

Communities and Environment Scrutiny Select Committee

05 November 2025

Part 1 - Public

Matters for Cabinet - Key Decision



Cabinet Member	Martin Coffin, Cabinet Member for Finance, Waste & Infrastructure Des Keers, Cabinet Member for Community Services Robin Betts, Cabinet Member for Housing, Environment & Economy
Responsible Officer	Robert Styles, Director of Street, Leisure and Technical Services Eleanor Hoyle, Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health Paul Worden, Head of Finance
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Review of Fees & Charges – Waste, Leisure and Environmental Health

1 Summary and Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report sets out the proposed fees and charges for the provision of services in respect of garden waste subscriptions, household bulky refuse & 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 2026. It also includes a proposal for introducing charges for recycling & refuse containers at new developments.

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 The proposed scale of charges for garden waste subscriptions, household bulky refuse & 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 as detailed in the report be approved;
- 3.2 The proposed scale of charges be implemented from 1st April 2026; and
- 3.3 The principle of charging property developers for recycling & refuse containers at new properties be approved in principle.

4 Introduction and Background

- 4.1 In bringing forward the charging proposals for 2026/27 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 2026/27 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 taxpayer 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);
 - 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.

- 4.3 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 Proposals

5.1 Garden Waste Subscriptions

- 5.1.1 The current charge for an annual garden waste subscription is £63 with a second or third bin discounted to £40. 27,900 residents are currently signed up for the service representing a take up of around 54% of estimated eligible properties. The current charge represents a price per collection of £2.42 for a fortnightly service. Our waste contract partner authority (Tunbridge Wells BC) is already charging £66. If a resident chooses not to subscribe to the service then there remains the option to take the garden waste direct to the household waste sites or have it collected by a private operator.

- 5.1.2 Current charges (2025/26 Financial Year) for garden waste subscriptions across district & borough authorities in Kent are:

Ashford BC - £62.00
 Canterbury CC - £58.92 plus £71.38 to purchase a bin
 Dartford BC - £51.00
 Dover DC - £64.25
 Folkestone & Hythe DC - £61.70 plus £38.25 to purchase a bin
 Gravesham BC - £62.00
 Maidstone BC - £51.00 plus £10 fee for new subscriptions
 Sevenoaks DC - £60.00
 Swale BC - £62.00
 Thanet DC - £70.00 plus £42.00 one-off charge per bin
 Tonbridge & Malling BC - £63.00
 Tunbridge Wells BC - £66.00

It can be seen that charges for the collection services range from £51 to £70 (excepting any one-off charges) with an average County charge of £61.

- 5.1.3 Income to the Council from the garden waste subscription scheme is significant - second only to income from parking - and uptake across the borough since its introduction has been extremely good. This has been assisted by a number of marketing campaigns which will be continued in the future.
- 5.1.4 Advice from Finance colleagues has been received stating that where fees & charges are linked to contract costs which are subject to annual indexation, a 4% increase is to be considered for setting fees for 2026/27 Financial Year. As such,

and rounding to the nearest pound, it is proposed that the charge for the initial subscription would be set at £66.00, with second & third containers set at £42.00.

5.2 Household Bulky Refuse & Fridge/Freezer Collection Service

5.2.1 In April 2016, a two-tier fee was introduced with a price for up to six items of bulky refuse and a lower price for up to two fridge/freezer only collections. The new fee structure also included a concessionary charge for those receiving Council Tax Support.

5.2.2 While Councils are not able to make a profit from the collection of a “prescribed” household waste (such as a bulky collection service), the legislation does allow Councils to recover the associated collection costs together with reasonable administration costs.

Currently this Council’s charges for bulky collections are:

- Standard fee (up to six items) £72
- Fridge/freezer only £44
- Subsidised fee (CTR) £15

5.2.3 The current fee structure of our neighbouring authorities is outlined below, with each authority having different arrangements in place.

