

Finance, Regeneration and Property Scrutiny Select Committee

19 November 2024

Part 1 - Public

Matters for Cabinet - Key Decision



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Cabinet Member	Kim Tanner, Cabinet Member for Finance & Housing; and Des Keers, Cabinet Member for Communities
Responsible Officer	Sharon Shelton, Director of Finance & Transformation; and Adrian Stanfield, Director of Central Services & Deputy Chief Executive
Report Author	Joy Ukadike, Head of Legal and Democratic Services; Anthony Garnett, Head of Licensing, Community Safety and Customer Services; Laura French, Tonbridge Castle, Events and Customer Services Manager; Stuart Edwards, Head of Administrative and Property Services; Glen Pritchard, Revenue Manager; and Nizete Vasconcelos, GIS Manager

Fees and Charges 2025/26

1 Summary and Purpose of Report

1.1 This report sets out the proposed fees and charges for 2025/26 within the purview of the Scrutiny Select Committee for review and thereafter for recommendation to Cabinet.

2 Corporate Strategy Priority Area

2.1 Efficient services for all our residents, maintaining an effective council.

2.2 It is important that fees and charges are reviewed on an annual basis in accordance with a set of guiding principles to ensure the Council can continue to provide the existing range and standard of services and cover increases in expenditure.

3 Recommendations

3.1 It is **RECOMMENDED** to Cabinet that:-

- 1) the proposed charges for legal costs as set out in section 5.1 of the report be approved;

- 2) the current photocopying charges of £0.10 (inclusive of VAT) for each page of the same document or additional copies of the same page plus postage as appropriate be retained as set out in paragraph 5.2.
- 3) the Fee Schedule for Street Naming and Numbering as set out in section 5.3 of the report be adopted from 1 April 2025;
- 4) the proposed scale of fees for local land charges searches and enquiries set out in section 5.4 of the report be adopted with effect from 1 April 2025;
- 5) the fees and charges 2025/26 related to Tonbridge Castle as set out in section 5.5 of the report be approved; and
- 6) the fees and charges 2025/26 related to Open Spaces as set out in section 5.6 of the report be approved; and
- 7) authority be delegated to the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive to negotiate fees for individual commercial events on Council-owned land ; and
- 8) the fees and charges 2025/26 related to Billboards and Banners as set out in section 5.9 of the report be approved; and
- 9) the amount of costs charged in 2025/26 to recover unpaid council tax and business rates debts remain at the 2024/24 levels (section 5.10).

4 Introduction and Background

- 4.1 In bringing forward the charging proposals for 2025/26 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 and customer feedback.
- 4.2 The proposed charges for 2025/26 have also taken into account a set of guiding principles for the setting of fees and charges reproduced below for the benefit of this Committee:
 - Fees and charges should reflect the Council's strategic priorities and other corporate aims recognising there may be trade-offs as these are not mutually exclusive;
 - Fees and charges should have due regard to the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy;
 - If there is to be a subsidy from the Council tax payer to the service user this should be a conscious choice;

- The Council should look to maximise income subject to market conditions, opportunities and comparable charges elsewhere, in the context of its strategic priorities and other corporate aims.
 - Fees and charges should normally be reviewed at least annually (unless fixed by statute or some other body);
- 4.3 Fees and charges should not be used to provide a subsidy from the Council taxpayer to commercial operators;
- There should be consistency between charges for similar services;
 - 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.
- 4.4 It is essential in light of the Council's overall financial position that opportunities are taken to maximise income, as it is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve further expenditure savings to meet the targets in the Savings and Transformation Strategy. Attention has been given to the fees and charges applied by neighbouring Council's, and averages across the County, and these comparisons are included in relevant sections of the report for Member consideration.

5 Proposal(s)

5.1 Legal fees payable by third parties

- 5.1.1 From time to time the Council's legal fees can be recovered from third parties, for example, costs in connection with section 106 agreements required to be entered into by developers seeking planning permission for their schemes. Our level of fees has historically followed the Supreme Court guideline hourly rates. The guideline hourly rates were last updated on 1st January 2024 and are currently as follows for Kent, which falls under National Band1: -

Solicitors and legal executives with over 8 years post qualification experience	£278
Solicitors and legal executives with over 4 years post qualification experience	£233
Other solicitors or legal executives and fee earners of equivalent experience	£190
Trainee solicitors, paralegals and fee earners	£134

