
Fees and Charges Task & Finish Group – Final Report

Committee considering report:	Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission
Date of Committee:	7 March 2023
Task & Finish Group Chairman:	Councillor Tony Linden
Date Task Group Chairman agreed report:	3 February 2023
Report Author:	Gordon Oliver

1 Purpose of the Report

This report presents the work undertaken by the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group and their final recommendations.

2 Recommendation(s)

To consider the Task and Finish Group’s final proposals as outlined in Section 6 of this report and agree whether these be referred to the Executive for consideration.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	There are no financial implications arising directly from this report, although if proposals are accepted, this may result in financial implications which will be assessed in detail if they are taken forward.
Human Resource:	There are no HR implications arising directly from this report, although if proposals are accepted, this may result in HR implications, which will be assessed in detail if they are taken forward.
Legal:	There are no Legal implications arising directly from this report, although if proposals are accepted they may result in Legal implications which will be assessed in details if they are taken forward.

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Risk Management:	There are no risk management implications arising directly from this report, although if proposals are accepted, this may result in risk management implications, which will be assessed in detail if they are taken forward.			
Property:	There are no property implications arising directly from this report, although if proposals are accepted, this may result in property implications, which will be assessed in detail if they are taken forward.			
Policy:	There are no policy implications arising directly from this report, although if proposals are accepted, this may result in policy implications, which will be assessed in detail if they are taken forward.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		There are no equalities implications arising directly from this report.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		The proposed decision does not have any impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics.
Environmental Impact:		X		There are no environmental impacts arising directly from this report.

Health Impact:		X		There are no health impacts arising directly from this report. However, if accepted, proposals may help to increase participation in leisure services which would have health benefits.
ICT Impact:		X		There are no ICT impacts arising from this report.
Digital Services Impact:		X		There are no Digital Services impacts arising directly from this report.
Council Strategy Priorities:		X		Setting of fees and charges is part of the core business of responsible financial management
Core Business:		X		Setting of fees and charges is part of the core business of responsible financial management
Data Impact:		X		There are no data impacts associated with this report.
Consultation and Engagement:	See full details within the report.			

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 This report presents the work undertaken by the Task and Finish Group set up by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission (OSMC) to review fees and charges across the Council, together with a set of draft proposals. OSMC is invited to review the recommendations and consider whether these should be put to the Executive.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

- 5.1 At its meeting on 25 January 2022, OSMC agreed to set up a Task and Finish Group to consider further options in relation to charging for West Berkshire Council's services. The following were highlighted as the key areas of focus for the Task and Finish Group and its subsequent recommendations:

- New proposals for Planning income;

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- The Leisure Strategy and fees and income potentially arising from this;
- Other opportunities for commercial charging for services, particularly those provided by the following departments:
 - Development and Regulation
 - Communities and Wellbeing
 - Environment

5.2 In addition to exploring further opportunities for charging for Council services, the Task Group was also asked to consider the value for money of the fees and charges levied and the appropriate balance between affordability and income generation.

5.3 A copy of the Task and Finish Group's terms of reference is provided in Appendix A.

Background

5.4 The original intention was for the Task and Finish Group to report its findings to OSMC in September 2022. This would have allowed any recommendations to be incorporated into the budget reports to be taken to Council in March 2023.

5.5 Unfortunately, the Task and Finish Group was delayed in starting its review. This was as a result of the need to extend the timescales for the preceding Customer Journey Task and Finish Group, which meant that resources were not available for the Fees and Charges review. Also officer and Member availability over the summer period resulted in further delays. As a result, the Task and Finish Group was unable to conclude its work by the original deadline.

5.6 It is recognised that the resulting delay means that it will not be possible to consider any of the Task Group's recommendations as part of the 2023/2024 budget. However, an interim report was presented to OSMC on 29 November 2022, which set out some initial recommendations designed to improve Member understanding of and engagement with the Fees and Charges appendices of future Revenue Budget Reports.

