Slough Borough Council

Report To:	**Cabinet**
Date:	20th July 2026
Subject:	Fees and Charges – In year proposals
Lead Member:	Councillor Ahmed – Lead Member for Finance
Chief Officer:	Ian O'Donnell, Interim Chief Operating Officer (S151 Officer) and Pat Hayes, Executive Director for Regeneration, Environment and Planning
Contact Officer:	Mark Hak-Sanders, Director of Financial Management and Strategy
Ward(s):	All
Purpose of report:	For decision
Key Decision:	YES
Exempt:	NO
Decision Subject To Call In:	YES
Appendices:	Appendix 1: Schedule of Proposed Changes Appendix 2: Benchmarking Analysis Appendix 3: Equality Impact Assessment

1. Summary and Recommendations

1.1 The framework for the setting of fees and charges was agreed by Council in 2022. Within that framework, their determination is a responsibility of Cabinet and Licensing Committee respectively depending on whether the fee relates to an executive or non-executive function.

1.2 Whilst the approved 2026/27 budget included changes to fees and charges, as agreed by both Cabinet and Licensing Committee, to take effect from 1st April 2026, the approved budget also included significant savings with fees and charges implications including a Council-wide transformational savings target of £1.0m for Corporate Income & Fees and Charges Review, with a further £0.5m in 2027/28. The budget report also set out that a fundamental review was required across a number of areas to ensure compliance with the agreed policy and that the fee was based on cost recovery and in accordance with the relevant statutory framework.

1.3 This report sets out the outcome of a review of a number of fees and charges recommends some in-year changes Cabinet to consider. These are set out in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.9 below.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

A. Approve an in-year increase in charges for garden waste as set out in Appendix 1 from 1st September.
B. Approve an in-year increase in charges for replacement bins as set out in Appendix 1 from 1st September.
C. Approve in-year increases to Building Control fees as set out in Appendix 1 from 1st September.
D. Approve in-year increases in the fee for road closures under temporary traffic regulation orders as set out in Appendix 1 from 1st September.

Reason:

There are a number of approved 2026/27 and medium-term financial plan savings that are dependent on increasing income from fees and charges, including but not limited to the £1.5m corporate saving for Income Generation and Fees and Charges Review.

Commissioner Review

Locally set fees help to manage demand and cover costs for providing services. They are a vital means of ensuring that full costs can be recovered by the Council, and businesses, groups or individuals do not pay more than they should, while simultaneously reducing the risk of a subsidy from local taxpayers.

Effective management of discretionary fees and charges should ensure that the service is cost efficient, the processes and the fees themselves are transparent, fair, equitable and affordable. Charges should be set in accordance with the statutory framework applying to the services. Price sensitivities for individuals, groups and businesses should be fully considered, including undertaking where required consultation and impact assessments, and where available benchmarking. The outcome of the above should be reported to decision makers, so that charges can be set appropriately with statutory notice periods observed, to enable the delivery of the level of services necessary to achieve the Council's agreed objectives.

The costs of any discretionary subsidies and concessions provided for provision of services must be clearly identified, quantified over the period of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and considered in view of the wider context of the Council's significant financial challenges and requirement for exceptional financial support from government.

Commissioners are content for this report to be considered.

Options considered

1 – Do nothing*:* Fees and Charges have in the main already been agreed for implementation from 1st April 2026. However, the Council agreed a budget in March 2026 with significant in-year savings to be delivered with fees and charges implications. By doing nothing those savings could not be achieved, and alternative savings would need to be identified – ***Not Recommended***

2 – Implement the proposed increases. ***Recommended***

2. Introduction

2.1. A key tenet of the Council's Corporate Plan is the building on our work to provide financial sustainability for the Council, living within our means, balancing the budget and being honest and open about the difficult decisions that will need to be taken over the coming years.

2.2. The existing framework and approved policy for fees and charges was approved by Council in 2022 and sets out the following key principles for setting those fees, in accordance with S93 of the Local Government Act 2003, unless prescribed in other specific legislation:

a) Users pay for the service at full cost recovery

b) A strategic and informed approach to subsidy and concessions

c) Adopting a strategic approach to new charges

d) Appropriate communication and engagement with service users

e) Coherence with broader efficiency and framework objectives; and

f) Fees and charges will be subject to systematic and in-depth review.

