

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CO-CONVENED OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House on Tuesday, 23 September 2014.

PRESENT

Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Cllrs: Barker (Chairman), Duckett and McVicar

Also Present: Mr Chapman (PGR co-optee), Mr Court (PGR co-optee) and Ms F Image (Diocesan representative)

Substitutes: Cllrs Berry (substitute for Cllr Costin) and B Saunders (substitute for Cllr G Clarke)

Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Cllrs: Duckett (Chairman), Sparrow (Vice-Chairman), Chapman and Coleman

Substitutes Cllr B Saunders (substitute for Cllr Johnstone)

Social Care, Health & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Cllrs: Drinkwater (Chairman), Berry, Duckett and Goodchild

Substitutes Cllrs McVicar (substitute for Cllr Gomm) and Sparrow (substitute for Cllr Sheppard)

Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Cllrs: McVicar (Chairman), Bowater, Matthews, B Saunders, Shadbolt and Williams

Substitutes Cllr Chapman (substitute for Cllr Gomm)

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs A R Bastable
Mrs G Clarke
N B Costin
Dr R Egan
C C Gomm
Ms A M W Graham
Mrs D B Gurney
Mr T Hodey
P Hollick
R W Johnstone
D Jones
Mr D Morton
Mrs M Mustoe
R B Pepworth
N J Sheppard
M A Smith
N Warren
T Woodward

In addition to discussing the specific fees and charges Members commented that the report did not clearly demonstrate which of these were statutory and where there was flexibility to amend proposals. It was suggested that future reports identify the level of service use as a means of providing context for these charges, for example in relation to waste collection it was proposed to increase the charge by £1.00 but it was not clear the extent of the impact of this change. Additionally it was suggested that a more consistent approach to setting the fees and charges was required, for example some directorates provided a 2014/15 comparison and others did not. Members also commented that in the future it was necessary to have appropriate officers in attendance at OSC meetings to discuss the proposed charges and to be able to respond to queries on the nature of specific charges.

In light of the report the Committee discussed the detailed proposed fees and charges and commented as follows:-

- Social Care, Health & Housing (Appendix A1)

Clarity was sought in relation to proposed fees and charges for telecare monitoring services for those who met eligibility criteria and whether VAT had been applied appropriately to these charges. Members also queried whether costs relating to domiciliary care were per hour for each carer.

Members also queried fees and charges for guest rooms and whether it would be appropriate to increase the proposed charge in light of the comparative costs of rooms elsewhere. The Social Care, Health and Housing OSC considered a recommendation to increase the proposed charge but it was considered inappropriate to amend the proposed fee at the current time. It was however agreed that it be reviewed for 2016/17 following a review of the standard of these facilities.

Members queried the nature of immigration survey requests and what these entailed. In light of responsibilities being added to the role of the Council it was proposed and agreed by the Social Care, Health and Housing OSC that this charge be reviewed with a view to the Executive considering whether the proposed charge was sufficient.

Members also queried whether it was necessary to refer to a 'renewal' of a blue badge and whether the weekly price per care home bed for other local authorities was high enough in comparison to our own prices.

RECOMMENDED by the Social Care Health and Housing OSC to Executive that the comments detailed above be considered and that whilst the Committee supports the proposed fees and charges in Appendix A1 in light of the additional responsibilities on the Council relating to immigration surveys the associated charge be reviewed to ensure they were set at an appropriate level for 2015/16.

- Children's Services (Appendix A2)

Members noted the charges relating to schools transport and in addition sought clarity in relation to the charges for the music service and the means by which schools could use the pupil premium to fund music lessons. Members also sought clarity in relation to the charges for out of county and non-LEA schools, specifically why there was not a 40 minute lesson for out of county schools and why costs were not increasing for 2015.

RECOMMENDED by the Children's Services OSC to Executive that the proposed charges in Appendix A2 be supported subject to further clarity being provided in relation to music service charges for out of county and non-LEA schools to ensure that these charges were set at an appropriate level for 2015/16.