Gravesham B.C.	Maidstone B.C.	Sevenoaks D.C.	Tun. Wells B.C.
1-4 items - £33 Up to 8 items - £66	1-4 Items - £32 Up to 8 items - £74 White goods - £24	1 item - £25 2 items - £30 3 to 4 items – 40 5 to 10 items - £55 White goods - £25	1-4 items - £66 (max.1 fridge or freezer) Up to 8 items - 132
No concessions	Council Tax Reduction 1-4 items - £22 (one per year) 5-8 items £42 (one per year)	No Concessions	Council Tax Reduction 1- 4 items free (one every 90 days)

- 5.2.4 As per 5.1.4 above, as this service is subject to annual indexation, a 4% increase is considered appropriate. As such, it is proposed that the charge for the standard service of up to six items would be set at £75, fridge/freezer only at £46 and the subsidised fee at £15.50.

5.3 **Refuse collection charge**

- 5.3.1 On occasion the Waste Services Team receive requests from customers to empty wheeled bins where the customer has not placed their bin out and has missed the collection. On these occasions the Team are occasionally asked by the customer if they can pay for a “one off” return collection.
- 5.3.2 A collection charge to cover these circumstances was introduced in April 2015. It covers the contract cost of returning and includes a small administration fee. To date there have been no concerns raised by customers. Although the number of requests is low, it does allow our Waste Services staff to offer an alternative solution. In accordance with the guidance stated at 5.1.4 and 5.2.4 above, it is proposed to increase this charge to £27.00 for 2026/27.

5.4 **Property Developer Charge for New Bins**

- 5.4.1 Currently the Council supplies all bins and waste containers to residents at no charge. The purchasing costs for new & replacement containers are met from the Council's capital budgets, currently £159K for 2025/26 FY. This does not include delivery or administrative costs.
- 5.4.2 Research shows that the majority of councils now charge developers for containers for new properties, and some charge residents for replacements and/or extra bins. In Kent all borough & district councils apart from TMBC now make a charge to developers for containers for new builds, both for individual properties and those with communal collection points. The charge is generally made as a one-off, with maintenance/replacements becoming the responsibility of the councils. As an example, the recent development at Leybourne Chase cost the Council £38,344 in capital purchasing costs for all containers required to provide the recycling & collection services.
- 5.4.3 The few councils which make a charge for replacement containers have reported difficulties with managing such a charge, specifically when trying to evidence whether the loss/damage was caused by the resident or the collection contractor.
- 5.4.4 As such, it is recommended that Members approve in principle a charge for new property developers to include capital costs, delivery costs and a reasonable administrative element. If approved, officers will begin discussions with the Waste Services, Finance & Planning colleagues to develop a suitable process for managing such a charge, including invoicing & payment systems.

5.5 Stray Dog Redemption fee

- 5.5.1 The Environmental Protection Act 1990 prescribes that a person claiming to be the owner of a dog seized as a stray by the Council shall not be entitled to the return of the dog unless all the expenses incurred by reason of its detention, and such further amount as is for the time being prescribed, are met. The Environmental Protection (Stray Dogs) Regulations 1992 set down a prescribed redemption fee of £25 and provides for local authorities to recover its other reasonable expenses, in addition to any other expenses incurred, such as kennelling costs.
- 5.5.2 Where a dog is taken to kennels the Council charges the owner for the other reasonable expenses, associated with the costs of providing the Dog Warden contract and admin costs. This is presently set at £90.50. The total fee charged by the Council is therefore £115.50.
- 5.5.3 In line with other contract-linked costs, it is proposed that the contract & administration fee be increased to £94 with no formal waiver or discount, but the Council will continue to exercise discretion to allow payment by instalments. Daily kennelling costs are paid direct to the kennels by the owner when collecting their dog.
- 5.5.4 At present, where the Dog Warden returns a stray dog to the owner without the need for kennelling, a charge is made at the prescribed fee of £25. No change is proposed to this charge as it is a statutory fee set in legislation.

