

Report to Council – 17 October 2023

Report of Finance Scrutiny Committee – 12 September 2023

Finance Scrutiny Committee met on 12 September 2023. The minutes are published on the council's website.

The following members and officers were present at the meeting:

Present: Councillor Khan (Chair)
Councillors Kloss (Vice-Chair),
Councillors, Martins, Rodrigues, Walford, Wenham and Watling

Also present: Councillor Watkin (Portfolio Holder for Property, Resources and Customer Services)

Officers: Head of Finance
Democratic Services Officer (IS)

Minute 13 included recommendations to Cabinet and Council.

13. Annual Review of Fees and Charges

The committee received a presentation by the Head of Finance. The reasoning behind raising some fees and charges from 1 January 2024 was explained as being necessary to meet increased costs. Several exceptions were detailed such as:

- Garden waste collection – annual subscription runs from September to August.
- Leisure – SLM set these charges and there were contracts in place, so these would change later in the year.
- Hackney and Private Hire – fell under the remit of Licensing.
- Market Traders – outside of this.
- Planning fees – fell under central government legislation but would be reviewed in the autumn.

In response to a question about the issue of two increases in the same twelve-month period, the Head of Finance explained that these proposed changes would be fully debated at Council in October. It was also pointed out that many of these charges were purchased as a one-off, so a customer would not see two price increases. Members of the public were also used to seeing prices change regularly, so this would not be seen as unusual.

The Head of Finance also explained that whether future years would see fees and charges being reviewed in January, had yet to be determined.

There followed a discussion about the rephrasing of the charges where some of the committee members were unhappy with the changes and others saw the reasoning and agreed with it. There was clear concern that the estimated additional income of £30,000 for 2023/24 as a result of raising charges on 1 January rather than 1 April was only small compared with the £1.4 million gap in the budget.

In response to a question about bulky waste charging, the contract fee was approximately half of the cost to make the collection. This was subsidised. There could be a risk that charging the full cost of collection would increase fly tipping.

The point was made that every subsidised service was every member of the community paying for a small number to benefit from the service.

The Chair expressed his disquiet at the earlier increase in January 2024, citing parking increases and burial cost increases as being of particular concern and asked that this was minuted.

RESOLVED –

1. that the Finance Scrutiny Committee has considered the draft Charging Policy for 2024/25 at Appendix 1 and provided comments to Cabinet and Council.
2. that the Finance Scrutiny Committee has considered the proposed Fees and Charges for introduction from 1 January 2024 and 1 September 2024 and provided comments to Cabinet and Council.