

OS Committee Budget Group – Fees and Charges – Summary of Presentation – 26th January 2021

Attendance:

Members	Cllrs A Henley, A Mercer, C Stanbra, M Pengelly, J Hakewill, L Bunday, S Naden-Horley (Apologies from Cllr M York)
Officers	J Gotts, M Dickenson, G Hammons, S Darcy, P Goult, F McHugo

1. Fees and charges within previous sovereign councils had been reviewed and prioritised as to whether harmonisation was required based on statute, recharging and revised costs. This was undertaken through an aggregated team to make recommendations for the changes to be applied from Vesting Day. This included the following key areas:
 - Bulky waste collections
 - Building Control fees
 - Local Land Charges and Search Fees
 - Pre-Planning Application Advice
 - Taxi Licensing
 - Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licences
 - Crematoria and Cemeteries
2. Other areas to consider but which were not identified as high priority or were subject to further considerations included:
 - Fairs/Circus pitches
 - Pest Control/Domestic Premises/Food Safety
 - Private Sector Housing
 - Failure to comply with acts – charges
 - Car Parking
 - Green Waste Collection
3. Following work conducted by officers from within the service areas and Finance, the Executive's Budget Task and Finish Group reviewed the individual fees and charges and agreed that those to be harmonised for Vesting Day would be: Building Control fees, Pre-Planning fees, Bulky Waste Collections, Taxis, and licences for Houses of Multiple Occupation. This is in addition to fees for Environmental Health licensing which are already harmonised across North Northamptonshire.
4. Where fees and charges have not been harmonised for Day One, separate rates between the areas of North Northamptonshire will remain in place and these would be reviewed either during the year or prior to the setting of the 2022/23 budget with a view to harmonise where possible over the next 2-3 years. Crematoria and Cemeteries fees and charges had been reviewed to harmonise over this period.
5. The fees and charges that were previously levied by the County Council had also been reviewed and an inflationary increase had been applied to service areas where applicable as per the Fees and Charges Policy.

6. Slides detailing the proposed areas for harmonisation and the impact on income were also presented.
7. Officers confirmed that the methodology used by Dorset and Buckinghamshire had been considered and taken into account in drawing-up the proposals. It was recognised that there was a priority in harmonising some charges; other fees and charges would be considered by NNC during 2021/22.

Questions/Comments

- a) Cllr Stanbra queried the suggested delegation to officers referred to, in relation to adjusting fees.

Officers – confirmed that this related to a general 2% inflationary increase on fees and charges where this was appropriate.

- b) Cllr Pengelly raised concerns regarding the consultation process

Officers – the fees and charges were presented as part of the budget report and formed part of the budget consultation which commenced on the 11 December.

- c) Cllr Mercer queried the reference to Search Fees, were these not set by statute?

Officers – there is local discretion regarding the fees that can be applied based on cost recovery. The Land registry has a standard £15 fee. Our LLC1 fees vary from £12 to £25.

- d) Cllr Mercer wondered whether the current four archives would be centralised by North Northamptonshire Council (NNC), which may present some cost savings?

Officers – that would be a matter for the relevant service area within NNC to consider after Vesting Day.

- e) Cllr Henley expressed surprise at the variation across sovereign councils in relation to taxi fees and HMO fees, given that all licenses were dealt with by the Central Licensing Unit.

Officers – sovereign councils currently had the ability to set their respective fees, however, these are the only remaining areas not harmonised within the Central Licensing Administration Unit which is why they have been prioritised for harmonising.

- f) Cllr Henley noted that there was currently no proposal to harmonise car parking charges.

Officers – The wider issues around car parking requirements, charging and the associated management would be considered by NNC after Vesting Day.

- g) Cllr Hakewill noted that income from car parking in Corby and Kettering would be part of the Council's income budget, and NNC would need to consider the policy regarding car parking during 2021/22.

APPENDIX D

- h) Officers provided a breakdown of the elements relating to total income from Fees and Charges.

Officers – would provide a detailed breakdown and circulate to Members.

- i) Cllr Hakewill raised concerns that increasing the cost of bulky waste collection may lead to a corresponding increase in fly tipping. He felt there may be a disproportionate negative impact in rural areas, which already encountered fly tipping problems. Cllr Hakewill noted that BCW's current charge was significantly higher than other councils and queried this.

Officers – BCW's collection service is undertaken by Wellingborough NORSE through a contractual arrangement. Their charges were based on the wider service offer and supported other service areas. Officers confirmed that a 50% concessionary rate for bulky waste collections would apply for eligible residents in receipt of housing or council tax benefit and enforcement of fly tipping was identified as a priority. The data available did not show a clear correlation of fly tipping and increased charging for bulky waste in Wellingborough following changes in 2020/21.