5.7 The Task and Finish Group met five times between September 2022 and January 2023 to collect evidence for the review. Further details are provided in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1: Details of Task and Finish Group Meetings

Meeting Date	Focus of Meeting	Witnesses
15 September 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of the terms of reference• Work planning	N/A
24 October 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Planning Fees and Charges• Fees and Charges of Comparator Authorities	Eric Owens Jean Marshall
15 November 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leisure Fees and Charges	Steve Welch
8 December 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fees and Charges in the Resources Directorate	Joseph Holmes Andy Sharp Melanie Ellis

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fees and Charges in the People Directorate	Jo England Jonathan Martin Lisa Potts
17 January 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Environment Fees and Charges	Jon Winstanley

Findings

Budget Report - Presentation of Information

5.8 The initial findings were based on a review of the Fees and Charges appendices of the Revenue Budget Report for 2022/23. Copies of these are included in Appendix B of this report. The Task and Finish Group also considered a selection of fees and charges reports from other local authorities.

5.9 Overall, Members considered that it would be helpful to have additional information within the Fees and Charges appendices of the Annual Budget Report in order to better inform decision making about proposed changes for the coming financial year. In particular, the following issues were highlighted:

- The level of income generated by each fee / charge and the amount of ‘units sold’ in previous years were not provided, so Members did not know:
 - how demand had responded to previous changes in fees / charges,
 - the relative importance of individual fees and charges to the Council’s financial position; and
 - where they should best focus their attention when reviewing the proposed changes.
- It was not always clear if there was a statutory requirement to levy a fee / charge for a particular service, and if the Council had any say in setting the amount of that fee / charge, or if amounts were also set centrally.
- Information was not always provided within the report as to the justification for any changes to fees and charges, and for any variations in the level of proposed changes across the fees and charges levied by a particular Council department.
- Similarly, where a decrease or no change was proposed, it was not clear as to the reasons for this.
- The percentage change of each fee / charge relative to the previous year was not provided in all cases. This would allow Members to quickly scan changes and identify any outliers that merited further investigation.
- Where it was proposed to raise fees and charges in line with inflation, it was not clear as to why a particular measure of inflation had been chosen, i.e. CPI vs RPI.
- Information was not provided about how recently benchmarking of fees and charges had been carried out, or what the findings of the benchmarking had been.

- The reports did not provide an estimation as to the likely impact of variations to fees and charges on the amount of revenue that would be generated in the coming year – this must be known in order to be able to build future budgets.

Planning Fees and Charges

- 5.10 Eric Owens (Acting Executive Director – Place) and Jean Marshall (Interim Planning Services Lead) were invited to give evidence on Planning fees and charges.
- 5.11 Most Planning fees and charges are set by Central Government and they do not cover the full costs of processing applications. Local Planning Authorities are allowed some discretion in setting fees for pre-app advice and planning performance agreements (PPAs).
- 5.12 Historically, the service has prioritised applications that have statutory timescales over pre-apps. As a result, few developers have seen the value of paying for pre-app advice, with most choosing instead to submit planning applications and then negotiate on the details afterwards. This has led to lower levels of income from pre-apps than might be expected. Pre-apps brought in just £90,000 out of £1.3 million levied across the service as a whole in 2021/22. This approach also contributes to delays in determining applications and may result in poorer quality developments.
- 5.13 Members asked if there is a financial impact for non-determination of planning applications. It was confirmed that fees have to be returned to the applicant in the event of non-determination within the statutory timescales unless an extension can be agreed, but the Planning Service has strong measures in place to minimise this. Applicants can appeal for non-determination, but this is rare.
- 5.14 Officers explained that a different approach is being proposed whereby developers will be encouraged to seek pre-app advice. In future, if there are significant changes to an application following submission, then the applicant will be given the choice of withdrawing the application or having it refused, rather than engaging in protracted negotiations. This change in approach will deliver additional income from pre-app fees, reduce delays in determination of planning applications, and result in higher quality developments.
- 5.15 It was confirmed that the service regularly undertakes benchmarking of pre-app fees against comparator authorities.
- 5.16 PPAs are project management tools which the local planning authority and applicants can use to agree timescales, actions and resources for handling particular applications. They cover the pre-application and application stages, but may also extend through to the post-application stage. They can be particularly useful in setting out an efficient and transparent process for determining large and/or complex planning applications. Fees for PPAs can only be set at a level to recover costs. PPAs are not currently offered in West Berkshire as a matter of course, but this is something that the Planning Service is working towards.
- 5.17 Charging for Development Viability Statements is another area where the Planning Service has historically performed poorly, but officers provided reassurance that performance is improving and there is potential to increase income further.

