

Report title	Environment and Sustainability Proposed Fees and Charges 2025/26
Report author	Shamshaad Wilde / Helen Clark
Department	Financial Services / Environmental Services
Exempt?	No
Exemption type	Not applicable
Reasons for exemption	Not applicable

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 identification 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 within 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.

- 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 next year's budget for each charge/group of charges, so that Members can estimate the financial implications of any price rises.
- 2.4 There will be a further review of all Environmental Services discretionary services considering both delivery and fee models over the next 6 - 9 months. The aim will be to identify where full cost recovery is possible. Where this cannot be delivered within existing parameters a list of options will be prepared for further consideration by this committee and aligned to the new Corporate Business Plan.

3.0 Review and rationale with respect to individual service areas

3.1 Houses in multiple occupation (HMO) licensing costs (statutory fee)

These fees have been moved from the Housing General Fund Services to Environmental and Sustainability. A review of the fees has been undertaken for mandatory HMO's, consequently the fees are proposed to increase from April 2025. A standard new HMO licence will increase from £702 presently to £765. Table 1 below provides details of standard new application fees in other Surrey authorities for comparison.

Table 1 – New HMO licence application fees in Surrey

	New licence
Elmbridge	£600.00
Epsom and Ewell	£747.30 (up to 5 units, additional units £151.58)
Guildford	£987.00
Mole Valley	£818.85
Reigate and Banstead	£1,054.00
Runnymede	£765
Spelthorne	£1,315.00
Surrey Health	£861.40
Tandridge	£818.85
Waverley	£757.60
Woking	£880.00

3.2 Allotments

- 3.2.1 To note that allotment fees are set one year in advance as under the terms of their leases, allotment holders must be informed of any increases in charges twelve (12) months before they take effect. Therefore, charges from April 2025 were set by this Committee in November 2023.
- 3.2.2 Changes agreed during the budget setting process in November 2024 will be implemented from April 2026. A financial and operational review of the service was undertaken by officers to identify whether the income generated fully covered the cost of delivering the service. It was identified that the service was not fully funded, and an element of subsidy was required to deliver the service to residents. A full financial review of the budget will be undertaken over the next 6-9 months to give clarity on the level of subsidy and identify the fee required to fully recover costs.
- 3.2.4 It is noted that the existing full cost fees are in line with the local Surrey and South London position. Appendix B has comparative data.
- 3.2.3 In Runnymede a high percentage of plot holders (43.66%) benefit from a senior citizen 50% fee abatement discount. To note a typical allotment consists of 5 rods.

		%
Number of rented plots:	355	
Plots rented at full price:	200	56.34
Plots rented at discounted price	155	43.66
Total no. of rods rented:	1790	
No. of rods rented at full price:	990	55.33
No. of rods rented at discounted price (OAP):	800	44.67

- 3.2.4 Runnymede is proud of its allotment service and acknowledges how well most residents manage and maintain their plots. It is however understood that the senior citizen discount is not necessarily a good indicator of affordability.
- 3.2.5 A review of payment methods was also undertaken which identified that over 95% of allotment tenants are now paying by direct debit. Paying by alternative means including, card, cash or cheque creates an additional transactional cost for the authority. To offset this cost service users who choose to pay by alternative means will be charged an additional £3 per plot holder.
- 3.2.6 As a consequence of the above facts the following changes to fees are proposed.
- Allotment tenants who pay by means other than by direct debit will be charged a £3 transactional fee from April 1st, 2025.
 - The discounted fee abatement for senior citizens will be reduced from 50% to 25% from 2026/2027.
 - The full price of a rod will be increased by 13.64% from £22 to £25 for the year 2026/2027.

3.3 Parks and Green Spaces Sports Clubs and sports grounds

- 3.3.1 A financial and operational review of fee calculations for all sports related grounds maintenance activities took place over September and October 2024.
- 3.3.2 The work identified that the grounds maintenance activities associated with some sporting activities benefited from substantial subsidy. This was particularly significant for the fine turf sports, cricket and bowls. Total income from four (4) bowls clubs in 2024 was £11,700 (averaged from 3 clubs) and total income from the four (4) cricket pitches £19,268.
- 3.3.3 Two (2) full time equivalent grounds staff are largely allocated to fine turf activities and work associated with cricket and bowls over the summer months. This equates to a total salary budget of £69,593, or £34,797 per sport. These are indicative figures for the resourcing of grounds maintenance of Bowls and Cricket. The figures are illustrative and do not reflect the total cost of these services. The full cost will also include the costs for administration of the booking process, maintenance of associated pavilions, materials, machinery, equipment, fuel, servicing and repairs.
- 3.3.4 A detailed breakdown of all activities and costs relating to bowls and cricket will be carried out over the next 6-9 months. Once this data is available options for delivering these services will be reviewed and number of options for fee structures from 2026/2027 will be considered.
- 3.3.5 There will be a consultation exercise with our sports clubs to identify the best way forward.
- 3.3.6 One option to be considered is delegated self-management. This arrangement works very well in a number of other local authorities. In Runnymede some clubs are already on the journey to self-management. Giving sports clubs greater freedom to generate their own income and manage their facilities and grounds maintenance can in the right circumstances deliver long-term security.