Service	Current Charge	Proposed Charge 2026/27
Stray Dog Redemption Fee - Return Direct to owner	£25 (Statutory fee)	£25 (Statutory fee)
Stray Dog Redemption Fee - Kennelling required	£115.50 (including statutory fee, but not including daily kennelling costs).	£119.00 (including statutory fee, but not including daily kennelling costs).

5.6 Tonbridge Allotment Charges

- 5.6.1 Allotments in Tonbridge are managed on the Council's behalf by the Tonbridge Allotments and Gardens Association. In 2021 the Association adopted a charging structure that was approved by Members of the former Communities and Housing Advisory Board on the 16 February 2021 and approved at the Associations annual general meeting in October 2021. The charging structure raised annual rents per rod by one pound per annum through to 2024/25 and rents were increased to £10 per rod in 2025/2026.
- 5.6.2 This charging structure referred to above has now expired. The Association have therefore proposed a freeze to the annual rent of £10 per rod for 2026/2027.

Proposed Annual Charges (10 rod plot)	
2026/27	£100

- 5.6.3 Whilst no direct income is received by the Council, it is expected that there will be no increase in management fee paid by the Council to the Association.

5.7 Tonbridge Cemetery Charges

- 5.7.1 On the 9 November 2021 Members of the former Communities and Housing Advisory Board undertook a strategic and comprehensive review of charges at the Cemetery. The review specifically took into consideration the significant subsidy applied in relation to site management and maintenance costs. The Board, and subsequently Cabinet, approved charges for 2021/22 to reflect and address the above.
- 5.7.2 Additional increases of 10%, 5.25% and 3.5% were applied in April 2023, April 2024 and April 2025 respectively, to reflect inflationary and contract increases at the time of each review. It is proposed that an increase of 4% is applied to charges from the 1 April 2026, again to take into account inflation and relevant contract indexation. Proposed charges are shown at **Annex 1**.
- 5.7.3 Members will note that there are no fees for burials of under 18's. This policy decision was recommended to and approved by Cabinet through a Supplementary Report considered on the 14 February 2019. Cabinet resolved that: "the existing charges for child burials at Tonbridge Cemetery be amended, with future burials for all under 18-year-olds being free of charge with immediate effect". Members may wish to note that on average only one to two burials for under 18s have been undertaken in recent years, and the Council is able to seek reimbursement of an element of the costs for these burials.

5.8 **Pest Control**

- 5.8.1 The price for a treatment of rats or mice is £126. It is proposed to continue to subsidise this for residents in receipt of Council Tax Reduction Scheme by £66 so the resident will have to pay £60.

5.9 **Condemned Food Certificates**

- 5.9.1 This is a service available to food businesses in the borough which properly controls the safe surrender and disposal of food deemed by Environmental Health staff as unfit for human consumption. The service continues to reflect legislative requirements for stricter controls and is based on total cost recovery. The proposed charges, as set out below, continue to reflect this approach.
- 5.9.2 Recent years have seen no requests for these certificates. The lower income rate is reflected in estimated full year income.

Service	Current Charge	Proposed Charge 2026/27
For each Condemned Food Certificate Issued	£228 for first hour plus £228 for each additional hour plus VAT	£237 for first hour plus £237 for each additional hour plus VAT

5.10 **Exported Food Certificates**

- 5.10.1 This is a service provided by the Council for food exporters who export food not of animal origin. In this instance, Authorised Officers from the Borough Council certify that the food products being exported have been manufactured and held under hygienic conditions in accordance with the requirements of assimilated Regulation (EC) 852/2004 and The Food Safety & Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013. The premises are subject to regular inspection by Food and Safety Officers.
- 5.10.2 The level of demand for Exported Food Certificates is approximately 20 per year.
- 5.10.3 There is some variance across the County in fees charged for this service in 2025/26:

Dartford BC – Price on Application
Maidstone BC - £149
Sevenoaks DC - £82
Swale BC - £149
Tunbridge Wells BC - £149

- 5.10.4 We propose to apply a 4% increase to the current charge to reflect costs in responding to these certificate requests.

