

# EQUALITY SCREENING

Equality Impact Assessment guidance should be considered when completing this form.

POLICY/FUNCTION/ACTIVITY	LEAD OFFICER
Fees and Charges	Helen Clark

**A. What is the aim of this policy, function or activity?** Why is it needed? What is it hoped to achieve and how will it be ensured it works as intended? Does it affect service users, employees or the wider community?

A review of fees for discretionary services provided by Environmental Services identified that a number of services did not deliver full cost recovery through fees. There was a considerable subsidy attached to a number of services including ground maintenance for bowls and management of allotments.

The fee structure for bowls and allotments both incorporate 50% abatement of fees for specific groups.  
For allotments the 50% discount applies only to senior citizens and for bowls clubs the discount applies to senior citizens/registered disabled and under 18s.

A breakdown of service users in 2024 showed that 43.7% of allotment holders paid discounted fees.  
For bowls 68.1% of club members paid the discounted fee (minus a further 20% VAT) and 99.7% of visitors paid the discounted fee.

The policy will be to reduce the discount for bowls members and visitors to 25% from April 2025 with a further review into the full costs of delivering this service and potentially additional fee reviews to follow.

For allotments, fees are agreed one year in advance. Fees from 2025 are already approved. For 2026 the discounted rate will be reduced to 25% with a further review into the cost of delivering this service and potentially further fee revisions to follow.

The fact that a high proportion of service users in these service areas pay a reduced fee will impact the rate full paying service users would have to pay to fully recover costs.  
By reducing the discount, it is hoped that future fee increases will be smoothed across all service users.

In light of the £4.1m budget shortfall, increasing income and reducing leisure service subsidies will help mitigate against potential removal or reduction of services in other areas of the Council.

The proposed changes affect service users, the wider community and staff delivering the service.

**B. Is this policy, function or activity relevant to equality?** Does the policy, function or activity relate to an area in which there are known inequalities, or where different groups have different needs or experience? Remember, it may be relevant because there are opportunities to promote equality and greater access, not just potential on the basis of adverse impacts or unlawful discrimination.

The Protected Characteristics are; Sex, Age, Disability, Race, Religion and Beliefs, Sexual Orientation, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Gender Reassignment, Pregnancy and Maternity.

There is a high percentage of senior citizens who either have an allotment or use the bowls facilities. There are currently no known inequalities relating to age or disability where allotments or bowls are concerned.

However, it is acknowledged that the proposed increase in fees and charges and the reduction in the discount currently enjoyed by many allotment holders and members of Bowls clubs, could have a negative impact on the protected characteristics of age and disability.

### **Allotments**

It is recognised that a high percentage of senior citizens hold an allotment, and so any fee changes would have an impact on the protected characteristic of age.

It is also noted that a high proportion of those who hold an allotment also enjoy a discount in terms of the fees and charges

The proposal is:

- There will be a new fee for non-direct debit payers (transaction fee)
- The discounted fee abatement will be reduced from 50% to 25% from 2026/2027.
- The full price of a rod (an allotment plot) will be increased by 13.64% from £22 to £25 for the year 2026/2027.

It is presumed that any increase in fees and charges would have a negative impact although given that having a discount is not an indication of ability to pay, it is not clear how much of an impact the increase in fees would have. This is also the case where an abatement in the discount enjoyed is applied.

### **Bowls**

Where Bowls is concerned the proposal is the same as the proposal for allotments. The fees will be raised and the discount will be reduced.

It is also acknowledged that there is a high proportion of people who are senior citizens and who will be affected by the increase in fees and charges. Bowls players who have a disability will also be affected.

In terms of the protected characteristic of age, two age groups will be affected by the change in fees and charges, i.e. people who are senior citizens, and those who are under 18 years of age. Both groups will be affected, but it may be that one group may be affected more than the other due to the relative income each has.

It must be stressed that having a discount is not a reflection of a lack of income to be able to afford the full fee (no discounts applied).

Therefore, where the proposal for allotments and bowls are concerned, it can be concluded that:

1. The protected characteristic of age (senior citizens) is engaged for allotments
2. The protected characteristic of age (senior citizens and the under 18 years of age) is engaged for bowls. Furthermore, the protected characteristic of disability is engaged.
3. The increase in fees would have a negative impact on someone within that protected characteristic of age regarding allotments and the impact will be on age, (senior citizens and under 18s), and Disability where bowls is concerned. The changes in fees and charges may have the effect of making it harder for those people who currently have a

discount to afford to attend or attend at the same level of frequency as before.

4. The impact is indirect i.e. the policy itself is directed at anyone who has an allotment or who either uses bowls facilities or who has a discount. It is also difficult to gauge what the impact would be and therefore, the Council will monitor the impact of the increase in fees and the reduction of discounts, which would help to recognising any further impacts on any one with a protected characteristic.

If the policy, function or activity is considered to be relevant to equality then a full Equality Impact Assessment may need to be carried out. If the policy function or activity does not engage any protected characteristics then you should complete Part C below. Where Protected Characteristics are engaged, but Full Impact Assessment is not required because measures are in place or are proposed to be implemented that would mitigate the impact on those affected or would provide an opportunity to promote equalities please complete Part C.

**C. If the policy, function or activity is not considered to be relevant to equality, what are the reasons for this conclusion?** Alternatively, if there it is considered that there is an impact on any Protected Characteristics but that measures are in place or are proposed to be implemented please state those measures and how it/they are expected to have the desired result. What evidence has been used to make this decision? A simple statement of 'no relevance' or 'no data' is not sufficient.

All Environmental Services fees are set to increase. The authority must cut budgets by £4.1m to balance future budgets. Unless fees increase to ensure services are fully funded by income the authority may not have sufficient resources available to deliver these or alternative services to the community in future.

The removal of services could impact residents on low income and potential future bowls and allotments service users who presently have limited time for leisure activities.

The subsidy afforded to these services must be balanced against options for subsidising services to other members of the community. By smoothing the fee increases across all service users in these service areas the full fee rate can be held back to ensure anyone not receiving a discount can still afford the cost of participation.

Given that this equalities screening has highlighted that there will be a negative impact on the protected characteristics of age and disability and has recognised that it is difficult to gauge the actual impact on those people the changes will affect. It is concluded that a Full Impact Assessment is not required at this stage, and the ongoing monitoring is required to appreciate whether there is an issue or new issues as a result of the implementation of the changes moving forward.

This screening assessment will need to be referred to the Equality Group for challenge before sign-off.

Date completed: 11<sup>th</sup> November 2024.

Sign-off by senior manager: Helen Clark