

| <b>Fees &amp; Charges 2025/26</b>  |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Executive Summary</b>           | This report recommends the fees and charges for the financial year 2025-26 that will come into effect from 1 April 2025.  |
| <b>Options considered.</b>         | Alternatives for the individual service fees and charges proposed have been considered by service managers as part of the process of creating this report.  |
| <b>Consultation(s)</b>             | Portfolio Holder<br>Director of Resources/S151 Officer<br>Budget Managers   |
| <b>Recommendations</b>             | That Cabinet agree and recommend to full Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The fees and charges from 1 April 2025 as included in Appendix A.</li> <li>• That delegated authority be given to the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and relevant Directors/Assistant Director to agree the fees and charges not included within Appendix A as required (outlined within the report).</li> </ul> |
| <b>Reasons for recommendations</b> | To approve the Council's proposed fees and charges for 2025/26.   |
| <b>Background papers</b>           | Fees & Charges 2024/25 report (Full Council – 20 February 2024)   |

|                          |                                    |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>Wards affected</b>    | All                                |
| <b>Cabinet member(s)</b> | Cllr Lucy Shires                   |
| <b>Contact Officer</b>   | Tina Stankley, Section 151 Officer |

| <b>Links to key documents:</b>        |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Corporate Plan:                       | This report helps to ensure that the Council is financially sound by setting charges for external services, adequately reimbursing the costs of delivering the Council's services and generating extra income where appropriate. |
| Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) | This report includes opportunities that service managers have identified to generate extra income from within their current operations.  |
| Council Policies & Strategies         | N/A  |

| <b>Corporate Governance:</b>                       |  |
|--|--|
| Is this a key decision                             | Yes  |
| Has the public interest test been applied          | Not an exempt item   |
| Details of any previous decision(s) on this matter | Current approvals on Fees & Charges 2024/25 report (Full Council – 20 February 2024) |

## **1. Purpose of the report**

- 1.1 This report recommends the fees and charges the Council issue for the financial year 2025-26 that will come into effect on 1 April 2025. It is requested that Cabinet review these and then recommend approval to Full Council.
- 1.2 Cabinet is also asked to agree that delegated authority be given to the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and relevant Director/Assistant Director to agree the fees and charges not included within Appendix A.

## **2. Introduction & Background**

- 2.1 The setting of the fees and charges for the next financial year forms part of the annual budget setting process. The reasons for presenting the fees and charges for approval ahead of the detailed budget report is to provide enough time for the service areas to make changes/issue notification letters to the public before the beginning of the new financial year.
- 2.2 This earlier setting also allows opportunity for income budgets to be updated and included in the new financial year's budget report, along with any forecasted impact in future year's budget projections.

## **3. Fees & Charges 2025/26**

- 3.1 Fees and charges proposals for 2025/26 have been circulated by the Finance Team and reviewed by the relevant budget manager so that income budgets can be updated as part of the annual budget setting process. The proposal is to increase fees and charges by 2% (rounded to the nearest 10p or £1) in line with inflationary costs. Appendix A provides the detail of the proposed 2025/26 charges to come into effect on 1 April 2025.
- 3.2 Fees are increased by one of following dependent upon what they are:
  - By inflation increases to cover the inflationary increases in costs of providing the service.
  - Statutory increases which are set by central government e.g. planning fees and election charges.
  - Fee increases which must be set on a cost recovery basis e.g. land charges, building control and the majority of our locally set licencing fees.

### 3.3 **Elections**

These fees related to the delivery of elections and disclosure of information from the register of electors. These are all statutory (set by central government). There have been no changes from the 2024/25 fees.

### 3.4 **Communications**

These fees relate to filming costs when external bodies request the use of a Council asset (such as the Cromer Pier).

These have been reviewed and increased where demand has been higher. Fees are charged based on the size of the filming activity (number of cast/crew). An additional fee is charged if the operation requests exclusive use of a Council asset for filming.

However, the fees given are only indicative as the Communications team reserve the right to individually assess large scale filming operations to ensure that no cost will be incurred by the taxpayer for any private filming.

### 3.5 **Customer Services & ICT**

The Customer Services team only provide one direct service that comes with a cost, foreign pension verifications. This is a statutory service which the Council is required to provide.