- 5.18 Members asked about the potential for the Planning Service to sell specialist services to other authorities. However, officers explained that the service lacked the capacity to offer this, and there would be difficulties around marketing such a service.
- 5.19 The Task Group was informed that a 'Place Review' was underway at the time of the scrutiny review, which would provide further detail on the changes outlined above. The Members were content that this would help to address issues with past performance within the Planning Service, while also helping to drive income generation, particularly in relation to pre-application advice and planning performance agreements. No further opportunities for charging for services have been identified.

Leisure Fees and Charges

- 5.20 Steve Welch (Service Director – Communities and Wellbeing) was invited to give evidence in relation to fees and charges for Leisure Services, and potential opportunities around the implementation of the new Leisure Strategy and Leisure Contract. Due to the slippage in the Task and Finish Group's timetable, the scrutiny review was undertaken at the same time as the procurement of the new leisure contract.
- 5.21 The outgoing leisure contract has an annual management fee of £50,000. This generated 1 million visits to leisure centres and over £1 million of social value for the 12 month period to September 2022. The current operator uses a Charitable Trust model that generates savings on business rates and VAT.
- 5.22 The charging model for core services is set by West Berkshire Council - this covers activities such as swimming, gym classes, badminton and squash, amongst others. For remaining services, the Operator is free to charge market rates.
- 5.23 The West Berkshire Residents Card is used to offer discounts for service users, as well as to collect data on how people use the leisure centres. Further concessions are offered to those aged over 60, people with disabilities and those on low incomes.
- 5.24 Prices are reviewed annually and although they tend to increase in accordance with the Retail Price Index (RPI), the Council can increase or decrease individual prices by different amounts depending on its chosen priorities. Prices are managed through the leisure contract rather than being set in the annual Budget Report. Members felt that this should be highlighted in the Fees and Charges appendix to the Budget Report.
- 5.25 Members highlighted that some of the prices on leisurecentre.com were out of date or inaccurate. For the new contract, it was suggested that mystery shopping be undertaken on a regular basis to ensure that members of the public are provided with correct information.
- 5.26 Members noted from the fees and charges list that the current leisure offer does not appear to cover some popular activities such as yoga and Pilates. Also, it was suggested that other activities that are rising in popularity, such as racketball, could be promoted to make better use of squash courts. It was suggested that the new operator should take an evidence-based approach when setting their programmes in order to increase footfall. Officers provided reassurance that this would happen.

- 5.27 The new leisure contract is due to be considered by Executive in March 2023. As a result of improved national guidance / frameworks, this will be better structured with a different approach. The new leisure operator will be incentivised to improve performance through profit-share. However, it was noted that energy prices would represent a significant challenge if they remained high.
- 5.28 While the specifics of the new leisure contract could not be discussed with the Task Group, general principles are that: prices should be aligned to market rates; all sections of the community should have access to leisure facilities and health and wellbeing programmes; and the contract should contribute to the Council's objectives. In particular, there is an aspiration to encourage people who traditionally do not use our leisure facilities, but this has to be balanced with income. Core prices will cover the same activities as the previous contract, but the contract is open to innovation, particularly around driving increased use through concessions.
- 5.29 The Task Group learned that offering concessions has unintended consequences. For example the West Berkshire Card offers discounts to all residents regardless of income. Further concession are offered to over 60s, but people within this demographic may be relatively affluent. Members considered that the over 60s discount is outdated and the age limit should be increased in line with the national retirement age (currently 66).
- 5.30 Pricing of leisure services is not the only factor affecting participation rates - car ownership, public transport and social isolation are all factors. Members sought assurance that the new contract would have more emphasis on outreach programmes and sports development. This would help to increase both participation and fee income. Officers confirmed that this was being incorporated into the new contract.
- 5.31 The Council struggles to charge market rates for leisure services due to the aging nature of its facilities. However investment in the lido and Northcroft Leisure Centre will make a significant difference in terms of being able to generate additional income. Members highlighted the lack of a swimming pool in the east of the district, which means that residents use facilities in Reading instead. Investment in a new pool could help to encourage increased participation rates as well as boosting income
- 5.32 The Task Group asked whether there are any other opportunities to increase revenue (e.g. bundled services), and suggested that benchmarking could highlight some opportunities. Also, there was discussion about opportunities to better utilise public open spaces – a good example is Swinley Forest in Bracknell, which has a variety of facilities including the Lookout Discovery Centre, café, playground, mountain bike trails, and bike hub.
- 5.33 In addition to looking at Leisure Services, the Task Group touched on the operation of Shaw House. This currently runs significant programmes of resident-based activities, which are highly valued by the community, but are low-yield in terms of income. Members recognised that an appropriate balance is needed between a hard-line business strategy and community uses, and they felt that Shaw House should be considered in more detail as part of a future scrutiny review.