- Community Services (Appendix A3)

Members sought clarity in relation to the purpose of 'definitive statements'. Members also queried why the charges for granting a sex shop/cinema license were the same and whether the fee for granting of a sexual entertainment venue was sufficient. In relation to charges for the Licensing Act 2003 Members queried in general terms whether these fees were high enough.

Members queried the proposed weekly rate for off-street parking in Flitwick and whether it would be appropriate to provide a discount. In response the Executive Member commented this charge was presently being reviewed and further information would be provided at the Executive meeting.

Members queried the proposed charges for Hackney Cabs and Private Hire Licences and sought clarity as to why these fees had not increased. It was agreed that further clarity would be provided at the Executive meeting.

Members also queried whether it was necessary to agree a charge in relation to licensing mobile food vans. The Executive Member agreed to review this charge and whether it was necessary to include a charge, following a consistent approach to the recommendation of a charge for sex shop licences. The Executive Member was also asked to consider whether the charge for collecting fridges and freezers from domestic premises should be reduced or remain at the 2014/15 rate in order to deter fly tipping.

RECOMMENDED by the Sustainable Communities OSC to Executive that the proposed charges in Appendix A3 be supported but that further clarity be provided in light of the comments detailed above at the relevant Executive meeting.

- Regeneration & Business Support (Appendix A4)

Members queried why the proposed charges for 2015/16 had been held at 2014/rates. The Executive Member agreed to review the charges prior to the Executive meeting to consider whether it was appropriate to apply a 2% increase.

RECOMMENDED by the Sustainable Communities OSC to Executive that the proposed fees and charges in Appendix A4 be reviewed to determine whether it was appropriate to apply a 2% increase for 2015/16.

- Corporate Resources (including registration) (Appendix A5)

The Committee received an update in relation to the proposed fees and charges for the registration service in light of Bedford Borough Council's decision to apply an uplift of 3-3.5%. In light of this increase Members agreed it would be appropriate for Central Bedfordshire Council to negotiate these charges with a view to agreeing a similar uplift to Bedford Borough Council.

In addition Members queried the rationale for not increasing charges in relation to land charges, which it was confirmed was due to the Council not being permitted to make a profit in relation to this service. Members also sought clarity in relation to the charges associated to Freedom of Information requests and the time taken to compile a request.

RECOMMENDED by the Corporate Resources OSC to Executive that the proposed fees and charges in Appendix A5 be supported subject to a review of the proposed fees and charges for the registration service to bring them in line with the proposed charge for Bedford Borough Council.

- Building Control (Appendix A6)

RECOMMENDED by the Sustainable Communities OSC to Executive that the proposed fees and charges in Appendix A6 be reviewed to determine whether it was appropriate to apply a 2% increase for 2015/16.

- Planning Services (Appendix A7)

RECOMMENDED by the Sustainable Communities OSC to Executive that the proposed fees and charges in Appendix A7 be reviewed to determine whether it was appropriate to apply a 2% increase for 2015/16.

- Minerals & Waste (Appendix A8)

RECOMMENDED by the Sustainable Communities OSC to Executive that the proposed fees and charges in Appendix A8 be reviewed to determine whether it was appropriate to apply a 2% increase for 2015/16.

- Photocopying (Appendix A9)

RECOMMENDED by the Corporate Resource OSC to Executive that the proposed fees and charges in Appendix A9 be supported.

- Marriage fees (Appendix A10)

NOTED the statutory fees and charges proposed in Appendix A10.

- Charges to Schools and Academies (Appendix C)

Members sought further clarity on the process for making schools aware of the proposed charges in relation to statutory and traded services to schools and academies. Members also sought clarity in relation to the process by which these proposed charges were scrutinised before they were implemented. It was also requested that the proposed charges for the following academic year be provided to schools in a timely way so they were aware of charges prior to setting their budget for the following year.

In addition Members queried the costs of psychologists and requested that these be reviewed to determine whether the charges were appropriate. It was also commented that the charges in relation to the music service did not appear to correspond with those included in Appendix A2. Further clarity was also required in relation to the charges for the schools secure network costs.

RECOMMENDED that further clarity be sought from the Director for Children’s Services and the Executive Members to ascertain the process for scrutinising these proposed charges before they were implemented.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 13.10pm and concluded at 15.35pm)

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