

Report to Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Date of meeting: 20 November 2006

Portfolio: Finance, Performance Management and Corporate Support Services

Subject: Fees and Charges 2007/08

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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

(1) That the Committee considers the policy for increasing fees and charges for 2007/08, and recommends to Cabinet a general increase of 3.5%; and

(2) That any comments from the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel be taken into account when considering the recommendation to Cabinet.

Report:

Introduction

1. As part of the budget setting process, the level of fees and charges are considered for the forthcoming financial year. The general premise is that fees and charges will be increased by 3.5% in line with the retail prices index. However where it can be justified a higher increase should be considered. This report is intended to give members an opportunity to comment on those fees and charges proposed for 2007/08. This report was also considered by the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel on 14 November 2006, and their comments will be reported orally at the meeting.

Leisure Services

2. The general uplift for fees and charges is specified within the leisure contract, however if there is any exceptional changes to specific charges, these cannot be varied without recourse to the Council.

Civil Engineering and Maintenance

3. A report is scheduled for consideration at Cabinet on 13 November proposing the introduction of some free parking in short stay car parks on Saturdays, the anticipated lost income as a result is in the region of £75,000. Having said that a revised fee structure is being formulated that will endeavour to provide at least a 3.5% increase on the total fee income after the £75,000 has been deducted from the original budget. The proposed tariff structure for 2007/08 is shown in Appendix 1.

Finance, Performance Management and Corporate Support Services

4. There are no fees subject to the annual uplift as income of this Portfolio relates to Government Subsidies and Industrial Estate rents.

Leader's Portfolio

5. The main source of income to this Portfolio is for Land Charge searches. The recent fall in search income appears to have levelled out and the revised figure for 2006/07 is expected to be £15,000 higher than originally anticipated. However given the recent difficulties competing with the charge relating to private searches it is the view of officers that an increase at this time would again make the service less attractive and income lost through reduced searches would exceed the gain by increasing price.

Planning and Economic Development

6. The two main income areas within this Portfolio are Development Control and Building Control fees.
7. Development Control fee levels are controlled by Central Government. An increase was applied from 1 April 2005, however no indication has been given regarding fee increases for 2007/08 and it is assumed that no increase will occur.
8. Building Control Fees are income to the ring-fenced Building Control Charging Account and therefore do not affect the General Fund. Fees and Charges were increased from 1 July 2006 in order to ensure that in 2006/07 the fee earning account did not fall into deficit. Given that the costs incurred by the account are likely to be subject to inflation it is proposed to increase charges by 3.5% from 1 April 2007.

Environmental Protection

9. All fees in this area are recommended to increase by 3.5% to cover inflation. The proposed fee structure is set out in Appendix 2.

Community Wellbeing

10. The income here relates to licences. The 2003 Licensing Act transferred responsibilities to Councils for the administering and granting of Public Entertainment licences. The fee structure is governed by statute and there is therefore no discretion on fee levels. Other licences, which the Council can set, are to be increased by 3.5%. Full details are also contained in Appendix 2.

Housing

11. The Housing Portfolio has a number of fees and charges, most of which relate to income to the Housing Revenue Account. The schedule at Appendix 3 shows the levels proposed for 2007/08. These generally represent an increase of around 3.5% from the 2006/07 levels.
12. For administrative and practical ease, it is proposed that two nominal "standard charges" remain the same (dishonoured cheques and file photocopying). A detailed review of heating charges at the Homeless Persons Hostel will be undertaken during 2007, as it is some time since a detailed reconciliation has been made between the fuel charges the Council pays to the utility supplier and the charges the Council makes to residents. In the meantime, despite fuel charges generally being increased nationally, there is no need to increase the charges any more than 3.5% for 2007/08.
13. As previously agreed by members, licences for vehicular access across housing land that were issued before 1 July 2002 will be brought into line, for the first time, with those charges for licences issued after 1 July 2002. These will then be increased annually by inflation from 2008/09, in the same way as other fees and charges.
14. The schedule now also includes the new charges agreed for the three management services that the Council provides to Home Group, following the transfer of Wickfields

sheltered housing, Chigwell in October 2006.

Conclusion

15. The proposed policy for increasing fees and charges for 2007/08 are presented for comment but generally are based on an increase of 3.5%.