

London Borough of Waltham Forest

Report Title	Budget Review – Fees and Charges 2025/26
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Meeting / Date	Cabinet, 3 rd December 2024
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Cabinet portfolio	Councillor Paul Douglas, Portfolio Lead Member for Finance and Resources
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*[signed by Leader of the
Council]*

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Wards affected	None specifically
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Public access	OPEN
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Appendices	1 (i) – Analysis of Income Budgets 2024/25 1 (ii) – Income Budgets 2024/25 – 2025/26 1 (iii) – Fees & Charges 2025/26 2 – Equalities Assessment
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1. Summary

1.1 This report sets out the proposed Fees and Charges for 2025/26.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

2.1.1 Cabinet is recommended to agree the schedule of Fees and Charges as set out in Appendix 1(iii), so far as they relate to fees and charges that are not reserved for Council decision by the provisions of the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) Regulations 2000 (as amended).

2.1.2 Agree the proposal in that the Fees and Charges can be uplifted as early as 1st February 2025 and no later than 1st April 2025.

3. Proposals

3.1 The proposal for Fees and Charges for the majority of services are set out in Appendix 1 (iii) with the exception of Street Trading and Land Charges which operate as ring-fenced accounts.

- 3.2 Fees and Charges will be uplifted by such an amount to ensure full cost recovery and in line with market rates where applicable however some fees and charges are set by statute and are increased in line with the actual, allowable increase. The proposal is to increase the income budgets by £1.658 million to £49.593 million.
- 3.3 Unless the Fees and Charges are set by statute, services must ensure all costs are recovered in full and are required to obtain benchmarking data to assess comparability. Where services are proposing not to increase fees, there must be justification and notes are contained in Appendix A (iii) as appropriate.
- 3.4 Where possible, budgets were uplifted to match the increase in fees and charges. However, in some cases, whilst fees and charges were uplifted, it was not possible to increase the budgeted income where services are unable to achieve the current income targets.
- 3.5 It is proposed that assuming the fees and charges schedule is approved by Council that the Fees and Charges should be uplifted from the 1st of February 2025 where feasible but no later than the 1st of April 2025, in order to reduce the current in year overspend.

Specific Proposals

3.6 Chief Executive

Communications

- 3.6.1 Fees and Charges for Waltham Forest News advertising, and some outdoor advertising sites have been increased by 3%. The overall income target has not increased as the current target has not been achieved. Lamppost banner advertising is being introduced for the first time and therefore no increase is applicable. Lamp-post banner advertising income has been set at £0.055m.

3.7 Stronger Communities Directorate

Employment, Business and Skills

- 3.7.1 There is a marginal increase in fees for Adult Learning for 2025-26 due to the current economic climate and the cost-of-living crisis. The fees have been benchmarked against neighbouring authorities.

Culture and Heritage

- 3.7.2 Museums and Galleries fees and charges have not been increased due to market pressures and the need to maintain competitiveness. There is a need to remain competitive for on-line sales, licensing partnerships and to attract visitors to increase the footfall, thus maximise on-site income.
- 3.7.3 William Morris Gallery (WMG) is not increasing fees for loans, images or room hire for the next 12 months but will review again as part of the review of fees & charges for 2026/27. The decision is based on current demand from other borrowing institutions and level of charges

applied. Loan images and loan fees from the collection are maintained as the majority of loans are to other arts institutions – the decision is to support Arts and Cultural institutions with static fees. Shop and licence revenue will maintain current levels and new projects in progress for 2026 launch. Licence works will need 18-24 months in advance before revenue is realised.

- 3.7.4 Walthamstow Assembly Hall and Chingford Assembly Hall remain unavailable to be used as a venue as part of the Town Hall Complex redevelopment and continued use as a Food Distribution centre. Venue hire prices will be undergoing a review as part of the newly delivered offer.
- 3.7.5 The Wetlands is being managed through a delivery partner to run all on-site operations and all income and expenditure have been transferred over to the delivery partner since February 2021.

Queens Road

- 3.7.6 Lettings fees have increased by 5% although there is no increase in the change to the centre's income target as this was set when more lettings were achievable. Currently, lettings are limited as the majority of the premises is used to deliver Council services.

