.

1.1 Charges Review

- 1.1.1 At the last meeting of this Board Members agreed the proposed charges to the Leisure Trust's core charges. The charges for Poult Wood were not considered as the Trust was considering the introduction of a membership option. It was, therefore, agreed that the charges for Poult Wood would be considered at this meeting.
- 1.1.2 Within the Management Agreement the Trust is required to comply with the charges for the leisure facilities set out in the Core Pricing Schedule. It is agreed that the charges can be reviewed annually for implementation from 1 April each year. The Trust is entitled to increase the core prices provided that the average increase is not greater than CPI, and for any increases in core prices in excess of CPI the Trust requires the Council's consent. In determining fees and charges the Trust is required to have regard to:
- the Trust's charitable objectives
 - the needs of the local community
 - developing a balanced programme
 - the Council's key priorities
 - the Council's policy for pitch hire charges
 - the viability of the Trust
 - the prevailing market conditions

- pricing of other leisure facilities in the area

1.1.3 Attached at **[Annex 1]** is a schedule of the existing core charges for Poult Wood Golf Centre, together with the Trust's proposals for 2014/15. The percentage increase for each charge is also shown. The overall average proposed increase is 2.27%, compared to CPI of 2.1%. The proposals are felt to be acceptable.

1.2 Membership Options

1.2.1 Poult Wood Golf Centre has earned a deserved reputation as one of the best municipal pay and play courses in the South East. This has been sustained by ongoing investment in the course and facilities, as well as the dedication and skill of the experienced staff.

1.2.2 In more recent times, especially since the economic downturn in 2008, golf attendances have been down at the majority of golf courses, and Poult Wood has been no exception with an overall reduction in rounds played. This was especially stark in 2012 with poor weather and major events including the Diamond Jubilee and the London Olympics creating a further adverse impact on the market.

1.2.3 There has also been a significant reduction in the number of members of the Poult Wood Golf Club over recent years. The Club operates independently but in partnership with the management of the Centre, and provides the 'backbone' of regular users. Current membership is around 200, down from a peak of close to 500.

1.2.4 Whilst the pay and play tariff has a number of advantages it can also limit the attractiveness of the facility to golfers. Key issues include:

- the very regular golfer is now able to find competitive financial advantage in switching to a club, either private or municipal, that offers an annual membership with no consequent green fees. This applies particularly to the adult weekend market.
- income is reduced, sometimes to zero, during spells of bad weather, especially snow in winter.
- income is unpredictable and volatile. High dependence is placed on the summer months.
- golfers tend to display less loyalty in their behaviour.

1.2.5 Recent research has demonstrated that the majority of public courses, often owned by the local authority but operated by a trust or private operator now have a membership option.

1.2.6 The Trust is proposing to introduce the following Membership packages for a full year commencing on 1 April 2014:

- 7 Day - £780
- 5 Day - £510
- Junior - £120

1.2.7 Each of the options will be payable as a lump sum which would attract a 5% discount or by monthly direct debit based upon a 12 month contract renewable annually. Local comparisons are shown at **(Annex 2)**.

1.2.8 All categories of membership will apply to the use of both courses. The proposals are supported by the Poult Wood Golf Club and the Golf Professional. Tonbridge Sports Association has been consulted and is supportive of the proposals.

1.2.9 The Trust is seeking approval from the Council to offer members priority booking status with a suggested 48 hour advanced window for tee time bookings. This is consistent with the membership approach at the leisure centres.

1.3 Legal Implications

1.3.1 None.

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.4.1 All income from fees and charges at Poult Wood Golf Centre is retained by the Trust as part of the Management Agreement. The charging proposals outlined in this report will continue to ensure Poult Wood offers good value for money.

1.5 Risk Assessment

1.5.1 The introduction of membership packages at Poult Wood will provide an attractive option to golfers who wish to play regularly at the facility. Pay and Play will continue to be available, ensuring the facility is available to all.

1.6 Equality Impact Assessment

1.6.1 See screening for equality impacts later in this report.

1.7 Policy Considerations

1.7.1 Community, Healthy Lifestyles, Young People.

1.8 Recommendations

1.8.1 It is **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET** that:

- 1) the proposed core charges for Poult Wood Golf Centre outlined in **[Annex 1]** be approved and be implemented by the Leisure Trust from 1 April 2014, and
- 2) the Leisure Trust's proposed new membership options be supported, and the proposed new membership priority booking status with a 48 hour advanced window for tee time bookings for Poult Wood Golf Centre be agreed.

Background papers:

contact: Stephen Gregg

Nil

Robert Styles

Director of Street Scene & Leisure

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	The needs of different groups in the community are protected within the core charges.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	No	See above.
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.