

FEES AND CHARGES - UPDATE

1 OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 To advise Members of the progress on issues relating to fees and charges.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At the Meeting of Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 20 June 2002, Members agreed a plan of action to gather information to be used when making recommendations to this Committee on the schedule of fees and charges within the budget process for 2003/04. At this stage, it is for information gathering leading to future meetings of this Committee and to the determination of fees and charges at Council on 28 January 2003.

3 CAR PARKING

- 3.1 Members requested details of the following.
- (1) Additional information on the definition of costs, particularly those relating to asset rentals and depreciation. A different basis of depreciation has been included in the accounts for 2001/02, which gives a lower charge to car parking. At the time of writing this report, the external auditors have not completed the audit and therefore confirmation has not been obtained that this revised method is acceptable.
 - (2) Usage statistics for each car park. These are being compiled.
 - (3) A questionnaire / survey for car park users. This was undertaken and reported to Environmental Services Committee on 5th September 2002. The issues that will impact on car parking charges are as follows:-
 - (i) The survey showed support for the re-introduction of the one hour charge. This was deleted in 2000 with an aim to persuade motorists to stay longer in the Town Centres. However, this may have a relationship with (ii).
 - (ii) Motorists considered that there were insufficient parking spaces available. Here the analysis of parking spaces mentioned in (2) above will provide information on where the problems occur and days and times they occur. It may be possible to ease problems by a review of the car parking tariffs.

- (iii) There was a fall in the reporting of crime related incidence in the car parks. Here the Council has invested in new lighting and CCTV. Southend Road, The Approach and the Mill Hall/Bellingham Lane car parks have all benefited from improved lighting and CCTV has been installed at Mill Hall/Bellingham Lane. Budgets need to be considered for the expansion of these schemes.
- (4) A survey that will provide evidence of the benefit of the free Saturday afternoon parking and the future of the trader refund scheme. This has not been carried out. The analysis of car park usage will seek to show the effect on the Saturday afternoon free parking.
- (5) Car Park charges for other Essex District Councils. These are currently being compiled.

4 LOCAL LAND CHARGES

- 4.1 A questionnaire of customers was required including whether there is an acceptance that people are prepared to pay more for a speedier service. If this were supported this could open up the resources to invest in the service. The questionnaire was despatched to all users of the service during September. A copy is shown as appendix A.

5 CEMETERIES

- 5.1 Members requested officers to identify any Council owned land suitable for a cemetery. It has been reported that none is available.
- 5.2 To obtain schedules of cemetery charges or Essex Authorities. This is currently being compiled.
- 5.3 To identify areas where Rochford District Council charges could be rationalised. This has been undertaken at Officer level and it will be reported to Members at the next stage when all information on other Authorities is available.
- 5.4 To construct a survey of undertakers etc on the service. This was despatched in September. A copy is shown as appendix B.

6 HACKNEY CARRIAGE LICENCES

- 6.1 Members referred this issue to the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee to take account in their discussions on Taxi Licensing

issues. Charges will now have to be assessed against other corporate priorities. Officers will present a rationalisation of the charges and a view of the likely future costs of the service.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The fees and charges have a bearing on the achievement of corporate objectives and are an important issue within the budget and Council Tax setting process.

8 RECOMMENDATION

Members are requested to note the progress made on the key elements of fees and charges. (HFS)

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Background Papers:

None

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