Libraries, Registrars and Ceremonies

- 3.7.7 The Libraries service has proposed a 10% uplift on all lettings fees and charges and increases of between 5% and 10% for other fees and charges. Due to an overall shortfall in income within the Libraries service the overall income budget will not increase.
- 3.7.8 The Citizenship Ceremonies and Registrars service charges remain unchanged where the statutory maximum fee has been applied in line with the General Registry Office (GRO), whilst other fees and charges will experience increases ranging from 5% to 10%.

3.8 Adults Social Care Directorate

- 3.8.1 The proposals for Fees and Charges for Peoples Directorate Adult Services are reviewed in the light of the implementation of the Care Act and Personalisation agenda and should be considered in the context of the substantial changes being experienced within the service. The statutory guidance issued under the Care Act 2014 sets out principles that local authorities should consider when making decisions on charging.
- 3.8.2 The setting of fees and charges are based on reviewing unit cost of the applicable services. Unit costs have been applied to all services to retain a consistent logic, as the basis for the charge. In considering the proposed increases, officers in Social Care were also mindful of the costs charged by other boroughs.
- 3.8.3 In practice, for Adults Social Care, the residential charges are governed by the Care and Support Statutory Guidance issued under the Care Act 2014 and the Community-based services are governed

by the Fairer Contributions Policy (FCP). Residents will only be expected to pay what they are assessed to be able to afford. Any increase in charges would therefore only impact people who are assessed as Full Cost Payers (currently, with undeclared resources or known capital in excess of £23,250), this will be revised upwards through the implementation of the Charging reforms. Work is ongoing to understand what financial implications on the Council will arise from the implementation of the reforms. Once a financial assessment has been carried out a person in receipt of services is notified of the amount of the financial contribution, if any, they are expected to make. The process ensures that they retain a minimum level of income known as the Minimum Income Guarantee.

- 3.8.4 The underlying principle of the fees and charges for Adults in 2025/26 is to help people to make informed decisions to help them live independently with choice and control over the services they receive. The calculations take account of unit costs which may help develop a better service offer to self-funding residents who may wish to use Council services.
- 3.8.5 The Council has reviewed the basis of the Community Alarms charge and has determined that the charge should remain split between the basic community alarm and telecare. This will ensure that people only pay for the service they receive. The proposal is to increase these charges by 5%. The proposed charges for Community Alarm users (who have no other telecare charges) will pay £3.47 per week and the telecare users pay £5.78 per week. The charge is for either one service or the other, (they are not added together), and can be disregarded in the assessment for Fairer Contributions.
- 3.8.6 The Day opportunities review resulted in there being one service defined as Day Care, which is based at Markhouse Road. The maximum charges have been reviewed to reflect the unit cost of provision and will only impact full cost payers. Financial assessments are carried out on residents annually using appropriate guidelines as set out in the Care Act who, as a result of that assessment only pay what they can afford.
- 3.8.7 The basis for charging for Dementia Support was reviewed last year. The proposal is for the current charges to increase by 5%.
- 3.8.8 Charges for our in-house residential accommodation (Alliston House, George Mason Lodge and Mapleton Road) have been reviewed to consider any changes in the costs of provision. The proposal is to increase the maximum fees by around 4.4% to achieve full cost recover, for the in-house residential care homes for new residents from £1,188.20 to £1,240.20 per week - an increase of £52.00.
- 3.8.9 An increase in income of £65,300 is assumed for this report but is dependent upon the usage of the facility by full cost payers. Financial

assessments are carried out on residents annually using appropriate guidelines as set out in the Care Act who because of that assessment only pay what they can afford.

3.9 Children's and Education Directorate

3.9.1 There are 2 services with fees and charges to residents:

- Education Music Service fees: these have been increased by an average of 5%.
- Education Welfare: increased from £60 to £80 if paid within 21 days, reflecting Statutory guidance by government. An increase in income of £40,000 is assumed for this report but is dependent upon the number of penalties issues each year.

3.10 Place Directorate (Non-Housing)

Regeneration, Planning and Delivery

3.10.1 Fees for planning applications are nationally set by Parliament. These fees were increased by 35% for major applications and 25% for all other applications in December 2023, with an automatic inflation increase each April. The Government is consulting on a further increase in householder application fees.

3.10.2 Charges for pre-application planning advice are being increased by 25% to take account of inflation and service demands. The proposed additional income from pre-application planning advice will be used to finance the additional resource requirements to meet service demands. Fees have been benchmarked against neighbouring authorities.