The Council provides external photocopying services to Parish Councils, Local Businesses, and not-for-profit organisations upon request. This service currently generates around £4,000 a year for the Council in addition to the normal reprographics function.

These fees have been reviewed by the service manager to ensure that the Council is charging at a rate that generates income whilst keeping the service affordable for its customers. Costs for large plot printing have been increased for 2025/26 above inflation to recover the rising material costs to produce larger documents. Printing fees are set by the Council at its own discretion.

### 3.6 **Leisure**

The Holt Country Park team have continued to sell firewood in the local area by advertising at the park/on social media whenever required forestry works have resulted in tree felling. Following significant interest from the public in buying firewood during 2024/25, the charge has been increased above the recommended inflation rate by 4%. This fee is set by the Council at its own discretion.

School visit fees have also been increased above the rate of inflation to ensure that the service is recharging for staff costs. This service is primarily aimed at helping schools as opposed to generating a profit, but the increased fee will ensure that all costs are covered.

The Council facilitates open-air market days at Sheringham (Saturday's) and Cromer (Friday's) all year round, with an additional day on Wednesday's during the Spring/Summer months at Sheringham.

These fees are set by the Council at its own discretion with the aim to charge a competitive rate, ensuring the Council generates income whilst attracting tourists to two popular areas in the district.

There is not yet a proposed increase for these charges for 2025/26, the service manager will undertake a separate exercise in the future to determine the most appropriate rates for pitch fees. It is requested that this decision be delegated to officers.

### 3.7 **Legal**

The Council offers multiple legal services as outlined in Appendix A, a set fee is not declared for these services and customers are charged depending on the skill level of Solicitor required to handle the case. The legal team operates on a cost-recovery basis and does generate a net income to the Council.

### 3.8 **Environmental Health**

The Environmental Health team have undertaken a large benchmarking exercise (comparing North Norfolk's charges to other Norfolk Authorities) to identify areas where fees are below those set by other Norfolk authorities. Other fees for services provided have also been reviewed to make sure charges accurately reflect the costs to deliver services and have been increased by the rate of inflation to ensure adequate cost recovery.

Waste collection fees have not published in this report. This is because the full costs to the Council to deliver these services for 2025/26 are not known yet. It is quite a complex set of fees and charges to calculate, and we need to be closer to the 2024/25 year end to use more actual data. This will ensure that the fees set for the service can be calculated to fully cover the costs of providing the service. It is requested that the setting of these fees is delegated to the Director of Resources/S151 officer once the service areas are more certain of future costs. This is a statutory service of the Council that it must operate.

Environmental service charges that have been increased above the rate of inflation following the benchmarking exercise have been summarised below:

Garden bin collection fees have been increased above the rate of inflation for 2025/26. This is a discretionary service that the Council provides which generates a significant amount of income. The benchmarking exercise identified that the fees were low compared with other local authorities, and so these have been set at the average charge for the area and increasing income generation for the Council, whilst still providing value for money for customers. There is still a higher charge for non-direct debit arrangements to account for the extra administration fee to arrange billing.

Commercial services are a statutory function of the Council, the fee is determined on a full cost recovery basis and so has been increased either by/above the rate of inflation to match the cost in service delivery. Larger fees have been benchmarked against other local authorities resulting in larger increases for the forthcoming financial year.

Private water supply charges are a statutory function of the Council, the fee is determined on a cost recovery basis. All fees have been increased by the rate of inflation which has allowed for appropriate cost recovery.

Housing Act Notices and HMO licences fees are a statutory function of the Council. Fees have all been increased to equal the statutory fees set by the Government.

Environmental Protection fees and Fixed Penalty Notice fees are a statutory function of the Council. The fees are set at the statutory levels which have not increased for 2025/26.

Taxi Licencing fees are a statutory function of the Council, fees have all been increased by the rate of inflation to allow for appropriate cost recovery. There is a cap on the maximum fee, but the Council has not reached this limit yet.

As a caveat, it is noted from the Assistant Director of Environmental Health & Leisure that a Taxi Licensing fee review is scheduled to be undertaken by the team to assess if taxi licensing fees should be increased above the current levels. Any increase must be evidenced to show that it is proportionate in line with the officer time costs to deliver the service. This review will be taken to the Licencing Committee and Full Council once completed.

Most other licencing fees are a statutory function of the Council, so fees have remained the same as there has been no increase in the statutory limits. The Council is currently charging the highest fee allowed.