- 5.1.2 For some Property transactions the amount to be charged in connection with the Council's legal work is indicated in the Property document or Lease and in such cases the amount stated in such documents will apply on a case-by-case basis.
- 5.1.3 For certain leasehold and miscellaneous property transactions the Council does not charge the full fee for the legal and administrative work undertaken as the operators, who are often sole traders and small businesses, have to pay full market rate for the rental of the business premises in accordance with statutory provisions. This is for instance the case with regard to lease renewals where only a contribution towards legal and administrative work is charged of £250. It is proposed to continue with this approach to assist the local economy.
- 5.1.4 It is **RECOMMENDED** that the Council's charges follow the rates set out above and continue to reflect existing practises highlighted above. In respect of the fees set out at 5.1.1 above, the Supreme Court guideline hourly rates may change from time to time, so it is therefore **RECOMMENDED** that the level of legal fees charged by the Council is in accordance with the applicable rates set out in the Supreme Court guidelines. This will avoid the necessity of a further report should the guideline hourly rates change.

5.2 Photocopying Charges

- 5.2.1 A photocopying service is offered for members of the public calling at the council's main offices or requiring copies of Council documents sent by post. The current charges are 10p for each page of the same document or additional copies of the same page plus postage as appropriate.
- 5.2.2 These charges are intended to cover the costs of the photocopy meter charge (including toner), paper and an allowance towards the staff time in looking out documents and postage where appropriate.
- 5.2.3 The level of charge was reduced in 2007/08 after remaining static for a number of years to comply with Freedom of Information requirements. The marginal cost per copy (including paper) is still approximately £0.10 per copy. Comparative charges in neighbouring authorities have been somewhat difficult to ascertain and many appear not to charge for photocopying. However, it is considered appropriate to retain a charge to avoid requests for multiple copies of pages and to cover cases where documents cannot be provided by email. It is therefore suggested that the current charge be maintained.
- 5.2.4 It is **RECOMMENDED** that Cabinet be recommended to retain the current photocopying charges of £0.10 (inclusive of VAT) for each page of the same document or additional copies of the same page plus postage as appropriate.

5.3 Street Naming and Numbering

- 5.3.1 The requirement to provide a Street Naming & Numbering (SNN) service is derived from the Towns Improvement Clauses Act 1847, the Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1907 and the County of Kent Act 1981. The TMBC Street Naming & Numbering Policy sets out the framework under which the service is delivered in this authority.
- 5.3.2 The IT GIS Team are responsible for delivery of this service. The actual cost of service delivery has been calculated by recording staff processing time, software costs and postage costs. The service generates an income of circa £45,000 a year. Neighbouring boroughs have their costs calculated in a different way from TMBC, where new developments can be more costly and single addresses can be less costly, but the overall income is balanced.
- 5.3.3 Members had previously agreed for prior year reviews with the below relevant priorities:
- 5.3.4 There should be no overall reduction of income to the Council through the SNN function;
- The cost of SNN to the Council should, where possible, be recovered through fees and charges (noting that this is not always possible, and not always desirable);
 - Ensure there are no 'perverse incentives' to apply for alternative naming schemes to minimise costs;
 - Ensure there is clarity in the fee schedule to avoid confusion and the need for officer discretion in charging fees;
 - Where workloads are sufficient to justify such, additional new fees should be considered.
- 5.3.5 One of the primary objectives is to ensure that cost of SNN to the Council should, where possible, be recovered through fees and charges. Based on estimated costs of delivery of the function and the need to meet this objective, the proposals below are based on one increase in the region of 3.5% (rounded to nearest £) effective from 1 April 2025.

- New Properties

Category	Up to three in-fill properties on an existing street	Current Fee 2024/25	Proposed Fee 2025/26
1	Addressing one new in-fill property	£227	£235
2	Addressing two to three in-fill properties	£119 Per Property	£123 per Property
	Where four or more properties are to be named or numbered, the fee for new developments (below) will be levied.		
	Four or more in-fill properties on an existing street, or new properties on a new street		
3	Fee for naming of a street, other than in relation to new property addressing	£278	£288
4	Fee for addressing plots, including street naming if Required 1- 4 Units	£279 + £44	£288 + £46
Category	Up to three in-fill properties on an existing street	Current Fee 2024/25	Proposed Fee 2025/26
5	5 – 10 Units	£278 + £39	£288 + £40
6	11 or more units	£575 + £14	£595 + £14