3.10.3 Building Control fees are set in accordance with the Building Regulations (Local Authority Charges) 2010. Fees were increased in 2022-23 by 10% to recover costs in accordance with the Building Control Regulations and there is no increase proposed in 2025-26.

3.10.4 Land Charge fees are set on a cost recovery basis as this is a ring-fenced trading account, no increase is proposed in 2025-26, based on a recent benchmarking against neighbouring authorities.

Commercial Property Investment

3.10.5 The property services lettings service fee is set to increase by 2.6% after having benchmarked against private providers of similar services.

3.11 Place – Housing

3.11.1 Homelessness removal charges will remain unchanged. These are considered to provide full cost recovery, although this position remains under regular review. A new charge for the administration of removal has been added to the fees and charges for 2025/26, which will be 10% of the removal charge.

- 3.11.2 A robust benchmarking exercise was completed for the setting of the 2024/25 Housing fees and charges; therefore, all remaining fees and charges will be increased by 5%.

3.12 **Neighbourhoods and Environment**

Regulatory Services & Contingency Planning

- 3.12.1 Within Street Trading, which is a ring-fenced trading account, fees have been reviewed following a benchmarking exercise in April and aim to bring the Council in line with neighbouring/similar sized market authorities. This will apply an uplift of 5% across most fees in order to cover the operational costs of the service (staffing, administration, and other overheads etc)
- 3.12.2 Housing Standards scheme will end at the end of March 2025 and the expectation is that once the scheme gets approved the new pricing scheme will be set at an average increase by 9%.
- 3.12.3 The Selective Licensing current scheme will end in April 2025 and the fees will be set to increase at an average of 17% once the new scheme gets approved.
- 3.12.4 Services under Environmental Health and Trading Standards - Statutory fees were reviewed for 24/25. Most of the statutory fees are set by Regulations and cannot be increased (LA2003, Explosives, GA2005). Other fees are reviewed and set to increase at a minimum of 5%.

Neighbourhood Services

- 3.12.5 The proposals for Fees and Charges for Neighbourhood services have been reviewed through a recent benchmarking exercise and continue to be in line with other boroughs The fees are set to increase on average in the following services:- Cemeteries 7.3%, Green Space 4.3%, Pastures 8.8%, Sports pitches and Open Spaces 8%, Leyton sports 9,78%. Waste replacement Bins service (where applicable) 3.4%, Parking Fees 6.9%, Highways 1.2%.
- 3.12.6 Enforcement fees – Fixed Penalty notices no increase as they are Statutory fees and for the services provided by the Dog team fees are set to rise an average of 9.6%.
- 3.12.7 The fees and charges can be implemented from 1 February 2025 for the following services Parking, Cemeteries, Highways and Enforcement-Dog Team.
- 3.12.8 For the following services:- Pastures , Sports Pitches and Open Spaces and Leyton Sports Ground, the charges cannot be implemented from 1 February 2025 as the Residents have already made bookings in February and March on the existing charges.
- 3.12.9 For Waste replacement bins the charges cannot be implemented from 1 February 2025 as customers have been billed for the 24/25 financial year so the next available window for billing is 25/26.

- 3.12.10 Score Centre –there are no Fees & Charges as the existing Score centre is closed and GLL took on managing the new Score Centre. GLL will set the price increases going forward.
- 3.12.11 Cemeteries Income- there will be an increase in income recovered but this will be offset by an increase in direct costs, including soil disposal. The budget for both income and costs will be revised as part of budget setting process.
- 3.12.12 Highways Income – There is no budget increase in Highways. Most of those fees are statutory and cannot be increased. Of those remaining, some are recharges from other departments so depending on overall volume and a slight reduction in Vehicle Crossovers any increase will cover a shortfall in current trends.

The Hive

- 3.12.13 The fees and charges increase at the Hive are set to increase at an average of 5%. The increases can only apply from 1 April 2025 and cannot be applied to current bookings for 2024/25.