There are a small number of licencing fees (other than taxi licences which are mentioned above) where the charge can be set by the Council, albeit there is a cap on the maximum fee. This includes skin piercing premises, scrap metal dealers, adult entertainment venues and street trading consents. The fees for these venues have been increased by inflation to allow for cost recovery. There are a few exceptions; skin piercing, scrap metal collector 3-year licences and the fee to reissue a licence, these have been increased above the rate of inflation following benchmarking with other local authorities, which showed that our fees were below other authorities' fees.

### 3.9 **Planning**

Planning services are a statutory function of the Council and so the fees are determined at a national level by Government legislation.

The Town and Country Planning (fees for applications, deemed applications, requests and site visits) 2023 regulations introduced an automatic annual increase to the nationally set planning fees. This means that increases in planning fees will be announced before 1 of April 2025 by central government to allow for inflationary increases in the service.

The Council fees will increase the statutory planning fees when they are announced.

As part of the Planning Service Improvement Plan and audit recommendations, a new pre-application advice service has been developed. This was reported to Development Committee in August 2024 who supported the proposals. The new service options and fee structure is shown in Appendix A for approval by Full Council.

A revised fee structure has also been proposed for the street numbering scheme, with an increased price for single developments, but a larger saving for large-plot developments,

Revised fees have also been proposed for Land Charges services as CON 29 enquiry fees have now been split between commercial and residential fees.

It is requested that the planning charges be approved with a start date earlier than 1 April 2025 as the Planning department would like to start using the new fee structure at the earliest convenience. It is requested that a start date of 2 January 2025 is approved for the new pre-application charges.

### 3.10 **Estates**

The fees for the professional estates services have been increased by the rate of inflation to remain competitive. The only exception is the annual licence charge for a table (with maximum 4 chairs) which has been increased above the inflationary rate to £100.

For chalets and beach huts, it has been determined that the current prices are still appropriate with the current level of demand. The winter season prices for both have been increased as bookings for these have continued to be popular as with prior years.

A new fee has been introduced for Mundesley beach huts to be hired in the Spring season for up to six weeks, this is anticipated to generate extra income in the lead up to the busy summer season.

### 3.11 **Car Parks**

The proposed increases for Car park charges are being presented to Members in a separate report. The report details all the options for increases and recommends to full Council the increased charges to be implemented from 1 April 2025.

### 3.12 **External Facilities**

Please note, Council facilities operated by an external contractor (for example sports centres) are excluded from this report as the Council has no discretion on the setting of these fees.

## 4. **Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 Corporate Plan objectives are supported by the Council's allocated budgets, the Fees & Charges report will directly support the Council's budget setting 2025/26 report.

## 5. **Financial and Resource Implications**

Inflationary increases in fees and charges are required to meet the increased costs that the Council is facing. Without these increases the Council may have to consider making additional savings in service delivery to meet the shortfall in the Council's budget for 2025/26 and future years.

### **Comments from the S151 Officer**

An annual review of the Council's fees and charges takes place to ensure that we cover the costs of providing services. The additional income generated is included in the budgets and is an integral part in setting a balanced budget for the coming year.

## 6. Legal Implications

Any Fee described as statutory is set at a higher than District government level, the Council does not have the power to impose a higher fee.

### Comments from the Monitoring Officer

Fees and charges are set annually and are an important aspect of income to the Council and part of the budget setting process. The proposed fees and charges are brought in sufficient time to allow service areas to notify our customers and put mechanisms in place. Some are statutory amounts over which the Council may have no discretion, but some allow the Council to reflect the work and experience involved in delivering services.

## 7. Risks

For demand led services, there is a risk that demand will fall, and the actual income received will fall short of the budgeted income. To mitigate this risk when producing income budgets assumptions will be made around the level of income to be achieved which will be based on the best estimates calculated by services managers and the finance team working together.

## 8. Net Zero Target

None as a direct consequence of this report.

## 9. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

None as a direct consequence of this report.

## 10. Community Safety issues

None as a direct consequence of this report.

## 11. Conclusion and Recommendations

This report makes recommendations for the fees and charges that will come into effect on 1 April 2025. These are considered as part of the Council's service's income budgets that will be included within the details 2025/26 budget when it is presented for recommendation and approval.