- Existing Properties

Category		Current Fee 2024/25	Proposed Fee 2025/26
7	Renumbering an existing property	£102	£106
8	Renaming an existing property, not in a current numbering scheme	£102	£106
9	Registering the addition or change or an alias to a numbered property	£102	£106
10	Removing an existing alias from a numbered property	No charge	No charge
11	Rename an existing street	£2,137	£2,212
12	Rename a block of flats	£2,137	£2,212
13	Fee for addressing units (flats) when splitting an existing property	£143 per unit	£148 per unit
14	Fee for addressing a single property when merging separate units	£232	£240

5.3.6 It is **RECOMMENDED** to Cabinet that the above fee Schedule for Street Naming and Numbering be adopted from 1 April 2025.

5.4 Land Charges

- 5.4.1 Maintenance of the land charges register is a mandatory function of the Council. The Register now sits within the HM Land Registry digitised register. Search agents use this register along with collecting information from various departments within the Council to complete the Con29 (a “personal search”) which provide a commercial service to people seeking to buy a property (residential or commercial), and more generally those carrying out “due diligence” in relation to a property transaction.
- 5.4.2 The Council charge for Con29/Con29O (Enquiries of Local Authority) searches, which is backed by the Council’s indemnity insurance in the event of there being an error in the search result. The Council is therefore in competition with personal search companies for this fee: if the fee is set too high, it is likely more people will engage a search agent to undertake a personal search rather than pay the Council’s fees. The Con 29 form is a search setting out a standard set of enquiries agreed by central government, the Law Society and local authorities.
- 5.4.3 The Local Land Charges Act 1975 (“the Act”) and the Local Authorities (England) (Charges for Property Searches) Regulations 2008 (“the Regulations”) enable local authorities to charge for their property search services and set out rules for calculating the fees. The charges must be on a cost recovery basis and not on a “profit basis” and so the Council is legally restrained in its approach to such fee setting.
- 5.4.4 The regulations allow for the fact that the fee has to be set in advance and so is based on an estimate of the likely level of searches received and the likely expenditure of the local authority in connection with answering those enquiries for the forthcoming year. The Act provides that registering authorities must secure that taking one financial year with another, that fee income does not exceed the cost of providing the services. This applies to the Official Search of the Land Charges Register. The Regulations apply in respect of the Official Enquiries of Local Authorities (more commonly known as Con 29) and further provide that over any three year period the authority should not make a profit in relation to the fees it has charged.
- 5.4.5 The housing and commercial property market is known to be a volatile area of activity where income can fall, or alternatively increase, quickly.
- 5.4.6 The LLC1 search migrated to HM Land Registry on 25th April 2024 and from this date the Council no longer receives LLC1 income, whilst retaining responsibility to maintain the register. It is envisaged that this loss of income should be accounted for (at least in part) in fee setting for 2025/26 financial year (FY). Since the migration was completed, officers have reviewed the level of fees charged to ensure that they reflect the time spent on dealing with the relevant enquiries. **The table below** shows the fees for land charges searches and enquiries currently charged by TMBC and by other Councils in Kent for comparison.

Current Search fees for Kent Authorities					
2024/2025 (including VAT)					
Local Authority	Residential Con29	Commercial Con29	Optional Con29O	Additional Questions	Additional Parcels
Ashford	£92.00	£168.00	£17.00	£50.00	£18.00
Canterbury	£149.00	N/A	£13.62 to £20.40	£20.40	N/A
Dartford	£180.00 (LLC & Con29)	£220.00	£20.00	£20.00	£20.00
Dover	£161.70	N/A	£16.80 (Q22 - £26.40)	N/A	£15.00
Folkestone & Hythe	£140.30	N/A	£14.04	N/A	£20.04
Gravesham	£160.80	£247.20	£16.08 (Q22 £30.00)	on an ad hoc basis	£18.00
Mid Kent (Maidstone)	£172.20	N/A	£17.00 (Q22 £31.50)	£23.95	£25.20
Medway	£66.48	N/A	£13.32 (Q22 £20.04)	N/A	£20.04
Sevenoaks	£161.00	N/A	£24.00	N/A	£21
Mid Kent (Swale)	£172.20	N/A	£17.00 (Q22 £31.50)	£23.95	£25.20
Tonbridge & Malling	£162.00	£351.60	£21.00	£24.00	£14.40
Thanet	£140.00	£216.00	£13 (Q22 £18.15)	N/A	£25.30
Mid Kent (Tunbridge Wells)	£172.20	N/A	£17.00 (Q22 £31.50)	£23.95	£25.20