2.3. A key principle of the above is that any subsidies or concessions associated with specific charges, which mean the cost of delivering the chargeable service is higher than the income derived, are transparent and either prescribed through legislation or as part of an agreed policy that recognises a need to subsidise some or all service users, and the financial impact of that subsidy.

2.4. The Council currently receives some £21m from fees and charges. The approved budget for 2026/27 incorporated an assumed gross increase of £0.916m across directorates from the decisions taken by Cabinet and Licensing Committee at their February and March meetings, and those increases are reflected in the relevant 2026/27 service budgets. Further to this, as part of the overall budget approval, the Council agreed to a number of savings with likely fees and charges implications totalling some £2.2m for 2026/27 and £6.7m over the period of the medium-term financial plan. Included in this is a corporate target of £1.0m for 2026/27 and a further £0.5m for 2027/28 for "Income and Fees and Charges Review." It should be noted that fees and charges must be informed by the cost of the service and in general are limited to cost recovery. In other words, the Council cannot use fees and charges as a tax raising power. Therefore, when making decisions, the Council must consider the cost of the service, the approved policy and agree a fair charging regime based on the relevant statutory framework. The Council should not increase fees and charges with the sole or primary purpose of generating income.

2.5. To support the overall transformation programme, and in accordance with the requirement of the agreed fees and charges policy, a fees and charges review is ongoing, involving assessing whether the respective chargeable services are recovering full costs, benchmarking against comparators and undertaking market and sensitivity analysis. The focus of the review is on those areas where charging is not prescribed and where benchmarking information is available to act as a guide for further investigation. Appendix 2 to this report provides benchmarking information for those areas covered in this report. This benchmarking information is provided for information only to indicate where there is a significant difference between comparable boroughs. The Council must set its fees and charges based on its cost of delivery of the service and a lower fee may indicate that the Council is efficient in the cost of delivery or an indication that it is not fully recovering its cost.

2.6. This report identifies opportunities arising from first phase of that review, so that Cabinet is able to take some in-year decisions that will contribute towards the overall MTFP savings required. The work has been undertaken in conjunction with external consultants whose specialism is identification and quantification of fees and charges opportunities.

2.7. Under the Council's current constitutional arrangements officers' delegation to agree any in-year changes to individual charges is limited to inflation plus 3%, hence any in-year proposals over and above that limit require Cabinet (or Licensing Committee) approval.

3. Fees and Charges Review

3.1. The initial phase of the review has focused on opportunities in Adult Social Care and Regeneration, Environment and Planning, which make up the majority of chargeable services. It has identified some process improvements within non-residential financial assessments, by ensuring clients are in receipt of all qualifying benefits, and supporting the claim process, which should increase recovery by up to £0.480m in 2026/27, without adversely impacting on service users, and £0.950m from 2027/28 at a projected cost of some £0.050m over the next 12 months.

3.2. The review has also identified further areas that should contribute to specific savings set out in the budget, including planning and parking, as well as the adult social care work referred to above. These opportunities are not reflected in this report but are estimated to contribute a total of some £0.5m towards the overall 2026/27 savings requirement, rising to some £2.2m per annum by the end of the current MTFP (totalling some £6.7m over the period).

