

Report title	Corporate Management Committee Proposed Fees and Charges 2025/26
Report author	Samantha Cooper / Amanda Fahey
Department	Financial Services / Corporate
Exempt?	No

Purpose of report:

To resolve

Synopsis of report:

To set out the context and rationale for changes to fees and charges for the next financial year for the services managed by this committee and to recommend that the proposed fees and charges are adopted as set out.

Recommendation(s):

The proposed fees and charges as set out in Appendix 'A' are approved to be effective from the dates within the appendix or as soon as practical thereafter.

1. Context and background of report

- 1.1 The annual review of charges is an important part of the overall budget setting process and the policy framework for service provision in general. The Council faces a significant financial challenge, with a projected budget deficit of £4.1 million by 2027/28. To address the shortfall, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy sets out the Council's approach to achieving financial sustainability including the delivery of savings, efficiencies and income generation.
- 1.2 While the setting of fees and charges needs to be considered within the overall financial context of the Council, there will be many factors affecting their determination. For some charges, a full cost recovery basis may be appropriate, ensuring that service users pay the full cost of the service they receive, while for others the Council may choose to subsidise services to residents in support of the aims of the Council such as health and wellbeing.
- 1.3 Officers have been developing a standardised template to enable easy identifications of the level of subsidy provided for each chargeable service. This will require further refinement over the next 6 – 9 months, to fully support fee setting for 2026/27. It is also acknowledged that for some services there will be a period of change and transition to allow operational teams and service users to remodel the way services are delivered for the community, working together to ensure services are delivered efficiently and effectively and with the resources available.
- 1.4 Whilst the Council's Constitution places initial fee setting with each service committee, it also provides delegated authority to Officers to alter fees, charges, and prices

without reference to a committee, in order to respond to market conditions, new needs, changes in tax rates, and so on.

2. Report and, where applicable, options considered and recommended

Methodology

2.1 As part of the budget setting process, Service Managers are requested to review their charges each year. Members have previously agreed that officers put forward recommended increases based on:

- Current market conditions
- Local competition
- The likely yield of any fee increase
- On-going savings targets and revenue reduction programmes

Members have accepted that in some service areas it may not be possible to significantly increase fees, and in others it may be necessary to decrease them to stimulate demand, however as a minimum an average of 2% for discretionary locally set charges should be aimed for as the financial plans of the Council assume at least an inflationary increase.

2.2 This report reviews current levels of fees and charges, with a view to helping to balance next year's budget and is a key strand of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

2.3 The fees and charges proposed by service managers for next year are set out at Appendix "A". The appendix includes a Yield column showing the next year's budget for each charge/group of charges, so that Members can estimate the financial implications of any price rises.

Local Land Charges

2.4 The Local Land Charges Act 1975 imposes an obligation on local authorities to create and maintain a register of charges which apply to land. That legislation enables a person to carry out a search of that register and be issued with a result in respect of that search. The Local Authorities (England) (Charges for Property Searches) Regulations 2008 (the 2008 Regulations) enable local authorities to impose a charge for granting access to the register maintained by a local authority. Regulation 6 (3) of the 2008 Regulations requires local authorities to recover the full cost of operating the Land Charges service by breaking even over each three-year period, while having due regard to pricing in the market from competitors. The account has been in deficit for the last four years. By increasing fees between 33.33 -122.22% it is estimated this will ensure the account will breakeven from 2025/26.

2.41 Local authorities provide responses to two types of searches of the registers they maintain. One response is to what is termed the LLC1 search which provides basic information on the material contained in the register. The second type of search is a response to more detailed questions concerning material contained in the registers, known as CON29R Enquiries. The fees for the CON29R Enquiries are higher than for the LCC1 and make up the bulk of income received by a local authority.

2.4.2 Every local authority is required to migrate its Local Land Charges register service to His Majesty's Land Registry (HMLR). HMLR has escalated its migration programme and had allocated Runnymede for migration in 2024/25, this is now estimated to happen from January 2025. Once the migration has completed Runnymede will no longer receive income from LLC1 fees, this will result in the loss of income of £35,000 pa.

Council Tax and Business Rates – Court costs

2.4.3 The setting of Council Tax and Business Rates court costs are governed by Regulation 34(7) of the Council Tax (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1992 and Regulation 12(6) of the Non-Domestic Rating (Collection etc) Regulations 1989. The fees are required to be set at no greater than cost recovery, including officer time, and must be reasonably incurred and genuinely attributable to the enforcement process. While these costs are likely to increase due to inflationary pressures on the Council, the ability to pay of those affected by these charges will also be highly impacted. Any increase in costs will impact on those most struggling to pay, whether that be for Council Tax or Business Rates. Increasing the fees towards the cost recovery method set out in regulations, avoids cross subsidisation by other taxpayers, meaning that only those who have failed to pay sums due, and have not engaged with the Council for support with payment where appropriate, will be paying for these avoidable costs.

