

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

LEISURE and ARTS ADVISORY BOARD

9 December 2013

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 2014/15

Summary

This report outlines charging proposals in respect of Tonbridge Cemetery, Allotments in Tonbridge, Tonbridge Pitch Hire Charges, Tonbridge Castle Council Chamber, Weddings and the Summer Playscheme.

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 In bringing forward the charging proposals for 2014/15 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 services are accessible to all.
- 1.1.2 The proposed charges for 2014/15 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.*

1.2 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 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 2014/15

- 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 2]**. 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 3]**. 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.

1.3.4 It is anticipated that these proposals will generate additional net income of £1,600, which will be reflected in the 2014/15 revenue budget reported to the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board on 8 January 2014.

1.4 Tonbridge Allotments

1.4.1 Allotments in Tonbridge are currently managed on behalf of the Council by the Tonbridge Allotments & Gardens Association. The Association has recently reviewed its charging structure and has proposed amendments as highlighted below.

1.4.2 Currently tenants pay an annual charge of £2.50 per "rod" and therefore a 10 rod plot would cost £25 per year. Currently no fee is separately charged for the general use of water. If tenants elect to use a hosepipe an additional £1 per rod per year is charged. Due to the rising cost of water the Association has proposed that the annual £1 per rod be charged to all plot holders from 1 October 2014 to cover water use on site.

1.4.3 In addition to the above the Association offers shed rental at a limited number of sites at an additional annual charge of £8. Due to the increasing maintenance costs of the sheds the Association has proposed an increase to £10 per annum from 1 October 2014. A comparison of fees charged for other allotment provision in the local area is shown at **[Annex 4]**.

1.5 Tonbridge Sportsgrounds – Pitch Hire Charges

1.5.1 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 2013 was 2.6% 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.

1.5.2 The sports pitch income is credited to the Tonbridge & Malling Leisure Trust. The Tonbridge & Malling Leisure Trust manages the pitch hires in liaison with Tonbridge Sports Association, through the Angel Leisure Centre.

1.6 Tonbridge Castle Chamber – Hire Charges

- 1.6.1 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.
- 1.6.2 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.
- 1.6.3 The list of concessionary users was agreed by Cabinet on 10 December 2012 (**LAA 12/050**) and some amendments are proposed as shown in blue [**see Annex 5**]. Concessionary use is subject to a number of restrictions as shown in [**Annex 6**].
- 1.6.4 The Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer has brought forward proposed charges for all users of the Chamber, which are set out at [**Annex 7**]. Annual income from the hire of the Chamber is approximately £3,000, and it is estimated that the proposed charges will generate additional income of £100.

1.7 Tonbridge Castle Wedding Charges

- 1.7.1 The current wedding charges were agreed by Cabinet on 10 December 2012 (Decision D130008CAB). Members agreed a charge of £700 for weddings in the Chamber and £1,050 for weddings in the Gatehouse for 2013/14. Charges of £735 and £1,100 respectively were also agreed for 2014/15.
- 1.7.2 The current charges at a number of premises licensed for Civil Marriages are shown in [**Annex 8**].
- 1.7.3 Weddings are often booked more than one year in advance and applications are now being received for 2015/16. It is, therefore, necessary to consider a charge for implementation from 1 April 2015, as Members have already agreed the charges for 2014/15. The Director of Central Services has proposed an increase of around 5% for the following charges in 2015/16, which will generate additional net income of approximately £700:

	Current Charge 2013/14 (£)	Agreed Charge 2014/15 (£)	Proposed Charge 2015/16 (£)
Weddings			
• Chamber	700	735	770
• Gatehouse	1,050	1,100	1,150
Renewal of Vows/Baby Naming			
• Chamber	525	540	560
• Gatehouse	850	875	900

NB: Non-returnable deposit - £100

1.8 2013 Summer Playscheme Charges

- 1.8.1 Attached at **[Annex 9]** is a copy of the 2013 charges. Income from the Summer Playscheme charges in 2013 was £30,000.
- 1.8.2 Members will note from **[Annex 9]** that the full weekly charge for the Summer Playscheme in 2013 was £37. This entitled children to 20 hours of supervised activities, equating to £1.85 per hour. Registration levels were high with 90% of the places booked, and a number of venues reaching full capacity. Encouragingly, 95% of the parents completing the 2013 Summer Playscheme market survey felt the scheme offered good value for money.
- 1.8.3 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 2013 a weekly charge of £12 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 32% of the children registered on the Playscheme benefitting from the Leisure Pass scheme.
- 1.8.4 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%).
- 1.8.5 A proposed list of charges for 2014 is shown in **[Annex 9]** 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.
- 1.8.6 It is anticipated that additional income of £850 will be generated from the proposed increase in charges, which will be reflected in the 2014/15 revenue budget reported to Finance, Innovation & Property Advisory Board on 8 January 2014.

1.9 Legal Implications

- 1.9.1 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.

1.10 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.10.1 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.
- 1.10.2 All proposed charges presented in this report are inclusive of VAT, with the exception of charges for the Cemetery **[Annex 3]** and the Summer Playscheme **[Annex 9]** which are exempt.

1.11 Risk Assessment

- 1.11.1 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.
- 1.11.2 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.

1.12 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.12.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report

1.13 Policy Considerations

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

1.14 Recommendation

- 1.14.1 It is, therefore, **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET** that:

- 1) the proposed charges for Tonbridge Cemetery as detailed at **[Annex 3]** be agreed and implemented with effect from 1 April 2014;
- 2) the proposed charges for Tonbridge Allotments as detailed in the report be agreed and implemented with effect from 1 October 2014;
- 3) pitch hire charges at Tonbridge Sportsground be increased as outlined within the report for implementation from 1 April 2014;
- 4) the proposed amendments to the list of Tonbridge Castle Chamber concessionary users detailed at **[Annex 5]** be approved;

- 5) the proposed charges for Tonbridge Castle Chamber as shown at **[Annex 7]** be approved, and implemented from 1 April 2014;
- 6) the proposed charges for weddings in 2015/16 at Tonbridge Castle be agreed as detailed in the report; and
- 7) the proposed charges for the 2014 Summer Playscheme as detailed at **[Annex 9]** 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.