- j) Cllr Hakewill queried when the NORSE contract ended? He also queried whether information was available on the current costs of fly tipping across the sovereign councils. Cllr Hakewill also expressed concern regarding the difficulty of catching and prosecuting fly tippers.

Officers – The NORSE contract was due to end in March 2022. NNC would need to consider future options for service delivery. Officers stated that allowance for the costs associated with dealing with fly tipping were built into the budget and acknowledged that this would need to be monitored.

- k) Cllr Stanbra suggested that it may be a subject for NNC scrutiny to look at the issue of fly tipping, bulky waste collections etc to ascertain the impact, and consider what other options were available. He noted there was a projected 20% increase in income, however it was likely there would be a rise in the cost of dealing with fly tipping.

- l) Cllr Stanbra felt that NNC were unlikely to know whether the increase in bulky waste fees would see a corresponding increase in fly tipping for some months. Councillor Pengelly felt that the bulky waste collection service needed to be promoted. The need for a holistic approach to waste management and recycling was supported.

- m) Both Cllrs Stanbra and Henley drew attention to where fees and charges were not available for sovereign councils, particularly in relation to planning and licensing? A summary of income totals was requested to complete the information.

Officers – Confirmed that itemised data under each respective heading was not available in some cases due to the recording of income at summary levels and not at the detail of individual fees and charges lines, however officers would collate totals and circulate this information.

APPENDIX D

- n) Cllr Mercer raised concern that going forward the Kettering and Wellingborough cemetery services may be in competition with more local services e.g., operated by town councils. Had allowance been made in the projected income figures for this?

Officers – confirmed that this had been considered, however it was felt that it would not overly impact on the requirements for the NNC service.

- o) Cllr Pengelly raised concern that in most cases fees for Corby Borough residents would be going up across service areas. He also raised concern regarding the consultation process, given the lack of direct consultation with the taxi trade organisations as an example. Cllr Pengelly also expressed concern that some fees did not currently apply in Corby, and that policy needed to be changed (following consultation). Cllr Pengelly felt that the elements within the current budget consultation relating to fees and charges were not presented as clearly as they could have been.

Officers – accepted that clarity could be provided in some cases but had not been made aware of any issues from the consultation feedback. Officers agreed to circulate paperwork to councillors which would provide greater clarity and include percentage increases/decreases where applicable.

- p) In relation to the introduction of standard fees for pre-application planning advice this was welcomed by Cllr Pengelly. This was more open and transparent for applicants.
- q) Cllr Stanbra felt that where there were specific groups or organisations in existence (e.g., Hackney Carriage Owners) that targeted consultation on fees should be conducted, in order that their views be fed into discussions by members. Cllr Mercer agreed that where possible trade organisations or groups be consulted direct.
- r) Cllr Stanbra also raised the issue of the lack of baseline and harmonised income in some cases in the presentation papers.

Officers – confirmed that “top level” information would be supplied as per point (m).

- s) It was confirmed that Fees and Charges would be considered again by the Executive at its meeting on 10th February as part of the Budget process.
- t) Officers provided a brief explanation of the differences in management relating to the Kettering and Wellingborough crematoriums. It was noted that the Wellingborough facility is a wholly owned subsidiary company of the council. Officers confirmed that the proposed fee increases would be a harmonised core fee and that a proposed harmonisation of evening/weekend fees would be phased in. The future of crematoria services would need to be considered by NNC.
- u) Cllr Pengelly cited the significant increase in cemetery fees for Corby Borough residents.

Officers explained that the increases across Corby and Wellingborough are similar and being phased in. Corby's fees and charges are at the lower end in the majority of areas, not just the areas reviewed for harmonising.

APPENDIX D

- v) Councillor Mercer queried whether there were any proposals regarding rents for NNC premises etc.

Officers – confirmed this was not a Day One issue but would be looked at as part of the wider review of the NNC asset portfolio. There were likely to be variations across the area dependent upon the local market conditions

- w) **In summary, the standardisation of pre-application planning fees was welcomed. It was felt in relation to taxi licensing fees there should be direct consultation with trade organisations. It was noted that in relation to cemetery fees and charges there would be a negative impact for Corby Borough residents and that in general Corby's fees and charges across several service areas were historically lower than other Councils within North Northamptonshire. The impact of increased bulky waste charges needed to be closely monitored, alongside the levels of fly tipping and associated costs to NNC.**