

INCREASE OF DISCRETIONARY FEES AND CHARGES BRIEFING NOTE – FM

December 2021



1. Description of Proposal

The proposal for the increase of discretionary fees and charges is in line with the Fees, Charges and Concessions Policy which was agreed by Cabinet on the 8th November 2016. This policy states that all fees and charges should recover costs. When costs increase it is important that fees and charges also increase to keep pace with those rising costs. The current budget position at the Council means that these cost increases cannot be absorbed. By implementing Consumer Price Index (CPI) increases each year this will avoid long periods of no review and any subsequent need for sudden increases.

The review of discretionary fees and charges has been undertaken in conjunction with the Medium Term Financial Strategy and associated delivery plans, and therefore contributes to the overall objective of achieving a balanced budget. Failure to implement full cost recovery increases in discretionary fees and charges will require alternative savings to be developed and agreed by the Council.

2. Background - Fees, Charges and Concessions Policy

The key objectives of the policy are:

- Individual charging policy for each Portfolio area.
- Each financial year charges will generally be increased by Consumer Price Index (CPI) to ensure charges keep pace with the cost of providing services.
- Increases will be implemented in practical monetary values that make sense to customers. The CPI increase may be applied differently across a group of similar services in order to achieve this.
- The Council will ensure the full cost of a service is recovered, where that is the charging objective. Commercial services will be priced to generate a surplus. Where commercial services are not achieving that aim they will be reviewed, including the potential to improve the market offer.
- Non-residents may be charged differentially where appropriate.
- Charging decisions will be informed by intelligence from other local authorities and providers.
- Where relevant, charging decisions will be supported by an equalities impact assessment.

As part of the policy there is also a list of those people who may be eligible for a concession (e.g. those in full time education, those in receipt of the state pension etc.).

The policy also states that the fees and charges may be revised at any stage of the financial year, if the expected increase for a service area is less than £500k a year may be set by the portfolio holder and if the expected increase for a service area is more than £500k a year shall be set by the Cabinet.

3. Reason for change

The increase in discretionary fees and charges and adjustment to concessions will achieve the following:

- Cover the rising cost of providing services;
- Ensure a consistent approach across the Council;

- Bring prices in line market values where appropriate

4. Next steps

Following the approval of the revised fees and charges set out in the schedules, services will raise their fees on or after the 1st February 2022, giving reasonable notice to service users. For any existing bookings made for ceremonies and hire of assets after 1st February 2022, where a booking has been confirmed and a deposit paid, previously quoted prices will be honoured.

5. Decision required by the Cabinet Member for Governance, HR, IT and Community Safety.

It is recommended to increase the discretionary fees and charges and adjust the concessions as per the schedules.