- 3.3.7 The review also identified that the way some fees are calculated and collected for some sports is complex. Further work will be carried out over the next 6-9 months to review the way fees are calculated and collected to ensure the service is as transparent and simple to administer as possible for service users in financial year 2026/2027.
- 3.3.8 Members are asked to note that Runnymede presently provides good public sports facilities for residents and visitors alike. Changes to the way these facilities are delivered and managed are necessary to ensure Runnymede moves towards a balanced budget which will enable the authority to continue to offer discretionary services including sports facilities in future years.

3.4 Bowls

- 3.4.1 Fees are presently largely based on the number of club members per season. There is a 50% abatement for senior citizens/ juniors and registered disabled club members and visitors. A preliminary review of fee income has shown that just under 25% of players paid full membership price in 2024 (35/145) and only one visitor (1/298) paid full price. The full club member fee per annum in 2024/2025 is £135 with the discount rate at £67.20 and the full visitor fee is £14.10 with the discounted visitor rate £7.04. This equates to £5.19 per week for full price members over a 6 month season.
- 3.4.2 A wider review of bowls clubs has shown that a senior citizens discount is not necessarily offered to bowls club members. Given the sport is largely played by senior citizens, discounting the fee for the majority of members can disproportionately inflates the fee for members not in receipt of a discount.
- 3.4.3 In consideration of these facts for 2025/2026 the proposed fee changes for 2025/2026 will be based on a reduction in the discount for senior citizens/ registered disabled and juniors for both members and visitors from 50% to 25%. The full price fees will be increased by 18.52%. The increased fees still offer membership at a bowls club at a rate considerably lower than the present market rate. The proposed fees are itemised in appendix A.
- 3.4.4 As detailed earlier in the report a number of potential operational arrangements and fee structures will be considered over the next 6-9 months with a view to minimising the cost of subsidy in this service area.

3.5 Cricket

- 3.5.1 As referenced above the grounds maintenance cost of delivering cricket pitches is not fully recovered by fee income and consequently there is a subsidy attached to this service.
- 3.5.2 Grounds maintenance staff costs are approximately £34,797 per season against an income in 2024 of £19,268. These are illustrative figures with the full cost of the service including managing the booking administration, maintenance of associated pavilions, materials, machinery, equipment, fuel, servicing and repairs. To identify the percentage of subsidy for this area of service and give a clear picture of full cost recovery fees a review of all associated cost will be undertaken over the next 6-9 months.

Further work will also include consultation with all service users around options for self-management to identify the best model for future delivery of this service.

- 3.5.3 For 2025/2026 the fees will be restructured with the discounts for evening sessions and training sessions reduced given the pitch will require comparable preparation. Cricket fees for 2025/2026 will increase by 15.38 % for full priced games. Full details are in appendix A.

3.6 Football

- 3.6.1 Fees are scheduled to increase by approximately 19%. The fee for bookings with changing facilities are increasing by a marginally higher rate to reflect an increase in changing room cleaning costs.

3.7 Events – New Schedule of rates for large fee-paying events

- 3.7.1 A review of the event process whereby 3rd parties hold events on Runnymede land was undertaken. Consideration was given to the application and contractual agreement process, income achieved and cost of associated grounds maintenance works. The review identified that full cost recovery is not achieved for large fee-paying events.
- 3.7.2 A new scale of rates and services will be built up by the Green Spaces team to ensure all events charging entrance fees or charging stall holders for attendance are charged market rate delivering cost recovery from April 2025. The schedule of rates will include costs for all services involved in delivering this service including legal, finance, green spaces and grounds maintenance.

