

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

LEISURE and ARTS ADVISORY BOARD

08 December 2014

**Report of the Director of Street Scene and Leisure and the
Director of Finance and Transformation**

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Key Decision

1 LEISURE SERVICES – REVIEW OF CHARGES 2015/16

Summary

This report outlines charging proposals in respect of Tonbridge Cemetery, Tonbridge Pitch Hire Charges and the Summer Playscheme.

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 In bringing forward the charging proposals for 2015/16 consideration has been given to a range of factors, including the Council's overall financial position, 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.
- 1.1.2 The proposed charges for 2015/16 have also taken into account the set of guiding principles for the setting of fees and charges approved by Members of the Finance, Innovation 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.

1.1.3 The proposed charges for 2015/2016, in relation to the Council's facilities managed by the Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust will be brought forward for Member consideration at the next meeting of this Board in February 2015.

1.2 Consultation

1.2.1 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 are acceptable".

1.3 Tonbridge Cemetery – Proposed Charges 2015/16

1.3.1 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.

1.3.2 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 1]**. 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.

1.3.3 The principles referred to above have been applied to the existing charges and are reflected in the proposed charges shown at **[Annex 2]**. In general, charges have been increased by 2.5% 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.

- 1.3.4 It is anticipated that these proposals will generate additional net income of £1,500, which will be reflected in the 2015/16 revenue budget reported to the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board on 7 January 2015.

1.4 Tonbridge Sportsgrounds – Proposed Pitch Hire Charges 2015/16

- 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 2014 was 2.3% and it is, therefore, proposed that charges be increased in accordance with this indexation. The Tonbridge Sports Association has been consulted and is happy with this approach.

- 1.4.2 The sports pitch income is taken by the Tonbridge & Malling Leisure Trust as part of the Council's management agreement.

1.5 Summer Playscheme – Proposed Charges 2015

- 1.5.1 Attached at **[Annex 3]** is a copy of the 2014 charges. Income from the Summer Playscheme charges in 2014 was £30,059.
- 1.5.2 Members will note from **[Annex 3]** that the full weekly charge for the Summer Playscheme in 2014 was £38. This entitled children to 20 hours of supervised activities, equating to £1.90 per hour. Registration levels were high with 91% of the places booked, and a number of venues reaching full capacity. Encouragingly, 99% of the parents completing the 2014 Summer Playscheme market survey felt the scheme offered good value for money.
- 1.5.3 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 2014 a weekly charge of £13 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 35% of the children registered on the Playscheme benefitting from the Leisure Pass scheme.
- 1.5.4 In order to support large families, parents are only required to pay for their first two children. Discounts are also offered to parents booking two weeks (5%) or all three weeks (10%).
- 1.5.5 A proposed list of charges for 2015 is also shown in **[Annex 3]** 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 50 pence 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 also increase this by 50 pence, retaining the policy of encouraging parents to book for the full week.

- 1.5.6 It is anticipated that additional income of £900 will be generated from the proposed increase in charges, which will be reflected in the 2015/16 revenue budget reported to Finance, Innovation & Property Advisory Board on 7 January 2015.

1.6 Legal Implications

- 1.6.1 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.

1.7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.7.1 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.
- 1.7.2 Charges for the Cemetery [**Annex 2**], the Summer Playscheme [**Annex 3**] and Pitch hire charges (excluding casual lettings) are exempt of VAT.

1.8 Risk Assessment

- 1.8.1 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.
- 1.8.2 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.

1.9 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.9.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users

1.10 Policy Considerations

- 1.10.1 Community, Equalities/Diversity, Healthy Lifestyles, Young People.

1.11 Recommendation

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

- 1) the proposed charges for Tonbridge Cemetery as detailed at **[Annex 2]** be agreed and implemented with effect from 1 April 2015;
- 2) pitch hire charges at Tonbridge Sportsgrounds be increased as outlined within the report for implementation from 1 April 2015;
- 3) the proposed charges for the 2015 Summer Playscheme as detailed at **[Annex 3]** be approved.

Background papers:

Nil

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