5.4.7 Proposed increase in fees to be effective from 1 April 2025 are as follows:

- Residential CON29 fee increase [from £162.00] to £168.00 including VAT (overall increase 3.7%)
- Commercial CON29 fee to stay at £351.60 including VAT, no change as already considered high when compared to others

- Optional CON29 questions increase [from £21.00] to £24.00 including VAT (overall increase 14.3%)
- Supplementary questions increase [from £24.00] to £27.00 including VAT (overall increase 12.5%)
- Additional Parcels increase [from £14.40] to £16.80 including VAT (overall increase 16.7%)
- Expedited fee to stay at £58.80 including VAT, no change as a minimal number of requests for expedited search
- Refined data to increase [from £9.60] to £12.00 including VAT (overall increase 25%)

5.4.8 It is not believed that it is appropriate to have any concessionary charges apply to these fees given that the search function supports the sale and purchase of private property. Members are reminded of the requirement under the Public Sector Equality Duty (s149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have regard to the requirement to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act, (ii) to advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups and (iii) to foster good relations between people from different groups, however it is not believed that these charges will have an adverse impact on any particular group protected by the 2010 legislation. The charges will be the same for everyone who requires the Services and there does not appear to be any disproportionate effect on any of the protected groups.

5.4.9 It is **RECOMMENDED** that the proposed scale of fees for local land charges searches and enquiries set out in Section 8 be adopted with effect from 1 April 2025.

5.5 Tonbridge Castle

5.5.1 There are three levels of fees at Tonbridge Castle:-

Type 1 “Fixed rate”	Type 2 “Discount / commission when criteria is met”	Type 3 “Events”
<p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attraction Tickets (Castle Tours) • Vast Majority of Weddings 	<p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attraction Tickets (Castle Tours – e.g. discount for groups) • School parties (1 place free in 10) • Castle event partners (Partners who book Weddings / Events) 	<p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events where different levels of commission or fees are negotiated between TMBC and Event Organiser for events on: • Castle Lawn and grounds (where the Chamber is booked as part of a package) • Gatehouse / Council Chamber (Where Partners enter in to an agreement to hold functions and the income to TMBC will vary)

5.5.2 The Castle was originally programmed to be closed from November through to December 2024 for roof works, however as the duration of works was not sufficient this has been moved to January through to April/May 2025. This has resulted in the team not being able to book internal events, weddings and school trips for the November to December 2024 period, now this has moved to January to May this results in greater losses of income through our peak period.

5.5.3 The September meeting of Tonbridge Castle OSG with cross party representation from Councillors, together with Officers, reviewed the event fees and operation strategy for the Castle as we plan for the decommissioning of the Gateway.

A report on Tonbridge Castle OSG is scheduled to be presented at the Communities and Environment Scrutiny Select Committee on the 5 February 2025.

5.5.4 Proposed pricing for Castle tours 2025/26: -

Year	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Adult*	£9.00	£9.90	£9.90	£10.50
Concessions* Jun/Senior/Student	£6.50	£7.15	£7.15	£7.50
Family Ticket* 2 adults 2 children	£28.00	£30.00	£30.00	£32.00
Season Ticket Adult*	£30.00	£30.00	£35.00	£37.00

5.5.5 *Other castles continue to charge a lower entrance fee than Tonbridge (Rochester £8.50; Lullingstone Castle £9.00 and Upnor £8.10 for adult entry). The admission fees for castles further afield within Kent are significantly higher (e.g. Hever £25.95, Leeds £35 and Dover £30 for adult entry), although these are not considered to be directly comparable in size or offer. As Members will note from the table at 9.2 above, the entry fees were last raised in 2023/24 but there is a balance to be struck between admission prices and maintaining visitor numbers. Increasing the admission price may have the undesirable consequence of reducing visitor numbers. On balance we recommend that fees are raised by a small amount for 25/26, but these will be need to be monitored to ensure we remain competitive. In particular, the Castle Tour will be closed for four months during 2025 for the roof to be replaced. It is therefore essential that we remain competitive to regrow demand for this attraction.