3.8 Events – Fireworks

- 3.8.1 At present up to 8 fireworks events are permitted each year at Homewood Park. Usually, the fireworks are used in celebrations including weddings. If the maximum permitted number of events were held this year, they would generate an income of £2,288.
- 3.8.2 Homewood Park lies in the Thames Basin Heaths special protection Area. It is one of the six strategic Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs) in Runnymede. As such, its primary purpose is to draw visitors away from nearby heathlands to reduce recreational disturbance to the rare ground-nesting birds which reside on the heaths. The priority for SANGs is to make them shining examples of natural greenspace to which people will be drawn – Natural England have therefore developed guidance and criteria which set out their expected management and character. The firework displays within Homewood Park result in the Council infringing upon several of the quality criteria for SANGs, including through a loss of a naturalistic feel to the park (as grass is frequently mown to lower the risk of fires being started by fireworks) and the danger presented to dogs (one of the main SANG user groups) through discarded firework debris.
- 3.8.3 Away from its use as a SANG, Homewood Park is also a valuable habitat in its own right. This expanse of acid grassland is the largest example of this uncommon habitat owned by the Council, and the cracks and hollows in the numerous veteran and ancient oak trees will be home to protected species including bats and birds. Firework displays will disturb this protected wildlife, potentially causing it to flee the site permanently, and the long meadow grass is extremely vulnerable to wildfires arising from the use of fireworks. A wildfire would cause damage to the meadows and trees which would take decades to recover from.

3.8.4 Officers have reviewed the use of this space for fireworks events considering the above information. To protect wildlife and remove the risk of fires and other fireworks related detrimental impacts at this SANG site no further fireworks events will be permitted at Homewood Park. The last event is booked for November 2024.

3.9 Refuse Collection – Trade Waste and Domestic Waste (where chargeable)

3.9.1 Trade waste disposal fees have been increased by approximately 3%, these increases reflect the increase in landfill disposal costs the administration and collection fees also increased by 3%, the overall fee for Trade Waste has therefore increased by 3.00%, and the fees for the sale of bins have increased on average by 3% to reflect the increase in the cost of plastic.

3.9.2 The 2024 review of the trade waste service identified that the service was fully recovering costs. The service was found to be at the high end comparatively with respect to price. For these reasons a 3% price increase to reflect inflation is recommended.

3.10 Recycling – Green Waste

3.1.1 There are currently 11,475 subscribers for this service, some customers pay for more than one garden waste subscription. The total number of paid garden waste subscriptions is 12,208 (3257 x 140L subscriptions and 8951 x 240L subscriptions).

We are proposing to increase these fees by 19.05% for 140 litre bins and 8.60%.for the 240 litre bins. We propose to introduce a modest fee for the purchase of the first and any subsequent green waste bin. The bin fee will be £30 for a 140l and £40 for a £240L green waste bin.

Members to note that the Runnymede green waste service operates for the full 12 months each year.

3.11 One off payment covering Trade, Refuse, Recycling and Green Waste

The one-off payment for each size of bin is to cover the cost of collecting contaminated bins or additional bin collections. We are proposing to increase these on average of 3%. A 240 litre bin will increase from £70.10 to £75.00, 360 litre from £103.76 to £110.00, 60.00 and 1100 litre bin from £232.92 to £240.00.

3.12 Car Parks

A separate report is presented in this agenda on fee setting proposals.

3.13 Highways and Engineering

3.13.1 Fees have been increased by an average of 6.95% this brings the fees in line with the market for technical questions.

3.13.2 A new discretionary charge for Ordinary Watercourse consent applications was approved at the Environment and Sustainability committee in June 2023. This new fee has not been increased. The recommendation to remove the fee for copies of plans is because this service is no longer required. All plans are forwarded electronically.

3.13.3 Within the street naming and numbering service, the proposal is to increase the fees between 12.50% and 133.33%. These increases are necessary as it was identified that rates charged to individuals and developers were not fully covering costs. The fees for existing properties and amendments and fees relating to street naming and numbering schemes at new housing developments will therefore be increased.

3.14 Environmental Protection

As can be seen in the Appendix, most of these fees are set by statute and have not been changed, these fees have not been increased for over ten years. Discretionary fees have been calculated to reflect staff time and costs.

3.15 Food Hygiene and Health & Safety Courses

Food Export certificates and re-inspection requested by food businesses; we are proposing to increase these by approximately 1.75% - 2.16%.

3.16 Other Environmental and Sustainability Charges

Fixed Penalty Notice levels for most environmental offences remain unchanged. (Smoke free enforcement, Abandoned Vehicles, Dog fouling/control, fixed/controlled Penalty Fines). Water sampling charges and Street Trading are set by statute

3.16.1 On 16th November Environment & Sustainability Committee resolved to increase the Fixed Penalty Notice amounts for Fly tipping, littering and household waste duty of care– For fly tipping the upper level increased by 150% from £400 to £1000 if paid within 14 days or reduced to £500 if paid within 10 days and the Lower level by 233.33% from £150 to £500 if paid within 14 days or reduced to £250 if paid within 10 days.

