

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 15 SEPTEMBER 2009

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND
CONSERVATION AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT, LEISURE AND CULTURE

7. REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES FEES AND CHARGES

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

'D' RECOMMENDATION – that (A) the Executive be informed that all fees and charges within Environmental Services have been reviewed in line with the Fees and Charges Strategy.

(B) the current approach of maintaining low charges for allotments be commented on by the Committee.

1.0 Purpose/Summary of Report

1.1 At its meeting of 9 September 2008, the Executive agreed a Fees and Charges Strategy. A requirement of the strategy was that all fees and charges should be reviewed to confirm compliance. This report constitutes the results of that review for fees and charges used by the Environmental Services department.

2.0 Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/Objectives

Fit for purpose, services fit for you

Deliver customer focused services by maintaining and developing a well managed and publicly accountable organisation.

3.0 Background

3.1 The Fees and Charges Strategy requires that all fees and charges made are reviewed on the basis of the following criteria:

- any subsidy from the Council taxpayer to the service user should be a deliberate choice;
- fees should generate income to help deliver service improvement in priority areas;

- fees should support the medium term financial strategy;
 - there should be consistency in fee setting for similar areas;
 - unnecessary subsidy from the Council tax payer to commercial organisations should be avoided;
 - If the impact of the review is high, then changes can be phased.
- 3.2 In addition, Heads of Service were asked to identify any services where charges could be made, where they currently are not.
- 4.0 Report
- 4.1 As per the Divisional Budgets 2009/10 the fees and charges within Environmental Services are listed under the following five section headings:
- Refuse collection
 - Commercial waste
 - Allotments
 - Animal control
 - Pest control
- 4.2 Environmental Services fees and charges are listed at Appendix A on pages 7.6 - 7.7. These have been evaluated against the criteria outlined in the fees and charges strategy and this is detailed at Appendix B on pages 7.8 - 7.12.
- 4.3 Fees and charges for the services are reviewed annually as part of the Council's budget setting processes. Benchmarking is undertaken at least every 3 years and more frequently for high volume services that operate in a commercial, competitive environment.
- 4.4 Some further information about each of the activities for which fees and charges are levied are shown below:
- 4.5 Refuse Collection – Domestic refuse collection is a statutory service and must be provided free of charge to residential properties, within the context that councils may specify the type of container and frequency of collection. Local authorities may charge for bulky waste collections. The most frequently used service is the basic charge of £21.75 for up to 3 items. Other charges are set for mixed loads of waste. Charges fully cover collection and administration costs and are comparable with other local authorities. This service may only be used by domestic customers and items are limited to that which a

resident would take with them if they moved. Other items, outside this category, for example, waste from a building refurbishment, are treated as commercial waste and would normally be removed by the contractor undertaking the works. This reflects the statutory definition of household waste and free disposal service provided by Hertfordshire County Council.

- 4.6 Cleansing of public land under the control of the Council is statutory and undertaken free of charge. The service has other, discretionary charges for the cleaning of private land, but these are used relative infrequently – usually upon request from a private land owner or event organiser. They may also be used in the event of enforcement action.
- 4.7 Abandoned vehicles - There is a statutory requirement for the Council to remove abandoned vehicles under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. However due to the nature of the service the cost of the removal cannot usually be recovered (the vehicle is abandoned and the owner cannot be traced to be charged for the removal).
- 4.8 The Council offers a disposal service to residents that wish to surrender end of life vehicles. Charges fully cover costs but are kept low to encourage residents to dispose of vehicles legally rather than abandon them. The number of abandoned and surrendered vehicles in East Herts has fallen to very low levels.
- 4.9 The Council has a statutory duty to provide a Commercial Waste service, for which a reasonable charge may be made. This is a highly competitive commercial environment and charges are reviewed each year in line with rising landfill tax costs and competitor activity. The service operates a trading account and income levels help to support fixed costs (e.g. Buntingford Service Centre).
- 4.10 Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 certain organisations (e.g. registered charities; educational establishment) are ‘prescribed’ as producing household waste for which a charge may be levied. These organisations receive the same collection charge as commercial businesses but disposal (by Hertfordshire County Council) is free and this is reflected in the lower charge to the customer.
- 4.11 The Council also provides a clinical (healthcare) waste collection services to health service providers and dentists using special

containers. Charges fully cover costs and reflect the different disposal route for these materials.

- 4.12 Allotments - Most allotments are provided by town and parish councils, however, East Herts Council has 3 residual sites used as allotments, all in Hertford. Allotments are community assets that can help improve people's quality of life by promoting healthy food, exercise and community interaction. As such, the Council has traditionally kept fees very low to encourage their use. Current income levels for this service are £560 per annum against maintenance and support costs of £2,840 per annum, a net loss of £2,280 per annum. Many councils charge considerably more for this service. East Herts currently charges £2.50 per 25m² compared with an equivalent of £2.85 charged by Hertford Town Council. Members are asked to give their views on future charging policies. Should it be decided that a full cost recovery approach be introduced, it is recommended that this be phased in over a 3 year period.
- 4.13 Animal Control -There is a statutory requirement to collect stray dogs. No charge can be levied where the owners cannot be found and the Council incurs collection, kennelling and occasionally vets fees before dogs are re-homed. Where owners are identified a charge may be levied. The charge for stray dogs is set by statute at £25. However, reasonable administration and kennelling charges may be recovered at the Council's discretion. These are set at £20 and £15 per day respectively. These charges are set for full cost recovery and to make a contribution towards unrecoverable costs. Traditionally, the Council has sought to encourage owners to have their dogs 'chipped' to make identification and return of strays easier. Accordingly, where a 'chipped' dog is found it is returned to the resident free of charge if it is a 'first offence'. The Service also provides a 'chipping' service to residents for which a charge is levied. This service is currently subject to review.
- 4.14 Pest Control – This is a public health service that supports some of the most vulnerable members of our communities. There is a statutory requirement for the Local Authority to secure, as far as is practical, that the District is kept free from rats and mice, under the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949. East Herts Council complies by providing a domestic pest control service for which charges are levied.
- 4.15 Rat infestations are investigated and treated free of charge. Rats are a serious public health pest and are often not associated with an

individual property. For all other pests a charge is levied. Residents on income related benefits make a discretionary charge of £10. Services were free until 2008 when a charge was introduced to discourage unnecessary requests. For residents not on benefits charges are set to fully recover costs and generate income to make a contribution towards the concessionary elements of the service.

4.16 Pest Control services are also provided to commercial premises with the objective of generating income to support the discretionary elements of the service.

5.0 Consultation

5.1 None.

6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 None.

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 None.

8.0 Human Resource Implications

8.1 None.

9.0 Risk Management Implications

9.1 None.

Background Papers

None.

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