5.5.6 Additional tour fees 25/26:

Item	Cost	Comment
Castle Tour Guide – Commercial	£35.00 (no change from existing fee)	One off - charge per tour guide

5.5.7 A Tour guide is a new concept which was introduced for testing during 2024/25. However, there has been limited demand and we propose to test this for one more year during 2025/26 to evaluate whether sufficient demand exists to support continuation of the service.

5.5.8 Proposed fees for schools 25/26

5.5.9 The castle was initially programmed to be closed from November through to December 2024 for roof works, however as the duration of works was not sufficient this has been moved to January through to April / May 2025. This has resulted in the team not being able to book school visits for the November to December 2024 period, now this has moved to January to May this results in greater losses of income through school bookings as this is our peak period.

5.5.10 Costs for school visits do not include VAT.

5.5.11 The key difference between the normal entrance fee which is charge inclusive of VAT, is that you have the audio tour guide included with the price of the ticket.

Year	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Adult	£8.60	£9.46	£9.46	£9.99
School Children	£6.00	£6.60	£6.60	£6.99
Education Facilities includes toys, dressing up clothes, games, paper, pens and 2 tour guides (1 teacher free per 10 children. For special needs groups, carers admitted free as required)	£95.00	£104.50	£110	£110

5.5.12 As with the general admission prices, the fees for schools were last raised in 2023/24.

5.5.13 Ceremonies – fee model – chamber

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Weddings -					
Monday - Thursday	£900	£990	£990	£1,020	£1,050
Friday	£940	£1,034	£1085	£1,120	£1,155
Saturday	£980	£1,078	£1,125	£1,160	£1,195
Sunday	£980	£1,078	£1,125	£1,160	£1,195

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Events like Renewal of Vows/Baby Naming / Wakes				
Monday - Thursday	£330	£363	£380	£380
Friday	£440	£484	£500	£500
Saturday	£550	£605	£630	£630
Sunday	£550	£605	£630	£630

5.5.14 This will be reviewed as we develop our commercial wedding package options post Gateway.

5.5.15 In respect of weddings, these have suffered as a result of castle closures relating to repairs to the roof (see 5.7.1 above).

5.5.16 Ceremonies – additional fees

Additional Ceremony fees	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Castle Photo Opportunity – buy 30mins in the Castle 4-4.30pm	£55	£60	£62
Wedding Fair Table (single)	£28	£30	£31
Wedding Fair Table (Double)	£55	£60	£62
Corkage Table	£55	£100	£103

- Council Chamber

Venue	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Chamber Half Day	£110	£115	£119
Chamber Full Day	£220	£230	£237
Chamber Evening	£110	£225	£232
Castle Conference Room Half day	£83	£85	£88
Venue	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Castle Conference Room Full Day	£165	£170	£175
Castle Conference Evening	£83	£195	£200

5.5.17 It is **RECOMMENDED** that the proposed scale of fees for Tonbridge Castle set out in Section 5.5 be adopted with effect from 1 April 2025.

5.6 Fee and Charges for Events on open spaces

5.6.1 There are various levels of fees and charges based on numbers of people attending an event at any one time.

5.6.2 For each event there is an administration fee for the cost of processing the application, and an event fee for the associated costs of maintaining and running the open spaces.

- Commercial Events

5.6.3 The current administration fees (2024/25) for commercial events on Council-owned land are as follows:-

Type of event	Maximum attendees (at once)	Administration fee
Commercial	Less than 100	£58
	Less than 500	£58
	Between 500 and 1,499	£350
	More than 1,500	£695

5.6.4 Additional land hire fees are also charged for one-off events, as follows:-

Type of event	Maximum attendees (at once)	Land Hire Fee
Commercial	Less than 100	£580
	Less than 500	£580
	Between 500 and 1,499	£1158
	More than 1,500	£1737

5.6.5 Additional charges may apply where events require use of Council equipment, car parks or buildings. These charges will be determined on a case-by-case basis. In the event of a car park needing to be closed, the charge would equate to the loss of car parking income.

5.6.6 The charges, or rent, for regular activities will be determined on a case-by-case basis and will be specified in the legal agreement. In arriving at a charge or rent, Officers will take into account the following criteria:

- The requirement for the Council to obtain best value. This assessment may result in the opportunity being tendered to provide other operators a chance to apply.
- The nature of the proposed activity, for example whether it is being run for commercial gain. The Council will assess the anticipated income/profit being generated and may seek comparable evidence from similar activities taking place in similar areas to arrive at a charge or rent.