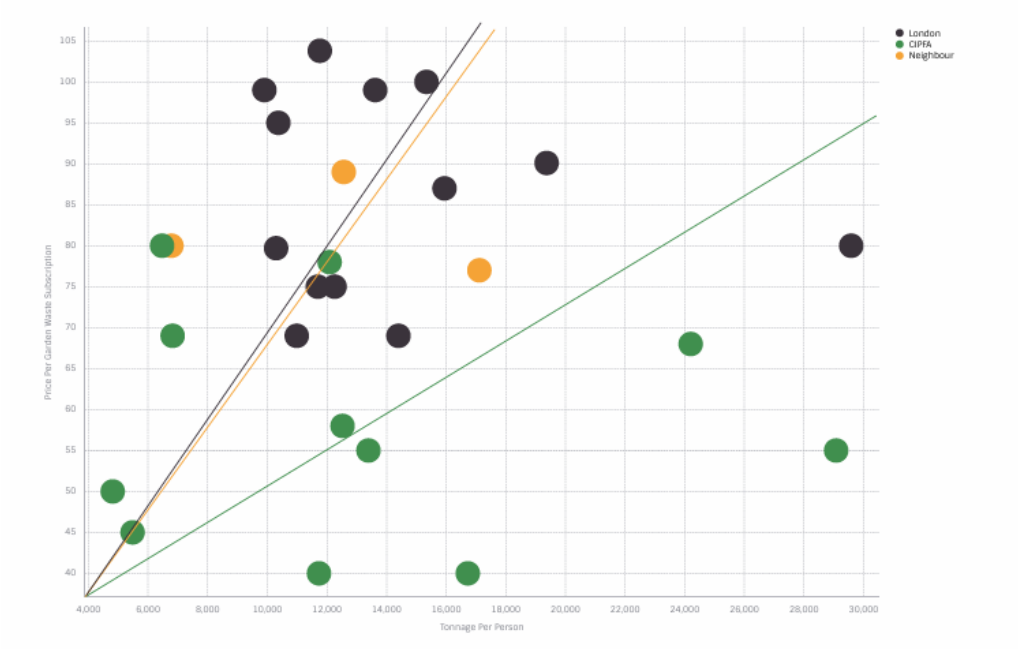
3.3. ***Waste Services***

3.3.1. *Garden Waste* - The Council provides a range of chargeable services including garden waste, bulky waste and commercial waste. The 2026/27 subscription charge for garden waste has not yet been increased and remains at £55. It is significantly lower than neighbouring authorities, and yet take-up remains significantly lower than would be expected. As a culmination of these two factors, the service does not recover its costs, which are currently estimated to be £91 per subscription. In effect the subsidy is some £0.400m. This differential is both a factor of the price and extremely low take-up and means it does not comply with the Council's agreed fees and charges policy. The Council also operates a 50% discount for those in receipt of pensions credit, which is not the norm, with some 20% of authorities nationally offering such a discount. The cost of the discount is some £0.030m per annum and that should be reflected in a clear policy.

3.3.3. Whilst it is recognised that an increased fee could impact on demand, an increase in the annual subscription is considered necessary to partially mitigate the current subsidy being met by council tax income and therefore borne by taxpayers. In parallel, the service will review operating costs to make sure that it is delivering in the most economical and efficient way. Whilst it is not a practicable option to increase the fee to £91 per subscription, a relatively small in-year increase, with a further increase from April 2027, is recommended in conjunction with a more proactive approach to increasing the level of subscriptions, promoting take-up of the service and developing a waste policy that incentivises compliance, to narrow the gap between the cost of providing the service and the income derived.

3.3.4 The aim would be to increase subscriptions over a 4 -year period to a level comparable to an authority of Slough's make-up. It is important that both price and volume are increased for the service to be in a position to move towards full recovery of its costs. A revised subscription of £60 is recommended to take effect from 1st September, with a further annual uplift of £5 per annum, although final annual increases will be agreed as part of the annual budget process. An option to pay for 3 years at the current rate could be included before the end of September, allowing residents to take advantage of price certainty. Table 3.3.8 below shows the estimated net increases from the proposals. The growth trajectory assumes that growth will steadily move Slough from its current position to a more typical level for Garden Waste subscriptions, linked to the proactive measures set out in section 3.3.3. Growth will be reviewed annually as part of decisions on fee levels in future.

3.3.5. There is a risk of residents not continuing to subscribe and combining green waste with residual waste, with a significant increased cost of waste disposal. The proposal above already builds in a risk that there is an initial reduction in the first year increasing disposal costs by some £0.011m in 2026/27. At £65 per subscription, it would require an estimated 15% reduction in subscriptions and equivalent increase in combined residual waste for the additional costs to outweigh the opportunity. However, it will be important to keep this under review. An analysis of authorities that charge for garden waste indicates that although the tonnage recycled for garden waste reduces when a charge is implemented, the price of the service once charged does not have a material or long-term impact on usage. Where there are variances, this is largely due to other factors such as green space and demography. The chart below compares, where the data is available, garden waste tonnage per capita to price. It should also be noted, as reflected in Appendix 2, for those three outer London boroughs that currently don't charge for garden waste, their tonnage collected per capita is below the average for all outer London boroughs.



3.3.6 An EQIA of the recommended approach is attached as Appendix 3 and highlights there is no evidence that any specific protected groups will be disproportionately adversely impacted. It should also be noted that under this proposal the Council will continue to provide a discount for those in receipt of pension credit.