Environment Fees and Charges

- 5.34 Jon Winstanley (Service Director – Environment) was invited to give evidence on fees and charges levied by the Environment Service, which includes: Transport; Countryside; Waste; Parking; and Highways.
- 5.35 Income from Transport services is relatively modest. There are fees for bus services to call at Newbury Bus Station, provision of bus and coach stands, temporary bus stop closures, and concessionary bus pass replacement. Fees charged to bus operators are generally kept low due to the low operating margins.
- 5.36 The majority of income for Countryside activities relates to use of the sports pitches, particularly Henwick. Sports pitch fees are regularly benchmarked. Members recognised the need to balance income with participation rates.
- 5.37 The Task Group asked what advertising opportunities had been considered. Activity is industry led and is focused on bus shelters. Bus shelters have been devolved to town / parish councils, but there may be potential to have advertising at Newbury Bus Station. Advertising has previously been considered for public car parks, but the income would be marginal. Advertising around sports pitches has not yet been explored, but any provision would need to be carefully managed to ensure that content is appropriate.
- 5.38 Members considered that there is limited scope to increase fees and charges within Transport and Countryside, although tackling the shortfall in playing pitches across the district would result in additional revenue generation.
- 5.39 Income from Waste activities is mostly derived from the garden waste scheme, which accounts for £1.6 million of the total income of £1.8 million. The scheme has been a success with the number of subscribers increasing year-on-year. However, it was noted that subscription income does not cover the costs of the scheme. It is proposed that fees should increase in line with inflation for 2023/2024.
- 5.40 There was discussion about fees for bulky waste collection. These are set on a cost-recovery basis. There does not appear to be any correlation between increasing fees and the number of fly-tipping incidents, which the Task Group had highlighted as a potential concern.
- 5.41 Members asked if there were opportunities for profit share in relation to commercial waste contracts. It was confirmed that this had been considered and dismissed - there are too many constraints within the current contract, the contractor has no appetite to pursue this, and there are too many other providers competing for contracts.
- 5.42 The Task Group asked about use of the Household Waste and Recycling Centres by non-West Berkshire residents and the scope to vary the fee to attract more use. It was confirmed that the £7 charge is more than Hampshire County Council charges non-residents, but it has been set to cover costs. It was suggested that there may be scope to increase use of the West Berkshire sites by reducing the charge, but it was considered unlikely that the additional income would be significant.