Service	Current Charge	Proposed Charge 2026/27	Estimated Income 2026/27
For each Exported Food Certificate issued	£92.50 plus VAT	£96.20 plus VAT	£1,924

5.11 Food Hygiene Requests for Re-visits

- 5.11.1 Food business operators that have made improvement to hygiene standards following their inspection can request a re-visit with a view to giving them a new and higher food hygiene rating. There is currently a charge of £215 for this service, which is based on cost recovery. Neighbouring authorities are currently charging as follows:

Ashford £117

Mid Kent Environmental Health Partnership £210

Sevenoaks £270

Dartford £205

Gravesham £221, and

Dover £207

- 5.11.2 The proposal is to increase the fee for 2026/27 to £223

5.12 Contaminated Land

- 5.12.1 The Environmental Protection Act 1990 Part 2A requires local authorities to implement a system for the identification and remediation of land where contamination is causing a risk to human health or the wider environment because of historic or current uses.
- 5.12.2 The Environmental Protection Team provides a contaminated land information service or assessment of risk for which it currently makes a charge of £100 per hour in responding to these requests for information.
- 5.12.3 Guidance from the Information Commissioner advises that local authorities can make a reasonable charge. We have assumed that a reasonable charge includes the hourly rate of the Officer responsible for providing information, on-costs and an administration charge.

5.12.4 The fee has been derived based upon comparison with other Kent local authorities. For example, while Ashford charge £25 per hour, Gravesham charge £113. Some Authorities such as Folkestone & Hythe, and Medway charge flat rates of £191.62 and £174 respectively. There is no maximum fee under the legislation.

5.12.5 We propose to apply a small increase to the current charge to reflect costs in responding to these requests for information.

Service	Current Charge	Proposed Charge 2026/27	Estimated Income 2026/27
Responding to requests for information relating to contaminated land	£100.00 per hour (1 hour minimum charge)	£104.00 per hour (1 hour minimum charge)	£2,080

5.13 Private Water Supplies

5.13.1 The Private Water Supplies Regulations 2009 introduced a statutory and more onerous regime for the risk assessment and sampling of private water supplies.

5.13.2 In a report to this Board on 28 February 2011 it was agreed to introduce a charge to recover the cost of Officer's time. In addition, owners of private water supplies and private distribution networks will be charged for the cost of sample analysis.

5.13.3 We have reviewed the cost of providing this service and propose to apply a small increase to £94 per hour, plus the cost of sample analysis.

5.13.4 The fee has been derived based upon comparison with other Kent local authorities. Tunbridge Wells charge £89 per hour. Dover charge a flat fee of £125 for sampling and £1,000 for a new risk assessment and £500 for a risk assessment review every 5 years thereafter, with sample analysis costs on top. These charges are no longer subject to a maximum limit by virtue of the Private Water Supplies (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2018. However, there is an expectation that charges should only cover costs incurred.

5.13.5 As each private water supply is very different, the Officer time for each visit/ risk assessment is difficult to quantify. We have seen a decline in this service over recent years which is reflected in the estimated full year income.

Service	Current Charge	Proposed Charge 2026/27	Estimated Income 2026/27
Carrying out sampling and risk assessment of private water supplies	£90.00 per hour (1 hour minimum charge) plus VAT	£94.00 per hour (1 hour minimum charge) plus VAT	£752

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.

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 surrounding local authorities have been consulted so Members can make appropriate comparisons. 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 2026.

12 Cross Cutting Issues

- 12.1 Following corporate guidelines for all of the charges included in this report has ensured a standard approach across different services.

13 Climate Change and Biodiversity

- 13.1 A moderate source of emissions is likely to be maintained at current levels.
- 13.2 Climate change advice has been sought in the preparation of the options and recommendations in this report. It is not considered that that the proposed will reduce demand for the services which is particularly relevant for the subscription for garden waste.

14 Equalities and Diversity

- 14.1 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.

15 Other If Relevant

- None

Background Papers	None
Annex 1	Tonbridge Cemetery Proposed Charges