

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Fees and Charges</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>19 January 2012</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Strategic Director, Resources Strategic Director, Place</b>		
<b>Lead Member:</b>	<b>Cabinet Members for Finance &amp; Central Services and Planning, Economy, Employment &amp; Regeneration</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Paul Holloway</b>	<b>292005</b>	
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<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>No</b>		
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

**FOR GENERAL RELEASE****1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:**

- 1.1 This report sets out the proposed fees and charges for 2012/13 for Bereavement Services and the Register Office within Life Events and for Trading Standards, Environmental Health and Building Control.
- 1.2 For Life Events, this revision of fees and charges was suggested within the Budget Update and Savings 2012/13 papers which were presented to Cabinet on 8<sup>th</sup> December. Projections based on the demand for our services and the increase in fees and charges suggest combined additional income of £85k is achievable for the next financial year for the Bereavement and Registration Services.
- 1.3 For Trading Standards, Environmental Health and Building Control all the fees and charges were reviewed as part of the budget setting process. The level of income from Trading Standards and Building Control is expected to remain the same in 2012-13, where as a result of the proposed changes to fees within Environmental Health, additional income of £55k is projected.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That Cabinet approve the fees and charges for Life Events in Appendix 1 and Appendix 3 and recommend them to Budget Council.
- 2.1 That Cabinet approve the fees and charges for Trading Standards, Environmental Health and Building Control as shown in Appendix 6 to 15 and recommend them to Budget Council.

### **3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

- 3.1 Brighton & Hove City Council adopted a Corporate Fees & Charges Policy in 2008. The main aims of the policy were to ensure that:
- Fees and charges are reviewed at least annually including consideration of potential new sources of income;
  - Fees and charges are set after comparing with 'statistical nearest neighbours' (or other relevant comparator groups) and taking into account market, legal and other contextual information;
  - Unless set by a statute, fees and charges are set to recover full costs, including central overheads and capital financing, or to a defined subsidy level agreed by the council;
  - Subsidies and concessions are not applied unless approved by members;
  - The impact on financial inclusion is considered when setting fee levels.

### **4. LIFE EVENTS**

- 4.1 For Life Events, this is the most comprehensive review of fees and charges for three years. As part of this, our charges have been benchmarked with neighbouring local authorities and service providers. The exercise was to review non- statutory fees and charges to demonstrate cost recovery and not to generate a surplus. It is not within our power to increase statutory fees. Consultation with the Institute of Cemeteries and Crematorium Management (ICCM) and the General Register Office (GRO) has previously established there is not a legal obligation to consult with members of the public about non-statutory fees, as the Local Authority should have its own policies for fee setting against services it provides. Brighton & Hove City Council adopted a Charges and Fees setting policy in 2008.
- 4.2 A further review of non-statutory fees and charges will be carried out for the next financial year. In most cases there will simply be an inflationary increase only, but costs may dictate we need to increase higher than inflation.
- 4.3 These proposals will generate additional income of £51k for Bereavement Services and £34k for the Register Office.
- Bereavement Services
- 4.4 Fees and charges in Bereavement Services have been increased by inflation over the last three years but have not been subject to a comprehensive review. As part of this review, we have benchmarked and researched the fees currently charged for similar services in neighbouring districts including Worthing, Surrey, Eastbourne and the Downs Crematorium. This review has demonstrated that Bereavement Services has a real opportunity to increase fees and charges for quality services, whilst remaining extremely competitive with our neighbours.
- 4.5 Appendix 1 contains a table of the main changes to our fees and charges, with the new proposed fee and some explanatory commentary. Appendix 2 includes

the benchmarking information, comparing the prices of our services to our neighbours.

- 4.6 The main increases relate to Right of Burial to purchase graves and the internment (burial) fees where we have been charging less than other districts over the past years and it is proposed to align these nearer to the other districts.
- 4.7 As part of this review, we have identified new business development opportunities for Bereavement Services. The fees for these new services are detailed in Appendix 1.
- 4.8 The additional income, estimated as £51k, will contribute to proposed savings.

#### Register Office

- 4.9 Fees and charges in Bereavement Services have been increased by inflation over the last three years but have not been subject to a comprehensive review. Having compared our current ceremony and non-statutory fees with those of our nearest neighbouring registration districts of West Sussex and East Sussex County Council plus other neighbouring districts such as Kent County Council, Hampshire County Council and Surrey County Council, it has become apparent that there is a real opportunity to increase fees and charges for our quality services, whilst remaining extremely competitive with our neighbours.
- 4.10 Appendix 3 contains a table of our current fees and charges, the proposed new charges for 2012/13 and some commentary on the reasons for these amendments. Appendix 4 includes the benchmarking information, comparing the prices of our services to our neighbours.
- 4.11 There is no increase to the minimum statutory charge of £43 for a basic Register Office marriage service.
- 4.12 This benchmarking review has demonstrated that our current fee structure is complicated. For ceremonies in the Regency Room, Hove Ceremony Room and the Mayor's Parlour the fees are currently set on a sliding scale of:
  - Monday to Thursdays
  - Friday mornings
  - Friday afternoons
  - Saturday mornings
  - Saturday afternoons
  - Sundays and public holidays
- 4.13 The new pricing structure in Appendix 3 has revised this to make it easier for the customer and will assist in our administration of the service. From 2012/13 it is proposed that the fee structure for ceremonies is as follows:
  - Monday to Thursdays
  - Fridays (same fee all day)
  - Saturdays (same fee all day)
  - Sundays and public holidays
- 4.14 It is proposed that Friday fees are set at the same rate for both morning and afternoon ceremonies. Although this sees a significant increase in the charge for

morning ceremonies, our charges are still much more competitive than East and West Sussex. Similarly, fees on a Saturday will be charged at the same flat rate but will still compare favourably to our neighbours (see Appendix 4).

