

<b>Report title</b>	<b>Environment and Sustainability Proposed Fees and Charges 2024/25</b>
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<b>Department</b>	Financial Services / Environmental Services
<b>Exempt</b>	No
<b>Exemption type</b>	N/A
<b>Reasons for exemption</b>	N/A

**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 the Appendix 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.
- 1.2 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 an average of 5% 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.

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

Fees for the bulky waste collection service have been increased by approximately 22%. Trade waste disposal fees have been increased by approximately 15.11%, these increases reflect the increase in landfill disposal costs the administration and collection fees remain the same, the overall fee for Trade Waste has therefore increased by 4.38%, and the fees for the sale of bins have increased on average by 8.6% to reflect the increase in the cost of plastic.

2.5 Halls associated with places of worship which are let out for commercial activity such as exercise classes or parties will be charged for waste collection at a 50% reduced rate.

2.6 A place of worship including any hereditament is exempt from local non-domestic rating by virtue of Paragraph 11 of Schedule 5 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 if the premises are not being used for commercial or charitable activity. If any place of worship wishes to claim exemption, they will be offered the standard domestic refuse collection arrangements. One 140L waste bin, one food caddy and one 240L recycling bin. Places of worship who wish to use larger bins will be offered 50% reduction on the standard rate aligned to the size of the bin required. The DSO can be contacted directly for further information.

2.7 Recycling

The fees for fortnightly collections have not been increased. The fees for new bins have been increased between 4-7% to reflect the increase in the cost of plastic.

Recycling – Green Waste

2.8 There are currently 11,583 subscribers for this service which is at capacity. These fees have been increased by 5%. There is a potential subscribers would not renew if the fees were increased any higher.

2.9 One off payments 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. These charges have been increased by 22%.

#### 2.10 Street Cleansing

The graffiti removal fee has been increased by 22%. The increase in the charge reflects the charge the Council has to pay external contractors through the increase in labour charges, the increase in fuel as well as the cost of the chemicals/materials to remove graffiti.

#### 2.11 Car Parks

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

#### 2.12 Highways and Engineering

Fees have been increased by an average of 63% this brings the fees in line with the market.

2.13 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.

#### 2.14 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. There is a separate report on this agenda on fee setting proposals regarding waste fixed penalty notices. Discretionary fees have been calculated to reflect staff time and costs.

#### 2.15 Animal Welfare Licences

The fees were increased last year by approximately 7-8%, there are no plans to increase them for 2024/25, the fees reflect staff time and costs.

#### 2.16 Community Events

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. This has resulted in overtime savings across the direct services. These fees have not been increased.

2.17 The continued success of all community events is a priority for Runnymede Borough Council and where the introduction of fees would impact on an event's viability the organisers can apply for grant aid which will normally be agreed where the objectives of the event are in accord with the Corporate Business Plan.

#### 2.18 Allotments

Under the terms of their leases, allotment holders must be informed of any increases in charges twelve months before they take effect. Therefore, charges from April 2024 were set by this Committee in October 2023. It is now proposed that the charges for 2024/25 be increased by £1 to £22.00 per 25m<sup>2</sup> (rod) per annum and for those paying by annual direct debit from £18.30 to £19.30.

## 2.19 Parks and Open Spaces

Parks and Open Spaces –Various levels of charge increases, and decreases have been set to reflect and stimulate demand. Details of specific charges can be found in the appendix.

A new charge was introduced on 2023/24 for team use of parks for training and fitness classes. The charge for fitness classes is £100pa., and team use for training increased by £10 from £140pa to £150pa.

## 2.20 Cemeteries

Cemeteries and Closed Churchyards – on average it is now proposed to increase fees by 10% details can be found in the appendix. New for 2024/25 is the cost of £700 to reopen a standard brick vault.

Whilst at some cemeteries there is a decrease in spaces available, the cost to maintain, administer and manage the cemeteries has increased due to price increases from our suppliers. The fees and charges have been benchmarked against other Councils and Runnymede remains competitive.

## **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 At the start of the 2023/24 financial year, the Council had an ongoing budget deficit estimated to be £5.2m by the end of 2026/27 that needed to be addressed. This included an assumption that fees and charges would 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 2024-25 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 set by government. 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 There are no new environmental, sustainability or biodiversity implications in the annual setting of existing fees and charges. 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 2024 or as soon as practical thereafter unless a different date is set out in the Appendix.

## **9. Background papers**

9.1 None

## **10. Appendices**

10.1 Proposed Fees & Charges for 2024-25