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**Meeting:** Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Date:** 17 January 2013

**Subject:** Fees and Charges 2013/14

**Report of:** Cllr Maurice Jones , Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources

**Summary:** The report proposes the revised fees and charges rates to be effective from 1 April 2013 and identifies those charges where increases are significantly different from the 2% advisory increase as per the 2013/14 Budget Strategy.

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**Advising Officer:** Charles Warboys, Chief Finance Officer

**Contact Officer:** Denis Galvin, Head of Financial Performance

**Public/Exempt:** Public

**Wards Affected:** All

**Function of:** Council

## **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Council Priorities:**

1. The annual review and setting of the Council's Fees and Charges are integral to the Council's Budget Strategy and the legal requirement to deliver a balanced budget. The review ensures a rigorous, responsible and realistic approach is taken to determine the appropriateness and relevance of the Council's schedule of fees and charges. Setting a balanced budget ensures the Council allocates its resources to deliver the priorities. These are:
  - Enhancing Central Bedfordshire
  - Improved Educational Attainment
  - Better Infrastructure
  - Great universal services
  - Value for money

### **Financial:**

2. The financial implications are set out in the report. The proposals set out in this report may be subject to amendment, once the Local Government Financial Settlement has been announced. At the time of writing this report this announcement is still awaited and it could have significant adverse financial implications for the Council, requiring it to make adjustment to the charges proposed in this report

**Legal:**

3. The Council has various powers to charge for aspects of the services it provides. The general rule is that when it is carrying out a statutory duty the Council can only make a charge where there is specific power to do so.

Section 93 of the Local government Act 2003 provides that when the Council is providing a discretionary service, it may charge for the service, provided the person receiving the service has agreed to its provision. Overall the income from such charges must not exceed the cost of the provision.

**Risk Management:**

4. Risks relating to service take-up and organisational reputation can be associated with increases to fees and charges that are perceived to be 'comparatively' high. The key risks are:

- Subject to the level of increase (and in view of the current financial climate), services might become unaffordable to some members of the community, which may impact take-up and therefore overall income levels. This may also impact on the Council's reputation.
- Those paying fees and charges may perceive that a higher than expected increase on any given area will be used to cross-subsidise increased costs of other service areas and not to cover the direct cost of the service they receive. This again may present a reputational risk.
- Services subject to significant increases in fees might attract unfavourable media attention, which again could result in reputational damage to the Council.

**Staffing (including Trades Unions):**

5. Not applicable.

**Equalities/Human Rights:**

6. Where appropriate, Equalities Impact Assessments will be carried out for proposals.

**Community Safety:**

7. Not applicable.

**Sustainability:**

8. Not applicable.

**Procurement:**

9. Not applicable.

**RECOMMENDATION(S):**

**The Committee is asked to:-**

1. **Consider the report and schedule of proposed fees and charges and comment as necessary to the Executive**

## Background

10. The Council's Charging Policy states that *'All fees and charges will be reviewed annually and adjusted as necessary in line with the Council's charging policy. The Chief Finance Officer will provide services with guidance each year as to the maximum inflation rate that may be applied.'*

11. It also states that *'All fees and charges should be reviewed on a more fundamental basis at least every 3 years, where it will be necessary to examine all the factors set out below in accordance with good practice guidance i.e. the CIPFA Practical Guide for Local Authorities on Income Generation (Fully revised 2008).'* This was undertaken in 2010/11 with the Revenue Income Optimisation Project where successful business cases were integrated into the fees and charges as agreed by Council in February 2011 and published thereafter. The next review is scheduled for autumn 2013.

In accordance with the policy, the Chief Finance Officer has advised that the minimum inflation rate to be applied in line with the Corporate Budget Strategy is 2% which is below the latest reported Retail Price Index. Where there have been significant variations from this advisory level these have been identified separately in this report.

12.

The proposals set out in this report may be subject to amendment, once the Local Government Financial Settlement has been announced. At the time of writing this report this announcement is still awaited and it could have significant adverse financial implications for the Council, requiring it to make adjustment to the charges proposed in this report

## General 2% increase

13. For the majority of services there will be a 2% increase for 2013/14. There are instances where this is not practically possible and these are highlighted in the following paragraphs. The detail of the changes is set out in Appendix A.

14. Social Care Health and Housing

Adult Social Care charges have been increased by 2% in line with the Council's budget strategy. It is usual practice to increase these charges in line with the DWP statutory increase in benefits and pensions. The inflation rate that is expected to be applied is 2.2% (based on CPI for September 2012) but this is subject to final confirmation by the government. If this is confirmed then the 2% proposals would stand. If not the charges can be reviewed again once the announcement is made.

15. As part of the Landlord Services' plans to develop an Outreach Service to non-tenants a new charge is proposed that will combine the provision of a Careline Emergency Response facility with one or more visits from a Sheltered Housing Officer per week.