3.3.7. *Replacement bins:* A £3 uplift to £52 for a new / replacement 240L bin was agreed, by Cabinet in February. However, the full cost of providing the service is estimated to be £65, which is still below comparable neighbours, with a significant proportion of costs are borne by developers as part of new developments. The increase, to be implemented on the 1st September, will ensure the service is operating on a full cost recovery basis and is estimated to generate an additional £0.006m for 2026/27 rising to £0.013m in a full year. A full schedule of individual proposed increases is set out in Appendix 1.

3.3.8. A summary of the waste fees and charges and the estimated net additional income is set out below:

Table 3.3.8

Recommendations	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29 £m	2029/30 £m
Garden Waste				
Increase annual subscription from £55 to £60 for this year and a further £5 in subsequent years to 2029/30	0.018	0.084	0.133	0.181
Proactive marketing activity to promote the garden waste collection service to the level of comparable authorities	0.015	0.080	0.150	0.225
Sub-total	***0.033***	***0.164***	***0.283***	***0.406***
Replacement Bins				
Increase to £65 (25%) for 240L and commensurate increase for other sizes	0.006	0.013	0.013	0.013

3.4. ***Building Control*** – The Building Control service is required to operate on a break-even basis. The review has identified the current service is not currently recovering its costs and fees benchmark low compared to the average for neighbouring councils and Outer London Boroughs. An increase of 20% across all fees areas is required to ensure the service operates at break-even. At this level Slough will remain comparatively low compared to benchmarks and should not have a significant impact on its market position, whilst generating an additional £0.05m in a full year. The increases, which are detailed in Appendix 1 should be implemented as soon as practicable, likely to be the 1st September. The table below summarises the proposal:

Table 3.4.1

Recommendation	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29 £m	2029/30 £m
Building Control				
Increase Building Control Fees by 20%	0.025	0.050	0.050	0.050

3.5. ***Highways Licensing***: The review has identified that fees for road closures under temporary traffic regulation orders (TTRO's) are not recovering the full cost of providing the service, despite the 5% 2026/27 increase agreed as part of the budget process. Estimated income for the year is £0.13m and increasing the fee to reflect full cost recovery would generate an additional £0.02m in a full year. Slough's current charge of £2,362.50 benchmarks below the average for comparator authorities. A full cost charge is estimated to be £2,800 based on current volume of applications for closure. The financial implication is set out in the table below.

Table 3.5.1

Recommendation	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29 £m	2029/30 £m
Highways Licensing Increase Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders (TTROs) to £2,800	0.011	0.021	0.021	0.021
Total	**0.011**	**0.021**	**0.021**	**0.021**

3.6. **Summary**

3.6.1. The initial review has identified a number of services that are not recovering full costs through current fee structures.

3.6.2. A number of the outcomes of the review will impact upon specific agreed savings agreed as part of the 2026/27 approved budget and medium-term financial plan. These have been excluded from this report and will form part of the detailed proposals required to deliver those agreed savings. The review has also identified significant estimated additional income through the financial assessment process which is estimated to generate an additional £0.480m in the current financial year and £0.960m from 2027/28.

3.6.3. Subject to Cabinet approval, the recommendations set out in this report, relating specifically to waste services, building control and highways licensing are estimated to increase net income by £0.080m during the current year by moving closer to full cost provision, whilst generating service growth, rising to £0.490m per annum by the end of the next medium term financial plan. Other outcomes of the wider fees and charges review should achieve further full year net savings of £1.2m, totalling some annual full year savings of £2.7m.

3.6.4 The report assumes a half-year delivery for the current financial year.

4. Implications of the Recommendation

4.1 Financial implications

4.1.1 Council agreed the 2026/27 budget and medium-term financial plan to 2028/29 at its meeting of the 5th March 2026 with assumed savings of £40m over the three years. Included in those savings was an estimated figure based on a review of fees and charges. This was estimated as a saving of £1.5m over the next two years and other savings with income implications of £5.2m. It should be noted that the Council holds a contingency budget of £6.2m (c.20% of the Transformation target) earmarked for exceptional variations following validation, due diligence or changes to savings as a result of further consultations.

4.1.2 Cabinet and Licensing Committee agreed the respective schedules for 2026/27 fees and charges at their meetings of 11th and 16th February and 9th March 2026, and those changes took effect from 1st April 2026. The estimated overall increase in income is £0.916m, which has been reflected in 2026/27 budgets.

