

Item which the Chair had decided was urgent for the reason that the matter had been considered by the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 15th February, 2023 and comments referred on to Cabinet for its meeting on 27th February, 2023 for consideration prior to its submission to Full Council on 6th March, 2023.

Agenda Item No. 14(i)

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 27TH FEBRUARY, 2023

REFERENCE FROM CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 15TH FEBRUARY 2023

“ VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL – PROPOSED FEES AND CHARGES
FOR 2023/2024 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet on 19th January, 2023 as contained within the agenda was presented by the Head of Finance / Section 151 Officer, which provided a consolidated overview of the fees and charges for the whole Council (predominantly neighbourhood services, but also resources, place, learning skills and social services). The reference asked the Committee to consider the proposals for amendments to fees and charges and associated policy and process changes. It also asked Committee to forward any such comments from the other Scrutiny Committee on to Cabinet for their consideration as part of the final fees and charges setting at the meeting on 27th February, 2023.

The Committee were informed that it was important when the Council set fees and charges that these covered all of the Council's costs unless it made a conscious decision to give some concession. Therefore, the majority of fees and charges reflected increases in line with inflation. The majority of the proposed fees and charges reflected an increase of between 5% and 11%. Some fees and charges had increased higher than this percentage; remained the same; or decreased to reflect the take up of services and the cost of delivery and rationale for doing so was outlined in the body of the report.

The Director of Corporate Resources outlined the areas within the remit of the Committee, including fees and charges related to Registrars, Legal Services, Land Charges and Human Resources (HR). The majority of charges had been increased by 11% for 2023/24. Details were also given around the proposed flat fee for Registrars regarding wedding ceremonies and civil partnerships as well as the proposed delegated power to set fees for statutory and non-statutory registry events two financial years in advance by the Operational Manager (Democratic Services).

Finally, the timetable for consultation and the finalisation of the proposed revised fees and charges was discussed.

Following the presentation of the report, the Chair welcomed Miss. Amy Greenfield, a public speaker, who put forward the views of the Holton Road Traders Association regarding the impact of the increases on fees and charges for Café Style Licences to trade on the highway on small independent businesses. She argued that the Council needed to work much more closely with those businesses affected in order to address their concerns, as such costs could hasten the decline of shops and businesses on Holton Road and other areas impacted. The Council's approach also seemed to be in contrast to the support that Welsh Government (WG) had given to such businesses, particularly during the Pandemic and its aftermath, such as lowering non-domestic business rates.

Councillor Carroll wished to echo the concerns raised by Miss. Greenfield about the Café Style Licence fees / charges, which could have a detrimental impact on local shops, high streets and the wider communities they served. He also wished to raise his concerns around the proposed increase for bulky waste collections and the proposed increases for hygiene caddies, which could increase the risk of 'fly tipping'. The Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources stated that the Council was taking a differentiated approach to fees and charges and in some areas the Council would be looking at full cost recovery. In terms of Café Style Licences to trade on the highway, it would not be possible to charge only those shops and businesses who were responsible for infringements as this would require constant monitoring and extensive use of Council resources, although monitoring was undertaken by Highways Officers on a regular basis. She stated that so far, the business owners she had spoken to did not oppose the proposed increase in charges, but she was happy to speak to any business owners who did have concerns and look to allay these. Similarly, the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services stated that although it was regrettable to have increased charges around bulky waste services, etc., such services were run at a cost to local taxpayers and it was necessary to ensure the continued functioning of such key Council services, with consideration given to full cost recovery as part of this. These and other waste charges would still be far cheaper than their equivalent in the private sector, with the Council not making any profits from such increases. Both also stressed that in terms of increased charges for hygiene caddies, etc. this was only to ensure that the Council was able to continue to provide such services and to 'break even' rather than make any profit. The Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources stated that the fees for both the Café Style Licences and hygiene caddies would be looked at further before the finalisation of the fees and charges.

Councillor Dr. Johnson stated that broadly it was correct to be looking at increasing Council fees and charges in line with inflation and actual costs and there was a discussion to be had on full cost recovery. However, other opportunities needed to be looked at too, i.e. maximising income from external organisations who wanted to use Council facilities. He wished to also raise his concerns around the large increase in fees around hygiene caddies, the proposed move to the three-week black bag collection and the considerable increase in fees / charges on Café Style Licences which could harm the local economy.

Councillor Hanks also raised concerns around increased fees / charges on Café Style Licences, referred to the potential benefits of a more 'tiered' approach to

charges at coastal car parks in the Vale, rather than a 'flat rate' and the need for facilities to be in place for the public to be able to pay with either cash or card at these locations, as well as the potential for 'benchmarking' charges for filming within the Vale of Glamorgan. She also asked about the length of time that temporary traffic lights could be deployed for and the charges around these, as well as enquiring about the prices for planning permission, retrospective planning, enforcement, etc. which she could not see in the report. On temporary traffic lights, it was explained that the Councillor should contact the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services about any concerns on traffic lights that have seemingly been left at a location with no further need, although occasionally the use of such lights may need to be extended at a location due to works taking longer than expected. On the planning fees, the Chief Executive explained that these were set nationally and not by the Council. On filming fees, the Council did benchmark these against other Local Authorities, with Council officers able to use their discretion with the fees, due to this being a very competitive environment.

On Councillor Wood's concerns around the impact of higher fees / charges on high streets and small businesses and the need for a more 'graded' system of car parking charges at coastal parks to encourage greater footfall and accessibility to the public at these locations, the Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources explained that the Council was looking at a more 'tiered' system of car parking charges in order to encourage footfall and help to increase trade for local businesses. Season tickets could also be bought for the use of the coastal car parks, etc. However, to maintain these car parks and the surrounding areas required money and resources and the Council only sought to be cost neutral with the increased fees and charges in order to achieve this.

The Chief Executive wished to add that on the Café Style Licences to trade on the highway, no fee was applied for the consideration of such applications and cited the support the Council had given to local businesses during the Pandemic, i.e. granting licences to business free of charge, with fees kept as low as possible immediately after the end of the lockdown. The increased fees and charges were simply to ensure that the Council was able to continue to operate on a 'cost neutral' basis, with such funding used to i.e. process, monitor and regulate license applications.

Having considered the reference and report, Scrutiny Committee subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T Cabinet be informed of the following comments and recommendations made by the Committee regarding the Vale of Glamorgan Council – Proposed Fees and Charges for 2023/2024, for their consideration:

- That Cabinet considers the potential impact of increased charges on the purchase / service fees of Hygiene Caddies.
- That Cabinet considers the potential impact of increased fees and charges on Café Style Licences to trade on the highway, with regard to local shops, small businesses, traders and the overall high street economy within the Vale of Glamorgan.

Reason for recommendation

To enable Cabinet to consider the views of the Scrutiny Committee when reaching a determination on the Vale of Glamorgan Council – Proposed Fees and Charges for 2023/2024.