

Environment Fees and Charges Proposals – 2014/15

1. Introduction

1.1 One of the starting points for the base budget for 2014/15 is that fees and charges should increase by 2.7%. In reality, however, officers look for every opportunity to maximise income, accepting that:

- Fees and charges can have a direct impact on usage and take up;
- In some circumstances the Council is providing services in direct competition to the private sector. Where this is the case, price is likely to have a direct link with demand and it is important that the Council does not price itself out of the market. In some areas benchmarking has taken place to ensure West Berkshire can compete with other authorities.
- Raising fees and charges can in some instances work against the Council's social inclusion agenda by effectively discriminating against those who are less able to pay;
- For some services there is a clear expectation that fees and charges will reflect the costs incurred in providing the service; the Council may be subject to legal challenge if increases in fees and charges cannot be justified.

1.2 Within the Environment Directorate fees and charges deliver an annual income of approximately £7,152,470 (2013/14 original budget). The majority of the fees and charges increases are in line with the 2.7% guideline in the budget strategy.

2. Specific Proposals

2.1 Planning and Countryside

2.1.1 The original budget for 2013/14 income from fees and charges in Planning and Countryside was £1,892,240. This amount includes the Nature Discovery Centre which has transferred to BBOWT on 6th January 2014. Income is generated from the following areas:

- Hire of sports facilities at Henwick Worthy, Holy Brook and Northcroft – This should be identified so as not to confuse with the Northcroft Leisure centre, the fees/charges for which are retained by the Leisure contractor Parkwood.
- Development Control.
- Building Control.

2.1.2 Development Control

Fees for planning applications are set centrally by the DCLG. Fees for formal advice given and related meetings at the pre-planning application stage (Pre-App) are set by the Council.

2.1.3 Building Control

Legislation requires Building Control charges to be set at a level to recover costs over a three year rolling period and that the service should not be profit making.

2.2 Highways and Transport

2.2.1 The original budget for income from fees and charges for the Highways and Transport service in 2013/14 was £3,865,750. Fees and charges have been reviewed in order to generate additional income wherever possible. Fees and charges are generated from the following four areas:

2.2.2 Car Park Charges

Car Parking charges increased in 2012 and it has been agreed not to increase these in 2014. There are however, a number of proposals to increase the amount of on street parking.

2.2.3 Licence Fees and Other Charges

Fees are charged for a range of services e.g. where Highway Authority approval is required to place items or to work on the public highway. These include vehicular crossings, skips, scaffolds, table and chairs on the highway, inspecting utility operations, temporary or permanent traffic regulation orders.

2.2.4 Highways Development Control Fees

Fees are charged to developers for design checking, supervision and inspection of new roads under construction and off site highway improvements. There is no increase proposed in the supervision fees for 2014.

2.2.5 Charges to Householders for Sewage Treatment

Approximately 150 properties, mainly in rural areas, are connected to small sewage treatment plants. These are the responsibility of West Berkshire Council to maintain, having previously been the ownership of Newbury District Council from when the housing stock was transferred to Sovereign Housing Association. The householders pay a fee to the Council which contributes to the maintenance costs.

2.3 Culture and Public Protection

2.3.1 The original budget for 2013/14 for income from fees and charges for Culture and Public Protection was £1,394,480. Income is generated from the following areas:

2.3.2 Trading Standards

Fees for this service include weights and measures, registration of poisons and licences for petroleum.

2.3.3 Waste Service

Fees include bulky household collection, provision of additional wheelie bins and garden waste collection.

2.3.4 Licensing and Environmental Health

Includes taxis, temporary events, premises, food safety etc

2.3.5 Culture

Cultural Services moved into Environment in April 2012. Fees and charges fall into four main arrears: Leisure, Shaw House admission and hire fees, heritage and tourism services and libraries.

Leisure – The leisure centres are managed by Parkwood Community Leisure. The Council agrees the maximum fee that can be charged for core activities. Increases in Parkwood's prices have no impact on the Council's budget.

Shaw House – For 2014-15 it has been decided to increase admission charges in line with inflation and for the increased charge to start on 1st

April 2014 rather than increasing the charge on 1st February as in previous years.

Heritage – West Berkshire Historic Environment record is used by enquirers for a variety of purposes. The charge is made for commercial enquiries to cover the costs of staff time.

No change in income is being proposed for the use of images from the museum collection as the museum is currently closed.

Libraries – As with last year there is no proposal to increase fines as it is felt this could have a detrimental effect on library use however, it there are plans in place for a daily charge on children's overdue books.. The Service is proposing not to increase the hire fees for computer games because they have not purchased any new games this year and feel that the public will not be willing to pay an increased charge for old games