- The frequency and duration of use. Activities which take place more frequently or for a longer duration will attract a higher charge than those taking place for short durations.
- The physical area on which the activity will take place. For example, the proposed location may result in additional income being generated.

5.6.7 Our research has indicated that the current practice for many local authorities elsewhere is not to publish their open space fee hire costs. This allows for a fee to be negotiated on a case-by-case basis, with the potential to achieve higher fees for large or significant events. To allow greater flexibility in respect of one-off events, it is proposed for commercial events that we do not publish any fees, as these will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis to optimise and enhance revenue income. Members are asked to note however that any negotiated fees for commercial events would not fall below those set out above.

Administration Fees – Charity and Community events

- Current administration fees 2024-25

Type of event	Maximum attendees (at once)	Administration fee
Charity or community	Less than 100	£29
	Less than 500	£29
	Between 500 and 1,499	£58
	More than 1,500	£116

5.6.8 The unforeseen consequences of the current threshold of “Less than 500” results in a lot of event organisers completing their event applications to reflect under 500 people where the lower fee level applies. The reality is that some of these events exceed the threshold of 499 people at any one time

5.6.9 It is proposed to simplify the applicable thresholds for people attending an event by reducing the threshold down to 200 people for future bookings to reflect the administration and supervision time that has to be undertaken by TMBC staff as follows:

- Proposed administration fees 2025-26

Type of event	Maximum attendees (at once)	Administration fee
Charity or community	Less than 200	£29
	Between 200 and 1,000	£58
	More than 1,000	£116

Land hire fees- charity and community events

5.6.10 Current Charges for land hire 2024-25 – per day

Type of event	Maximum attendees (at once)	Charge
Charity or community	Less than 100	£0
	Less than 500	£116
	Between 500 and 1,499	£116
	More than 1,500	£116

5.6.11 Proposed Charges for land hire 2025-26 – per day

Type of event	Maximum attendees (at once)	Charge “If free to attend”	Charge “If charging to attend”
Charity or community	Less than 100	£20	£50
	Between 100 and less than 500	£116	£150
	Between 500 – 2,000	£150	£180
	Between 2,001 and less than 5,000	£200	£500

5.6.12 Any changes to the fees charged will only be considered in exceptional circumstances by the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive.

Billboards and banners

5.6.13 Billboards and banners – Current charges 2024-25

5.6.14 The current charges for people to advertise their events within the Borough depend on the category of the organisation. These fall into one of three categories (Commercial, Community and Charity).

5.6.15 The Billboards have to be serviced regularly, taking down old out of date adverts, and putting up new posters. This service comes at a cost, depending on the number of adverts that have to be changed, as the Council have to pay for someone to undertake this duty.

5.6.16 An organisation who is a registered Charity, regardless how large the charity is can advertise many posters during the year promoting their events without any cost to them, and no income for Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council.

- Current fee levels

Type of event	Hire Duration 2 weeks	Charge
Commercial	Billboards (A0) – 3no. Max	£250 + VAT
	Notice boards (A2 size) – 6no. Max	£150 + VAT
	Banners (2m x 3m) – up to 3no.	£200 + VAT
	Banners (2m x 3m) up to 6no. Max	£350 + VAT

Type of event	Hire Duration 2 weeks	Charge
Community	Billboards (A0) – 3no. Max	£25
	Notice boards (A2 size) – 6no. Max	£20
	Banners (2m x 3m) – up to 3no	£25
	Banners (2m x 3m) up to 6no. Max	£40

5.6.17 It is proposed to introduce a small fee level for charities to cover the costs of this service which entails putting up and taking down the posters. We fully appreciate the financial pressures that all Charities have to deal with and therefore have reflected this in the proposed pricing

5.6.18 Billboards and banners – proposed charges for 2025-26

Type of event	Hire Duration 2 weeks	Charge
Commercial	Billboards (A0) – Three billboards to show advert	£250 + VAT
	Notice boards (A2 size) Four notice boards to show advert	£150 +VAT
	Banners (2m x 3m) Three banners to show advert	£200 + VAT
	Banners (2m x 3m) up to 6no. Max	£350 + VAT

Type of event	Hire Duration 2 weeks	Charge
Community	Billboards (A0) – Three billboards to show advert	£75
	Notice boards (A2 size) Four notice boards to show advert	£50
	Banners (2m x 3m) Three banners to show advert	£50
	Banners (2m x 3m) up to 6no. Max	£75

Type of event	Hire Duration 2 weeks	Charge
Charity	Billboards (A0) – Three billboards to show advert	£30
	Notice boards (A2 size) Four notice boards to show advert	£20
	Banners (2m x 3m) Three banners to show advert	£20
	Banners (2m x 3m) up to 6no. Max	£20

5.6.19 It is **RECOMMENDED** that the proposed scale of fees for Events on Open Spaces and Billboards set out in Section 5.6 be adopted with effect from 1 April 2025.

