

REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES – COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT

Item CE 24/35 referred from Communities and Environment Scrutiny Select Committee of 6 November 2024

The joint report of the Director of Street Scene, Leisure and Technical Services, the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health and the Director of Finance and Transformation set out the proposed fees and charges for the provision of services in respect of garden waste subscriptions, household bulky refuse and fridge/freezer collections, “missed” refuse collections, stray dog redemption fees, Tonbridge Allotments, Tonbridge Cemetery, pest control, food certificates, contaminated land monitoring and private water supplies from 1 April 2025.

In bringing forward the charging proposals for 2025/26 consideration had been given to a range of factors, including the Borough Council’s overall financial and market positions, trading patterns, the current rate of inflation and customer feedback. A set of guiding principles for the setting of fees and charges had also been taken into account and were summarised in 4.2 of the report.

Particular reference was made to the Borough Council’s significant and challenging financial position and as it was becoming increasingly difficult to achieve further expenditure savings to meet the targets in the Savings and Transformation Strategy it was essential that opportunities to maximise income were taken.

Attention was drawn to the Waste Contract which was due for renewal in 2027 and Members were advised that there would be a significant financial impact in respect of any future waste collection arrangements. Given this context, the waste contract specification would need to be revisited with the aim of reducing the cost of waste collection in advance of the next contract. However, there remained significant demand for many of the services included within the Waste Contract which could be mitigated by increasing fees and charges for other services.

In addition, Members noted that it was proposed not to increase the fee for 2025/26 of requests for re-visits of food businesses following food hygiene inspections as detailed in 5.10 of the report.

Careful consideration was given to the options available and there was in-depth discussion on the proposals for garden waste collections with the majority of Members feeling that this still represented good value for money. Due regard was given to the overall financial position and potential impacts on the Medium Term Financial Strategy and on the grounds of maximising income, whilst providing value for money it was proposed by Cllr Hudson that garden waste collections should be increased to £63 per annum for the first bin and £40 per annum for second and third bins. This was seconded by Cllr Brown and supported by the majority of the Committee.

Consideration was also given the household bulky refuse service and whether the existing concessionary charges for those in receipt of Council Tax benefit could be extended to cover other benefits. Members were advised of the challenges in assessing the financial impact of extending the subsidy as the Borough Council did

not have information on all benefit claimants. However, it was likely that the financial impact would be a significant loss of income and increased collection costs.

RECOMMENDED*: That

- (1) the proposed annual garden waste subscription of £63 per annum for the first bin and £40 for a second or third bin, as proposed by Cllr Hudson and seconded by Cllr Brown, be approved;
- (2) the schedule of proposed charges for household bulky refuse and fridge/freezer collection service as set out in 15.2.6 of the report, be approved;
- (3) the proposed charge for “missed” refuse collection as set out in 5.3.3 of the report, be approved;
- (4) the schedule of proposed charges in respect of Stray Dog redemption service, as set out in 5.4.4 of the report, be approved;
- (5) the charging structure for Tonbridge Allotment as set out in 5.5.2 of the report, be noted and endorsed;
- (6) the schedule of proposed charges for Tonbridge Cemetery as set out in Annex 1 and 5.6.2 of the report, be approved;
- (7) the proposed continuation of the pest control subsidy for residents in receipt of Council Tax Reduction Scheme as set out in 5.7.1 of the report be approved;
- (8) the proposed charge for condemned food certificates as set out in 5.8.2 of the report, be approved;
- (9) the proposed charge for exported food certificates as set out in 5.9.4 of the report, be approved;
- (10) the proposed charge for provision of services in respect of contaminated land as set out in 5.11.5 of the report, be approved;
- (11) the proposed charge for provision of services in respect of private water supplies as set out in 5.12.5 of the report, be approved; and
- (12) the above proposed scale of charges be implemented from 1 April 2025.

***Recommended to Cabinet**