3.13 Resources Directorate

Revenues and Benefits

- 3.13.1 Court cost recovery is set within a regulatory framework that seeks to recover set recovery costs for Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates.
- 3.13.2 Following a review in October 2022 of the court cost fees, the court fees were agreed and updated in March 2023 for implementation in 2023/24 onwards. The costs were not changed.
- 3.13.3 The fees were reviewed again in September 2023 and it was decided that both charges again remain unchanged.
- 3.13.4 A further review of the court fees was carried out in September 2024. Following this review, it was agreed that the Council Tax court costs would increase by £21 (21%) with effect from 1 April 2025. Taking into account full cost recovery and following a benchmarking exercise, Business rates court costs were shown to be at the top end of London Authorities, therefore these costs will remain unchanged.
- 3.13.5 Governance and Law (Mortuary)
- 3.13.6 The charges for the mortuary are comparable with other London mortuary costs and reflect the cost of providing mortuary services primarily to the East London Coronial Service whilst at the same time remaining competitive. These charges have also been fully reviewed recently as part of the new Mortuary Service offer.
- 3.13.7 The mortuary receives income from service level agreements in place with various third parties, including Mid and South Essex NHS Trust and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and Essex County Council.

4. Options & Alternatives Considered

- 4.1 In the case of fees set by statute and/or regulation there is no discretion as to the level of charges. For other charges, the rates are discretionary, and the Council has power to freeze, decrease or increase fees by a different rate. However, setting fees at a lower rate or reduced rate of increase is likely to increase the Council's overall savings targets for 2025/26 and beyond.

5. Council Strategic Priorities (and other National or Local Policies or Strategies)

- 5.1 The Council's budget provides the financial resources to deliver the priorities of the authority. Fees and Charges feed into the Medium Term Financial Strategy, which acknowledges the financial challenge ahead and addresses many of the more urgent problems.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 This report forms part of a process that will lead to the setting of the Council Tax for 2025/26.

7. Implications

7.1 Finance, Value for Money and Risk

- 7.1.1 Every effort is made to collect Fees and Charges in an efficient manner to the benefit of all residents.

- 7.1.2 Where feasible fees and charges are assumed to at least rise in line with inflation, fully recover all costs and where appropriate are set at market rates. The current rate of inflation, CPI (Consumer price Index) stands at 1.7% at September 2024 down from 2.2% in August 2024.

- 7.1.3 Income from fees and charges within the scope of the proposals forms a substantial part of the Council's budget. The total budget for controllable Fees and Charges is £49.572 million in 2025/26. A breakdown of the budgets is shown in Appendix 1 (i).

- 7.1.4 It is estimated that the additional annual income generated as a result of the fees and charges review is £1.658 million as set out in Appendix A (ii).

7.2 Legal

- 7.2.1 The Council may charge for its services where there is express statutory authority to do so, e.g. for recreational services or hall fees. The level of fee chargeable for statutory services may be set by statute or be limited to cost recovery. The Council may also charge for discretionary services under section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 or under the general power of competence in s.1 of the Localism Act 2011, where there is not already an existing power to charge. Fees are limited to cost recovery. The Council cannot plan to make a profit, if it did so then it would be acting commercially and can only provide services on a commercial basis through a company.

7.2.2 Save where expressly reserved to Full Council, the setting of fees is an executive function which is delegated to Cabinet collectively under the Council's constitution and executive arrangements. Fees reserved to Full Council will be agreed at the budget setting Council in 2025.

7.2.3 The Council can lawfully fix the fee to accompany an application under its selective license scheme as per s. 87 of the Housing Act 2004.

7.3 **Equalities and Diversity**

7.3.1 An initial screening exercise of the equality impact of this decision was undertaken and determined there was minimal impact on the Council's equality duty. This report forms part of a process that will lead to the setting of the Council Tax for 2025/26 where a full EA screening will be undertaken. It is possible that there will be indirect adverse impact through the increase in fees and charges to those with protected characteristics. There is evidence that shows these groups are disproportionately represented in lower income groups and so are less able to afford increased fees. The Council must also consider countervailing factors when reviewing fees and in particular, its difficult financial position and need to limit the risk of making substantial savings. The fees and charges have been reviewed by respective Portfolio Holders and Service Areas.

7.3.2 Having accessed each area, which had an increase above 5%, no equalities impacts were identified for the majority of services due to the increases either being so small as to make no impact or being optional / non-essential services, that residents can choose not to use if they are unhappy with the price increase. Where the service was essential or non-optional e.g. enforcement fines etc, the price increases are unavoidable due to external factors such as increased cost of materials.

7.4 **Sustainability (including climate change, health, crime and disorder)**

7.4.1 This report has no direct effect on the health of people living in Waltham Forest. There are also no direct climate change implications.

7.5 **Council Infrastructure**

7.5.1 This report has no direct effect on Council Infrastructure.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION (as defined by Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)

None