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- 5.43 The Waste Service currently derives a modest income for disposing of certain items, but Central Government may prevent local authorities from charging for disposal of DIY waste in future, which would have a modest negative impact on income.
- 5.44 Members had noted that other local authorities charged higher fees for wheelie bins. West Berkshire charges a one-off set-up fee of £27 for the garden waste scheme where a bin has to be provided. This fee is kept deliberately low to encourage participation. National frameworks are used to keep costs low, but fees will be kept under review.
- 5.45 In terms of Parking activities, car park charges account for the majority of income. Other significant revenue streams include: income from Parkway; penalty charge notices (parking enforcement); on-street parking charges; and season tickets.
- 5.46 The Task Group noted that parking revenues have only recovered to around 80% of pre-Covid levels. This is due to more people working from home and shopping online. Parking at rail stations and season tickets in Council car parks are significantly lower than before the pandemic.
- 5.47 Members asked about the potential for car parks to go cashless, since eliminating cash collections would save money. It was confirmed that cash payment has been retained, but most ticket machines offer contactless payment and payment via mobile apps. There is a transaction fee for payments on the parking apps, but this is absorbed by the Council, rather passing it on to customers.
- 5.48 Clarification was sought around difference in charges regimes for on-street parking across the district. Up to 30 minutes free parking is offered in roads around the edge of Newbury Town Centre where town centre car parks provide the closest access to the shops. This concession is not offered in Hungerford High Street, where the on-street spaces are closest to the shops.
- 5.49 Members suggested that on-street parking charges for Sundays be brought into line with other days of the week as had already been done with public car parks. It was confirmed that this will be recommended as part of the new Parking Strategy.
- 5.50 The Task Group noted that Wiltshire County Council had introduced parking charges for Blue Badge holders and asked if this had been considered for West Berkshire. It was confirmed that this will be considered as part of the Parking Strategy. However, the challenge is that Blue Badge permit holders can park on yellow lines for up to 3 hours, so introducing parking charges may simply displace parking to less suitable locations.
- 5.51 Members asked if there was potential to derive additional income from electric vehicle charge points. It was confirmed that while there was a small potential for profit-share, the potential for income generation was not considered to be significant. If fees were pushed too high, then there would be a risk of being priced out of the market. Also, income needs to be balanced against promotion of greener travel.
- 5.52 Highways income is derived from a number of different activities including: highway searches, traffic data, table and chairs licence fees, permit application fees and fines, temporary road closures, licence charges, coring and sampling inspections, storage, supervision of developer highway works, pre-app fees (highways and SUDs), street naming and numbering, and sewerage treatment property charges.

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- 5.53 Benchmarking has shown that fees for highway searches and temporary traffic regulation orders are below those of comparator authorities, so it is proposed to increase these from 2023/2024. Also it is proposed to move to a flat rate for all temporary road closures to remove the incentive for contractors to claim the reduced emergency rate.
- 5.54 Members asked if town / parish councils and charities are charged for road closures for public events. It was confirmed that there is generally no fee for these events - there are relatively few requests, and they tend to be repeat requests that require minimal work. However, the Council reserves the right to charge should more complicated requests be received.
- 5.55 Fees for putting tables and chairs on the public highway were waived during Covid, but it is proposed that these be re-introduced from next year.
- 5.56 It was noted that the Council had been unable to charge for pre-app advice on highways and SUDs due to a lack of staff resource. However, as part of the Place Review, the Council is working with consultants and assessing the resource required to enter into Planning Performance Agreements and actively engage with developers on pre-apps.
- 5.57 There was some discussion around fees for supervision of highway works by developers. This fee is charged at 10% of construction costs and ensures that new highways are constructed to adoptable standards. However, developers are increasingly choosing not to have estate roads adopted, which incurs no fee. Members were concerned at the potential for management companies to go bust or seek to shirk their maintenance responsibilities. It was felt that the Council should have a policy to ensure that all new estate roads are constructed to adoptable standards.
- 5.58 The Task Group asked about charges for dropped kerbs and whether enforcement could be taken where vehicles were crossing the footway illegally. It was confirmed that there was an assessment fee of £150, with residents required to arrange and pay for the works themselves. The Council has taken action and usually engages with residents when undertaking resurfacing works.

Resources Directorate Fees and Charges

- 5.59 Joseph Holmes (Executive Director – Resources), Melanie Ellis (Acting Head of Finance & Property), and Jonathan Martin (Senior Accountant) were invited to give evidence on fees and charges within the Resources Directorate.
- 5.60 Members noted that the commercial property portfolio is the largest source of income, however due to government restrictions, local authorities are no longer allowed to invest in property. Land charges are also a key source of income, but removal of certain functions of land charges to central government, will take an estimated £125,000 away from the Council. Other significant areas of income within the Resources Directorate include reclaiming legal costs.
- 5.61 The Task Group asked about how fees and charges are set. It was explained that Land Charges fees are mostly set nationally, but the Council has discretion over certain aspects. Income from Council Tax and Business Rates summons has to be discussed and agreed with the Magistrates Court before they can be changed. These fees were

calculated on a cost recovery basis, which is set at £105.50 per summons. It was thought that the fee could be increased by £5, but this would need to be agreed with the Magistrates Court.