16. In Learning Disabilities it is considered that the charge for Linsell House is no longer representative of the costs involved in providing the service. An initial evaluation is being conducted by the Head of Learning Disabilities and Mental Health and the Finance Manager to determine the level of disparity and to make recommendations for the level of increase which may differ from the 2% currently proposed

17. In Mental Health services consideration over 2013/14 will be given to the advisability of implementing the charge for adult customers with mental health needs attending day centres provided by the NHS

18. Children's Services

Music Services

Children's Services are recommending to hold prices for music services at the 2012/13 rate. The service was redesigned in 2011 to be a front end cost neutral provision.

19. Sustainable Communities

Key Changes include:

20. **Public Protection**

Licences:

Riding establishments – it is proposed to vary the cost of the licence based on the number of horses. This means that those who have the highest risk pay the most. The variances will better reflect the cost to the Council and reduce burden on businesses.

Dangerous wild animals and renewal of dangerous wild animals, Pet shops, Animal breeders and Animal Boarding Establishments – it is proposed to reduce the cost of the licence so that they better reflect the cost to the Council and reduce burden on businesses.

Animals Boarding and Breeding – where animal breeders and animal boarding are carried out on the same site, it is proposed to charge a reduced combined rate to reflect the reduced cost to the Council.

Animal Home Boarding – it is proposed to introduce a new charge due to an increase in the number of home run boarders.

Zoos – it is proposed to change the way this licence is charged for to better reflect the amount of officer time required.

Licensing of Hackney Cabs and Private Hire Vehicles – following consultation with the Licensing Committee and the trade, it is proposed to freeze the charges.

Acupuncturists – a new charge for acupuncturists already registered with a recognised professional body is proposed to be introduced due to the reduction in work required by the Council.

21. **Building Control**

High Hedges – it is proposed to increase the charge to better reflect the cost of the service including the need to run any potential appeals

22. **Highways and Transport**

Off street parking hourly charges, penalty charge notices and permits (except annual – see below) are proposed to be held at 2012/13 rates.

Parking permits – following requests from Members it is proposed to decrease the Residents permit per annum.

Book 25 visitors day tickets – due to the low take up it is proposed to reduce this charge. It will also be offered in conjunction with the first permit to try and increase take up.

Replacement of concessionary travel permits and Travel Aid Scheme – it is proposed to increase these charges to better reflect the true cost and bring the Council in line with other Concessionary Fare Authorities.

Construction of Crossover – it is proposed to charge a 10% admin fee to cover the costs of administration

23. Rights of Way

Documents – it is proposed to add £2 for postage and packing for documents when a request is made to post them.

24. Libraries

Following benchmarking it is proposed to freeze the following library charges:

- CDs
- Videos
- Fines
- Lost and damaged items
- Requests (apart from Additional charge for books borrowed from outside Bedfordshire)
- Lost ticket replacement
- Colour CD-ROM and internet prints
- Colour photocopies
- UK faxes

Picture hanging service – it is proposed to delete this charging structure as it is not required (i.e. the service does not receive requests).

Display of commercial posters and Libraries sale items – it is proposed to delete this charging structure as it is not required (i.e. the service does not receive requests). More fundamentally, the service wants to use library wall space to create attractive displays for library events and activities and promote their own services in order to increase usage.

Charity and commercial group sales – it is proposed to delete this charging structure as it is not required (i.e. the service does not receive requests). It was originally set up when the library service used to receive requests from charities to operate charity Christmas card sales. This has not happened for many years.

Meeting Room Hire – it is proposed to harmonise the Leighton Buzzard Theatre meeting room hire charge, with the Leighton Buzzard (and Flitwick) Libraries' room hire charge.

25. Planning

Pre application advice - This has now been replaced by a new charging scheme due to user feedback. The future scheme will make a simpler charging regime and one which does not discourage larger developments.

26. Corporate Resources

27. The Registration Service is provided for Bedford Borough Council via a Service Level Agreement and both authorities must agree those fees which are set locally.

28. Fees for marriages and civil partnerships use at Local Authority premises have been held at 2012/13 levels.

29. Fees for Celebratory Ceremonies have been reduced as a consequence of a change of process which has reduced costs.

30. Local Land Charges are required by a statutory instrument to be non profit making and the current set fees are at an appropriate level to comply with this.
31. Charges for Freedom of Information (FOI) requests that require more than 18 hours to collate and extract information to complete are subject to the FOI Act Fees Regulations where the charge can be no more than £25 per hour.

**Fees and Charges Schedule**

32. The full revised schedule is shown at Appendix A.

**Appendices:**

Appendix A – Fees and Charges Schedule

**Background papers and their location:** (open to public inspection)

None