2.4.4 A breakdown of the proposed fee is required to be submitted to the Court, who will consider whether the sum sought is reasonable based on the information provided.

Freedom on Information/Environmental Information Request

2.4.5 The cost limit for Freedom of Information requests is calculated at a flat rate of £25 per hour of work. For central government departments the cost limit is £600 (24 hours of work). For all other public authorities, the cost limit is £450 (18 hours of work). The staff hourly rate for Environmental Information requests is also £25 per hour. These fees have not been increased.

Corporate Properties

2.4.6 This committee oversees fees and charges for garages included in the general fund. The proposed increase for garage rents is 25 pence per week for council tenants, and 25 pence plus VAT for private renters. This modest adjustment aligns with inflation to help cover rising maintenance costs. Importantly, the increase is limited to inflation to avoid discouraging renters, as demand for these garages—primarily used for storage rather than vehicle parking—is gradually decreasing. Additionally, the overall garage stock is aging and remains sensitive to price adjustments. Any significant fee hike would likely lead to further declines in occupancy, resulting in revenue losses and potentially increasing maintenance liabilities due to underuse.

2.4.7 In relation to most licenses, wayleaves, easements, lease renewals, and other legal documentation concerning property and land assets, the application process typically begins with surveyors. They deal with the initial request, reading lease documentation and undertake negotiations before solicitors are instructed to establish the legal framework. In response to the proposed increase in legal fees, the Assets and Regeneration team has also adjusted their fees to align with the rates charged by private practices. Please note that reduced fees are available for charities, CIC and similar organisations which we have shown as a 25% discount and will be reviewed on a case by case basis.-

Civic Centre

- 2.4.8 The accommodation fees have increased by approximately 2%. Rooms are often booked to capacity by Runnymede and Surrey County Council staff, there is minimal opportunity to rent to third parties.

Sale of Agendas and Civic Publications

- 2.4.9 These fees are based on the cost of printing; they have not been increased; the fees were last increased by 90% in 2024/25. This increase was due to the discontinuation of a longstanding pricing structure that had not accounted for inflationary pressures for a considerable time.

3. Policy framework implications

- 3.1 There will be a number of instances of specific policies within specific services which require fees and charges to be levied in respect of various activities. Some of these will be discretionary and some statutory. In considering this report and reviewing its individual fees and charges, the Council is complying with the requirements of these policies.

4 Resource implications/Value for Money (where applicable)

- 4.1 The Council's latest Medium-Term Financial Forecast shows a budget deficit estimated to be £4.1m by the end of 2027/28. This includes an assumption that fees and charges will increase by 2% each year. The setting of fees and charges is an important tool in helping to address this situation and maximising income from services should be a priority.
- 4.2 In setting fees and charges there is a fine balance to be struck between trying to recover the cost of running services and not alienating our customers by making the charges unaffordable. In undertaking their reviews managers must balance these risks whilst at the same time trying to generate additional income to contribute towards the Council's ongoing budget deficit. Consideration should also be given to the cost of pay-to-use services, so that those choosing not to avail themselves of those services, are not carrying the burden, through taxation, of subsidised services for others.
- 4.3 Once agreed, the fees and charges will be included as part of the 2025-26 budget and the effects of any increases/reductions in the charges will be incorporated into the figures for the appropriate service areas.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 Where the status of a charge is marked as 'statutory' the Council is required under the law to levy a fee. Where the status is given as 'discretionary' the Council may amend the fee charged or choose to make no charge for the service.

6. Equality implications

- 6.1 Where any major changes to the structure of any charging regime are proposed, an Equality Impact Assessment will have been completed by the relevant Budget Manager.

7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

7.1 The annual setting of existing fees and charges has no environmental, sustainability or biodiversity implications. Any change to a structure or the inclusion of new charges that have any such implications will be set out in a separate report to Committee.

8. Timetable for Implementation

8.1 The proposed fees and charges will not take effect until 1 April 2025 or as soon as practical thereafter unless a different date is set out in the Appendix.

9. Conclusion

9.1 For many years Runnymede had resources available to provide low-cost charges across a number of discretionary services. Unfortunately, due to financial constraints the Council is no longer able to maintain large discounts. To ensure the long-term viability of these essential services, it is necessary to adjust charges to better reflect the actual cost of delivery. While we understand that this may impact some individuals, particularly those on fixed incomes, by carefully balancing financial sustainability with the provision of services, we aim to create a future where our community can thrive.

10. Background papers

None

11. Appendices

Proposed Fees & Charges for 2025-26