- 5.62 COVID-19's impact on services was examined. Most of the Resources Directorate's fees are in a good position and Land Charges have actually increased, because more people moved house as a result of the Stamp Duty reduction. Income from commercial property has been as expected. Legal and court costs have not recovered fully due to the Magistrate Court backlog, however these will eventually catch up and estimates suggested that court income will be £60,000 over the budgeted amount for the current year.
- 5.63 Members asked whether return on existing commercial investment could be enhanced. It was confirmed that properties could be enhanced where tenants had break clauses. However, if properties were sold, funds could not be reinvested into commercial assets without losing the ability to borrow from the Public Works Loan Board. However, capital receipts could be used to fund other capital schemes or fund transformation activity.
- 5.64 The current non-payment figures were examined and it was stated that the main issue within the Resources Directorate is around debt collection. Commercial property rent collection is in the high 90%.

People Directorate Fees and Charges

- 5.65 Andy Sharp (Executive Director – People), Jo England (Service Lead – Adult Social Care) and Lisa Potts (Finance Manager) were invited to give evidence on fees and charges within the People Directorate.
- 5.66 Schools Trading was identified as a significant area of activity. This covers services such as accountancy, payroll, IT, health and safety, property, legal and HR. Some services have high levels of buy-back, but income has decreased over time due to the formation of academies and competition in the market. However, HR contracts have been picked up recently following a competitor withdrawing from the market. A review of traded services found that West Berkshire Council compared well against neighbouring authorities. The offer is regularly reviewed to ensure that it is consistent with schools' needs. Areas such as accountancy and health and safety are performing particularly well. Members stressed that the Council needs to be competitive in its offer to academies and to consider the potential to increase market share. Members asked if services are offered to private schools and it was confirmed that they are. One area that Members did feel could be explored further was differential charging for traded services, including discounts for schools that buy bundles of services or the full range of services. Also, it was suggested that schools could be charged on a per-pupil basis rather than a flat rate for some services.
- 5.67 The Task Group asked about opportunities for increasing Adult Social Care fees. It was explained that this is a challenging area, since services are focused on vulnerable people. Also, increasing fees too much might make some customers eligible for funded care. Certain aspects of Adult Social Care are governed by the Care Act where Councils cannot charge more than it costs to provide a service. Proposed increases take account of inflation. Administration fees are already charged to those in the community and

officers confirmed that fees take account of all relevant officers' time and administration costs.

- 5.68 The main opportunities within the People Directorate were identified as being related to the Leisure Centres and Shaw House. Income potential is suppressed by the existing leisure contract and the relatively poor quality of local leisure facilities, which are older and more costly to operate, and less attractive to customers. Steve Welch had been appointed to maximise the benefit delivered by the leisure contract, enhance the commercial viability of the leisure centres, and increase income from Shaw House. Members highlighted that Shaw House had been considered 10 years ago and that Task Group had highlighted the potential to significantly increase income, but this had not been achieved.
- 5.69 Leisure and Culture income is at 80% of where it was pre-COVID-19, although this is also expected to recover, and Shaw House income is expected to have caught up by the end of the financial year.
- 5.70 The Commercial Board had considered a variety of schemes where they could potentially derive additional income. Although government intervention means that the Council can no longer do anything where its sole purpose would be to generate income, there are still opportunities. For example, the Board has looked at another council that has set up an adult social care company.
- 5.71 In terms of non-payment of fees, it was confirmed that Adult Social Care is aiming to catch up on its non-payment recovery – this activity was put on hold during Covid.

6 Proposals

- 6.1 The Task and Finish Group wishes to put forward the following proposals for consideration by the Executive.