4.1.3 The report provides a number of proposals on increasing fees and charges arising from the first phase of the fees and charges review where current rates demonstrate they are not recovering the full cost of service provision and increases above officer delegated limits are required to enable a trajectory towards full cost recovery. They also benchmark significantly below those of neighbours and comparators. The net financial savings from the recommendations in this report, totalling some £0.080m this year, rising to £0.490m in full year by the end of the next MTFP. This is in addition to the £0.96m full year adult social care savings are set out in the body of the report. The Council will monitor the implementation of these increases to ensure that, over a three-year period, the income streams are not exceeding full cost recovery, alongside reviewing the operating costs of each service to demonstrate value for money.

4.2 Legal implications

4.2.1 Some services the Council provides are mandatory and governed by specific legislation whilst other services provided are discretionary. Discretionary Services are those which the Council is permitted to provide but not required to provide.

4.2.2 In the absence of specific powers or prohibitions on charging for services, the Council has the power to charge for discretionary services under Section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 and under the power of general competence found in Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011.

4.2.3 The overall position on charging is that the Council must not charge for a service if legislation prohibits it from doing so. If legislation places a duty on the Council to provide a service and to charge for it, then it should. The power to charge for discretionary services is not available to local authorities if there is a statutory duty to provide the service. For some services the power to charge is contained in the statute which permits the Council to provide the service. In this case, this specific power must be relied upon as opposed to the general power to charge.

4.2.4 Charges may be set differentially, so that different people are charged different amounts e.g. concessions for older persons or people with a disability or on low incomes. When considering whether to subsidise services or offer a concession, the Council must balance its fiduciary duty to general taxpayers with its responsibilities to service users and other overarching duties, such as its equality duties.

4.2.5 The Council must generally ensure that taking one financial year with another the income from any charges for a service does not exceed the cost of providing the relevant service, as the Council is not permitted to use its charging powers as a taxation power. Any surpluses or under recovery of income should be addressed through a regular review.

4.2.6 In the fees and charges appendix to this report, the column titled ‘Basis for charging’ indicates whether the fee stated is prescribed by statute (as a set amount or up to an amount) in which case it is noted as ‘statutory prescribed’ or ‘statutory discretionary’ where legislation provides that you may charge for providing a service but the amount of the charge is discretionary, within the remit of the legislation e.g. the charge may be limited to cost recovery, reasonable cost or based on consideration of prescribed matters, or as ‘discretionary’ which is where the authority is not obliged to provide the service but if it does so then the charges are based on cost recovery pursuant to the statutory power to charge in Local Government Act 2003/Localism Act 2011.

4.3 Risk management implications

4.3.1 In setting fees and charges, consideration has been given to price increases and expected demand for services. There remains a risk that demand for services fluctuates and a review of costs may indicate that provision of services may not be at full cost recovery. There is also a risk that imposing a charge may result in changing behaviours such as reduced recycling or increased fly-tipping. Ongoing review is required to assess and mitigate unintended consequences.

4.3.2 Not agreeing some changes to fees and charges risks non-delivery of agreed savings which would need to be mitigated by identification of additional savings beyond those already agreed by the Council.

4.4 Environmental implications

4.4.1 Whilst there are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations, increasing fees and charges relating to some key environmental areas could have adverse implications on specific areas such as recycling. Mitigations will need to be put in place to ensure their minimisation.

4.5 Equality implications

4.5.1. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 created the public sector equality duty. Section 149 states that:- A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act, advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

4.5.2. The relevant protected characteristics are age, race, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. When making decisions in relation to service provision, the Council must take account of the equality duty and in particular any potential impact on protected groups.

4.5.3. Fees and charges are set against a clear framework that seeks to ensure that an approach that is strategic, fair, economically and legally sound. By working within the framework, any cumulative equality impacts can be identified. This framework also sets out the principles for any concessions which can be introduced to mitigate impacts. All proposed increases are to recover full costs or ensure the cost is reasonable compared to neighbours and comparators in the context of limited supply.

4.5.4 An equalities impact assessment is set out as Appendix 3 to this report, with particular focus on implications arising from proposed changes to garden waste subscriptions and concludes no disproportionate impact on any specific protective characteristics. It should also be noted that not charging the full cost of recovery, as set out in the agreed fees and charges policy, is likely to have equalities implications by diverting limited resources to subsidise these services.

5. Background Papers

None