5.7 Council Tax and Business Rate Court Costs

5.7.1 The Council is obliged by law to collect all unpaid amounts of council tax and business rates and therefore has to take recovery action through the Magistrates' Court to obtain the necessary order.

5.7.2 Following a review last year, the Court's approval to increasing the level of council tax costs requested from taxpayers was sought. This request brought us into line with the majority of Kent authorities (see table below).

Court Costs 2024/25	Council Tax - costs requested			Non Domestic Rates - costs requested			Increase costs? Or proposed cost figure for 2025/26
	Summons	Liability Order	Total	Summons	Liability Order	Total	
Ashford	£60.00	£65.00	£125.00	£0.00	£180.00	£180.00	No increase proposed
Canterbury	£79.00	£60.00	£139.00	£79.00	£60.00	£139.00	Currently under discussion
Dartford	£60.00	£50.00	£110.00	£60.00	£50.00	£110.00	No increase proposed
Dover	£92.00	£80.00	£172.00	£85.00	£55.00	£140.00	Currently under discussion
Folkestone & Hythe	£46.00	£54.00	£100.00	£109.00	£65.00	£174.00	No increase proposed
Gravesham	£65.00	£55.00	£120.00	£120.00	£0.00	£120.00	Increased in last year
Maidstone	£60.00	£50.00	£110.00	£145.00	£55.00	£200.00	To be considered
Medway	£95.00	£25.00	£120.00	£95.00	£25.00	£120.00	No increase proposed
Tonbridge & Malling	£60.00	£50.00	£110.00	£120.00	£60.00	£180.00	No increase proposed
Sevenoaks	£60.00	£50.00	£110.00	£60.00	£50.00	£110.00	No increase proposed
Swale	£43.00	£60.00	£103.00	£0.00	£103.00	£103.00	Going to propose increase 2025/26
Thanet	£60.00	£50.00	£110.00	£60.00	£50.00	£110.00	Currently under discussion
Tunbridge Wells	£65.00	£55.00	£120.00	£145.00	£55.00	£200.00	To be considered

5.7.3 The increased amount of £110.00 has been charged back to council taxpayers since 1 April 2024. Business rates costs remained unchanged at £180.00.

5.7.4 As the level of costs has only recently been reviewed, I do not propose to seek the Court's approval to increase the level of costs requested from council taxpayers or business rate payers.

5.7.5 It is **RECOMMENDED**, therefore, that the amount of costs charged in 2024/25 should remain the same for the 2025/26 financial year.

6 Other Options

6.1 For each of the services included in the report a proposed charge has been included taking into account the guiding principles for the annual review. Members of this Committee may of course wish to bring forward other options such as lower or higher charges

7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

7.1 The fees and charges have been considered in accordance with a set of guiding principles and the opportunity to maximise income has been taken into account where possible

8 Risk Assessment

8.1 A decision is required now on the proposed fee structure for these activities to ensure that the Council has timely and up-to-date arrangements in place to administer service requests when received.

8.2 Failure to uprate fees and charges appropriately when costs are increasing will expose the council to financial pressure with its Medium Term Financial Strategy.

9 Legal Implications

9.1 Section 93 of the 2003 Local Government Act allows authorities to charge for services that they have a power [but not a duty] to provide.

10 Consultation and Communications

10.1 In bringing forward proposals, fees and charges of surrounding local authorities have been considered.

10.2 Under Section 93 of the 2003 Local Government Act there is no requirement for the Council to consult with the public.

11 Implementation

11.1 Implementation of all the proposed charges will be from 1st April 2025.

12 Cross Cutting Issues

12.1 Climate Change and Biodiversity

12.1.1 No issues. Climate change advice has not been sought in the preparation of the options and recommendations in this report.

12.2 Equalities and Diversity

12.2.1 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.

Background Papers	None
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