Budget Report - Presentation of Information

Proposal #1 - To consider amending the fees and charges appendices of the Revenue Budget Reports in future years to provide Members with additional information to support decision making:

- (a) Provide details of the level of income for each fee / charge in the preceding year and (if possible) the number of 'units sold' – where this is not possible (e.g. due to a lack of granularity in the cost centres used), revenues for groups of fees and charges should be provided.
- (b) There should be a clear and consistent key used throughout the document to identify:
- which fees / charges are statutory with levels determined by legislation;
 - which fees / charges are statutory with local discretion as to the levels;
 - which fees / charges are discretionary and in the Council's control.

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- (c) There should be a short accompanying narrative to explain the rationale for any increments, decrements in fees / charges, or for keeping them unchanged – if there are variations within a group of fees / charges, the reasons for the variations should be made clear.
- (d) The percentage increase / decrease should be provided alongside the existing and proposed fees in all cases.
- (e) The reason for including a particular measure of inflation should be made clear, and if there is evidence of changes in costs that are unique to a particular service that are significantly different to the general inflationary figure, then consideration should be given to tailoring proposed increases / decreases accordingly.
- (f) All Council departments should be required to undertake benchmarking of fees and charges on a regular basis and the report should indicate when the latest benchmarking exercised has been completed in relation to each set of fees and charges.
- (g) The report should provide an estimation as to the likely impact of the changes in fees and charges on the level of future income.

The Task Group consider the above recommendations would be relatively simple to deliver and could be achieved with no significant financial, legal or resource implications.

Leisure Fees and Charges

Proposal #2 – Ask Leisure Service to undertake regular ‘mystery shopper’ exercises to ensure that online information about fees and charges provided by the new Leisure Services Contractor is up-to-date and accurate.

Proposal #3 – Review the West Berkshire Card concession scheme to ensure that discounts are appropriate and effectively targeted (e.g. raising the threshold for age-related discounts in line with the increase in state pension entitlement age).

Proposal #4 – Investigate the business case for investing in local leisure centres in order to make facilities more attractive and competitive with those in the private sector and neighbouring local authorities. This would allow for fees to be increased and would drive additional use and income.

Proposal #5 – Investigate the business case for constructing a new swimming pool to serve residents in the east of the district.

Environment Fees and Charges

Proposal #6 – Investigate the business case for additional advertising contracts at Newbury Bus Station and at Henwick playing pitches.

Proposal #7 – Seek legal advice regarding mechanisms to require that all estate roads be adopted in order to ensure they are built to an appropriate standard, while securing the appropriate inspection and supervision fees

People Directorate Fees and Charges

Proposal #8 – Thoroughly look at the area of Schools Trading to understand the current proportion of academies buying services from West Berkshire Council, and consider how the Council could gain a greater proportion of academy school spending on all services, as well as maximising opportunities within maintained schools. This should be presented as a future report to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission.

Proposal #9 – Consider the business case for bundling packages of traded services to schools, whereby schools taking all / multiple services are offered discounts, and for charging on a per-pupil basis rather than a flat rate where appropriate.

Cross-Directorate Fees and Charges

Proposal #10 – All Council departments should undertake regular reviews to identify additional opportunities to charge for services. Findings should be reported to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development.

- 6.2 The Task and Finish Group also proposes that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission should review Shaw House operations to understand its financial performance in the context of the community benefits it delivers, and to investigate if there are opportunities to further enhance income generation.

7 Other options considered

OSMC may choose to accept the Task and Finish Group's recommendations in full or in part, or amend the recommendations before putting them to the Executive. Alternatively, OSMC may choose not to put any of the Task and Finish Group's recommendations to the Executive if it considers that they are not appropriate.

8 Conclusion

For the reasons outlined above, the recommendation is for OSMC to accept the Task and Finish Group's recommendations in full and put them to the Executive for consideration.

9 Appendices

Appendix A – Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group Terms of Reference

Appendix B – Fees and Charges appendices of the Revenue Budget Report for 2022/23

Background Papers:

['Fees and Charges', Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission, 25 January 2022](#)

['Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group - Interim Report', Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission, 29 November 2022](#)

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

- The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval
- Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
- Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position
- Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

Wards affected: All wards

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