

## **Environment Fees and Charges Proposals – 2015/16**

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 One of the starting points for the base budget for 2015/16 is that fees and charges should increase by 1.8%, with the exemptions of:

- No increases for car park income
- A 2.8% on House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licence charges

In reality, however, officers look for every opportunity to maximise income, accepting that:

- Fees and charges can have a direct impact on usage and take up;
- In some circumstances the Council is providing services in direct competition to the private sector. Where this is the case, price is likely to have a direct link with demand and it is important that the Council does not price itself out of the market. In some areas benchmarking has taken place to ensure West Berkshire can compete with other authorities.
- Raising fees and charges can in some instances work against the Council's social inclusion agenda by effectively discriminating against those who are less able to pay;
- For some services there is a clear expectation that fees and charges will reflect the costs incurred in providing the service; the Council may be subject to legal challenge if increases in fees and charges cannot be justified.

1.2 Within the Environment Directorate fees and charges deliver an annual income of approximately £7,128,080 (2014/15 original budget). The majority of the fees and charges increases are in line with the 1.8% guideline in the budget strategy.

## **2. Specific Proposals**

### **2.1 Planning and Countryside**

2.1.1 The original budget for 2014/15 income from fees and charges in Planning and Countryside was £1,738,650. This figure has reduced from last year's budget as a result of the BBOWT partnership as we no longer receive income directly from Nature Discovery Centre for example.

Income is generated from the following areas:

- Hire of sports facilities at Henwick Worthy, Holy Brook and Northcroft
- Development Control
- Building Control

#### 2.1.2 Development Control

Fees for planning applications are set centrally by the DCLG.

#### 2.1.3 Building Control

Legislation requires Building Control charges to be set at a level to recover costs over a three year rolling period and that the service should not be profit making.

### **2.2 Highways and Transport**

2.2.1 The original budget for income from fees and charges for the Highways and Transport service in 2014/15 was £3,925,610. Fees and charges have been reviewed in order to generate additional income wherever possible. Fees and charges are generated from the following four areas:

#### 2.2.2 Car Park Charges

Car Parking charges in Newbury were increased in 2012 and it has been agreed to continue with current pricing therefore not increasing these in 2015.

However there has been an increase to the amount of on street parking locations with relevant parking charges. Also, appropriate parking fees dependant on which day of the week bank holidays fall are now applicable.

### 2.2.3 Licence Fees and Other Charges

Fees are charged for a range of services e.g. where Highway Authority approval is required to place items or to work on the public highway. These include vehicular crossings, skips, scaffolds, table and chairs on the highway, inspecting utility operations, temporary or permanent traffic regulation orders.

### 2.2.4 Highways Development Control Fees

Fees are charged to developers for design checking, supervision and inspection of new roads under construction and off site highway improvements.

### 2.2.5 Charges to Householders for Sewage Treatment

Approximately 150 properties, mainly in rural areas, are connected to small sewage treatment plants. These are the responsibility of West Berkshire Council to maintain, having previously been the ownership of Newbury District Council from when the housing stock was transferred to Sovereign Housing Association. The householders pay a fee to the Council which contributes to the maintenance costs.

## 2.3 **Culture and Public Protection**

2.3.1 The original budget for 2014/15 for income from fees and charges for Culture and Public Protection was £1,463,820. Income is generated from the following areas:

### 2.3.2 Trading Standards

Fees for this service include weights and measures, registration of poisons and licences for petroleum.

### 2.3.3 Waste Service

Fees include bulky household collection, provision of additional wheelie bins for garden waste collection.

### 2.3.4 Licensing and Environmental Health

Includes taxis, temporary events, premises, food safety etc

### 2.3.5 Culture

Cultural Services moved into Environment in April 2012. Fees and charges fall into four main areas: Leisure, Shaw House admission and hire fees, heritage and tourism services and libraries.

Leisure – The leisure centres are managed by Parkwood Leisure. The Council agrees the maximum fee that can be charged for admission. Increases in Parkwood's prices are agreed in December for January implementation and they have no impact on the Council's budget.

Shaw House – For 2015/16, it has been agreed to suspend heritage visitor entry fees to Shaw House to encourage an increase in visitor numbers, discretionary spend and promotion of the venue.

Heritage – West Berkshire Historic Environment record is used by enquirers for a variety of purposes. The charge is made for commercial enquiries to cover the costs of staff time.  
No change in income is being proposed for the use of images from the museum collection as the museum has just recently reopened following the redevelopment project.

Libraries – The Service is proposing not to increase the hire fees for computer games because they have not purchased any new games this year and feel that the public will not be willing to pay an increased charge for old games.  
An increase to administration fees for debt recovery have been proposed as these fees have remained the same for a number of years.