Littering fines increased by 80% from £100 to £180 if paid within 14 days or reduced to £90 if paid within 10 days. The fees came into effect on 1st December 2023 and the budget book has been updated to reflect the changes

3.16.2 In relation to the household waste duty of care the Fixed Penalty Notice amount increased from 1 December 2023 – Upper level £600 if paid within 14 days or reduced to £300 if paid within 10 days. Lower level £300 if paid within 14 days or reduced to £150 if paid within 10 days.

The air pollution fees for Register of authorised processes between 1.54% - 2.35% and Contaminated land between 1.87% - 2.10%.

3.17 Animal Welfare Licences

There was no increase in 2024/25, in 2025/26 we are proposing to increase the fees between 1.69% - 10.22% including the grant fee (enforcement charge) of £180.00.

We are proposing to reduce the cost for a Copy of licence by 40.30% from £33.50 to £20.00. The fees reflect staff time and costs.

3.18 Community Event support services

The DSO are frequently asked to support a wide range of events across the Borough including sporting events, charity fund raisers, agricultural shows, and fetes. The support requested includes services such as additional grass cutting, ground works to provide locations for car parking, tree works, general site clearance and provision and collection of litter bins. To ensure fairness and transparency for Councillors, event organisers and local residents a cost recovery fee for these services was introduced from 2023/24. Event holders looked to the market and did not choose the Runnymede option. This has resulted in overtime savings across the direct services. For 2025/2026 these fees have been simplified and can be found in appendix 1

3.19 Cemeteries

3.19.1 The cemeteries service delivers cost recovery by way of grave sales and internment fees. However, it is noted that there will be an ongoing need for grounds maintenance activities once all available grave spaces are sold. This future cost is not factored into the existing fee model. Over 2025/2026 a range of options to future proof the budget with respect to grounds maintenance costs will be explored. The cemetery fees will increase by around 10% in 2025/2026.

3.19.2 In the Environment & Sustainability Committee report on the 16 November 2023 Fees & Charges costs increased due to the new Grave Digging Contract, which went live in April 2024, the fees increased by 10%. This increase was to cover the cost of removing spoil from the Cemeteries and to prevent any future build-up of spoil at the cemetery sites.

3.20 To ensure future grounds maintenance liabilities can be met when income from selling grave spaces and internments diminishes, consideration will be given to the creation of a new earmarked reserve to be funded from a proportion of the fee income achieved through grave space sales. This will be subject to a future committee report and will be brought back to Members for their consideration once financial modelling has been undertaken to establish the need and the appropriate level of annual contribution to any such a reserve.

4. Policy framework implications

4.1 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.

5. Resource implications/Value for Money

5.1 The Council's latest Medium-Term Financial Forecast shows a budget deficit estimated to be £4.1m by the end of 2027/28. 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.

5.2 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.

- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 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.

6. Legal implications

- 6.1 Some charges are set by statute, either imposing a set fee, or imposing a maximum fee, which the Council cannot exceed.
- 6.2 Other charges will be discretionary, where the Council will not be able to make a profit from the fee, usually covering only the administration of the fee and not the enforcement of the scheme, which can sometimes be covered elsewhere in the legislation.
- 6.3 Finally, very rarely, the discretionary fees will not be capped, and the Council will be entitled to make a profit, although this would need to be set against fees levied by other providers if we want to attract clients.
- 6.4 To maximise the Council's income lawfully, each fee needs to be considered against the relevant setting legislation.

7. Equality implications

- 7.1 Councillors need to demonstrate that they have consciously thought about the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty, as set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, as part of the decision-making process. The three aims the authority must have due regard for are:
- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic
- 7.2 The Council must pay due regard to any obvious risk of such discrimination arising from the decision before them. There is no prescribed manner in how the equality duty must be exercised though producing an EIA is the most usual method. The results of the EIA conducted is attached to this Report

8. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

- 8.1 The proposal to stop fireworks events at Homewood will have a positive impact on biodiversity. Officers have reviewed the risk associated with use of this space for fireworks events and decided to stop all future events in order to protect wildlife and

remove the risk of fires and other fireworks related detrimental impacts at this SANG site.

9. Timetable for Implementation

- 9.1 The proposed fees and charges will take effect on 1 April 2025 or as soon as practical thereafter unless a different date is set out in the Appendix.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 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.
- 10.3 This year's review of fees and charges are part of an ongoing holistic review of all services delivered by Runnymede Borough Council.

11. Background papers

None

12. Appendices

Appendix A - Proposed Fees & Charges for 2025-26
Appendix B - Comparison of allotments fees
Appendix C - EQIA