- 4.15 As part of this review, we have identified new business development opportunities for the Register Office. The fees for these new services are detailed in Appendix 3. An example of a new service is a premium appointment service to be offered to those wishing to enter notices of marriage or use the Nationality Checking Service outside of core hours. Other authorities across the country such as Haringey and West Berks do this and our charges are competitive.
- 4.16 A further example is a premium pre-ceremony meeting option to be introduced to enable couples to meet with their Registrar in the lead up to their special day to complete a ceremony planning checklist. This new premium pre-ceremony meeting would provide an enhanced service to those couples wishing to discuss their requirements in more detail, at a time that fits around their personal commitments. Neighbouring authorities offer this service already with prices ranging from £45 to £129 an hour.
- 4.17 All new services are highlighted in Appendix 3.
- 4.18 The additional income, estimated as £34k, will contribute to proposed savings.

## **5. TRADING STANDARDS**

- 5.1 The majority of fees and charges will increase in line with the corporate rate of inflation, 2%. The exceptions to this are licences for explosives which are set by legislation, and weights and measures fees for liquid fuel. The revised fees are given in Appendix 6.

## **6. ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH**

- 6.1 The majority of fees and charges will increase in line with the corporate rate of inflation, 2%. The exceptions to this are the Food Safety Level 2 retake of exam fee and pest control fees for rats and mice.
- 6.2 It is proposed to increase the cost of the exam retake for Level 2 Food Safety from £15 to £20.
- 6.3 It is not possible to offer concessions on pest control charges, as these would be too difficult to administer reliably. However, the service is still considered to offer good value for money compared with private sector providers.

## **7. BUILDING CONTROL**

- 7.1 Building Control fees were all reviewed and compared to the relevant market rates and as a result they are all to remain the same for 2012-13. They are listed in Appendices 7 to 15.

## 8. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

### Financial Implications:

- 8.1 For Life Events the proposed fees and charges will increase cost recovery and bring levels more in line with comparable authorities and in line with the corporate fees and charges policy. The level of fees has not been increased by more than inflation for the last three years. For bereavement services the additional income of £51k represents 4.5% increase on the fees and charges budget of £1.14million. For register office the additional income of £34k represents 5% increase on budget of £0.68million. The proposed fees and charges are included within the proposed budget savings and are subject to agreement by Budget Council on 23 February 2012.

For Trading Standards, Environmental Health and Building Control the fees and charges have been reviewed in line with the corporate fees and charges policy. These are expected to yield additional income of £55k and this is reflected within the 2012/13 budget proposals for consideration by Budget Council on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2012.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Anne Silley*

*Date: 05/01/2012*

### Legal Implications:

- 8.2 The council needs to establish for each of the charges imposed both the power to levy charges of that type and, where applicable, the power to set the charge at a particular level. In some cases the amount of the charges is set by Government. In other cases where a figure is not prescribed, the amount that can be charged is restricted to costs recovery. In all cases the council must act reasonably and ensure that any statutory formalities which govern the particular charge are complied with.

*Lawyer Consulted: Elizabeth Culbert*

*Date: 06/01/12*

### Equalities Implications:

- 8.3 Life Events: an Equalities Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken (see Appendix 5) and a full EIA will be carried out. The screening has highlighted that no specific minority group is disproportionately affected by increases.

Environmental Health: Raised charges for pest control will standardise rodent treatment charges and still represent good value against private sector providers. However, residents with limited income may be discouraged from using the service but administration of concessions would take officer time in establishing validity and would increase costs. Mitigating measures would include investigation service for drainage, refuse and pest problems. Expert pest control advice is freely available for residents to undertake integrated pest management, including non-chemical strategies: hygiene, proofing, housekeeping habitat environmental management, stock rotation and education and chemical control

Trading Standards: Modest income generation may ameliorate reductions in services such as buy with confidence, programmed work like test purchasing, supporting vulnerable customers and business support.

Sustainability Implications:

8.4 None

Crime & Disorder Implications:

8.5 None

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

8.6

Public Health Implications:

8.7 None

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

8.8

**9. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):**

Life Events

9.1 A benchmarking exercise has identified there is real potential for increasing our fees and charges across both the Bereavement and Registration services. Both have excellent reputations for providing high quality customer focussed services, and there is a need to maximise income generation. The exercise can be achieved whilst remaining extremely competitive with our neighbours and other service providers nearby.

9.2 It does not make sense to continue with the current outdated pricing structure for services in both areas, and the alternative of not updating fees and charges would miss out on opportunities to justifiably generate more income for services that are already recognised for their quality.

**10. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Life Events

10.1 The recommendations are justifiable and make business sense in both of the service areas. Our highly regarded services have the potential to generate more income. This is based on information included within the appendices to the report.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices:**

1. Bereavement Services Fees and Charges
2. Bereavement Services Benchmarking
3. Register Offices Fees and Charges
4. Register Office Benchmarking
5. Equality Impact Screening document
6. Trading Standards and Environmental Health Fees and Charges
7. to 15 Building Control Fees and Charges

### **Documents in Members' Rooms**

None

### **Background Documents**

