

EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON 19 NOVEMBER 2020

HWSP.67/20 BUDGET 2021/22 – 2025/26

The Corporate Director of Finance and Resources submitted the annual budget reports, noting that the Panel's consideration marked the beginning of the process for setting and approving the Council's Budget.

(b) Review of Charges 2021/2022

The Corporate Director of Finance and Resources presented the Review of Charges reports informing the Panel that there was a 3% increase on the overall level of income in line with the Corporate Charging Policy.

(i) Community Services

The report of the Deputy Chief Executive had been submitted (CS.30/20) with an addendum which set out the proposed fees and charges for 2021/22 relating to those services falling within the Community Services Directorate.

The charges highlighted within the report would result in an anticipated level of income of £2,518,400 against the MTFP target of £3,006,000 which represented a shortfall of £487,600 against the MTFP target. Details of the proposed charges in relation to those areas within the Panel's remit as detailed on the agenda, were contained within the report.

The Executive had on 9 November 2020 (EX.123/20) received the report and decided:

"That the Executive:

1. Had reviewed the proposed charges as set out in the body of Report CS.30/20, the Addendum and relevant appendices with effect from 1 April 2021, noting the impact those would have on income generation as detailed within the report.
2. Made the report of proposed charges and the Addendum available to relevant Scrutiny Panels for their review and comment."

In considering the report, Members raised the following questions or comments:

- The Panel raised a number of questions regarding enforcement action for fly tipping. In response the Neighbourhood Services Manager clarified the following:
 - there had been a slight increase in fly tipping due to Covid 19 restrictions, particularly during the time when the local Household Waste Recycling Centres were closed. The sites remained open, were operating well and the cases of fly tipping had reduced accordingly;

- there continued to be issues of fly tipping at recycling centres, however, it was treated a little different to those dumping waste. In 2019 the Council had run a successful campaign which focused on Christmas waste, the campaign would be repeated this year with additional cameras and an increase in the message that recycling must be disposed of correctly or fines would be issued;
- the maximum 'on-the-spot' fine of £400 for fly tipping was set by the Government. If the fly tipping was commercial or it was a repeat offender, Civil Enforcement Officers had the power to refer the case for prosecution through the courts. This could result in a criminal offence and unlimited fine;
- if the Council issued the fine it retained the money, if the Court issued the fine then the Court would retain the money;
- the Council offered a reduced fine if it was paid quickly to encourage payment and reduce the number of cases that had to progress to Court.

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder reminded the Panel that additional funds had been allocated in the 2019/20 budget to increase capacity, especially at Christmas, to ensure that the sites were emptied quickly. In addition the Council did issue fines to people who left their waste next to the recycling site.

- A Member suggested that there should be an increase in publicity for the 10% discount for monthly and annual car parking permits, in addition, she asked for more information on the removal of the early bird tariff from West Walls car park.

The Neighbourhood Services Manager agreed that there should be more promotion of the discount available, however, given the current restrictions it would be prudent to do this in the future. He added that the early bird tariff had been removed from West Walls car park given very low take-up of the offer in that individual car park. The early bird offer remained popular in other car parks.

- If the public continued to work from home or use alternative modes of transport how would the shortfall in car parking income affect the budget?

The Neighbourhood Services Manager acknowledged that there was a trend which moved away from driving. There was a core customer base which continued to use the car parks; however, some work would be required in the future to consider the supply and demand for car parking in Carlisle.

The Corporate Director of Finance and Resources clarified that a shortfall in income became a budget pressure and savings would have to be found elsewhere in the budget. She added that there was significant pressure on a number of income streams as a result of Covid-19 and they would need to be addressed as part of the budget process. She reminded the Panel that some emergency government funding had been received to address income shortfall as a direct result of Covid-19, and that any on-going impact of Covid-19 was to be addressed as part of the 2020 Spending Review.

The Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder commented that there were several car parking schemes which should be promoted better in the City and he reminded the Panel of the role the Council had regarding climate change and the cycling and walking infrastructures.

- How was Bereavement Services dealing with the increase in deaths in the City and was there a special rate for families who had been financially impacted by Covid-19?

The Health and Wellbeing Manager explained that the rates were as detailed in the charges review, there was no reduced rate. However, there was an option for a direct cremation which was lower cost, and this had become increasingly popular. He reported that the dedicated Bereavement Service staff had been under extreme pressure in April and May had worked tirelessly seven days a week to provide the service.

- A Member asked for an update on the Spending Review and Covid-19 emergency funds.

The Corporate Director of Finance and Resources informed the Panel that the outcome of the Spending Review was due on 25 November 2020 which should provide the key principles for business rate baseline funding for 2021/22, with the detailed figures expected in mid-December. Support of £1.8m had been received to date from government and monthly returns continued to be submitted to the MHCLG but there was no indication if further tranches of support would be received.

The Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder informed the Panel that the waste collection calendars would not be circulated to households in hard copy. The calendars would be published online and on social media and hard copies could be requested. The change had resulted in a reduction of paper being used and resulted in a saving of between £20,000 and £25,000. Experience from 2020 reinforced the importance of checking information on line when services were disrupted or when there were changes to bank holiday arrangements announced with limited notice.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Charges Review Report 2021/22 – Community Services had been submitted to the Panel (CS.30/20).

2) That the Panel thank the Bereavement Services Staff and the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources and her team for their dedication and hard work during such a difficult and high pressured time.

(ii) Economic Development

The Corporate Director of Economic Development submitted report ED.38/20 setting out the proposed fees and charges for areas falling within the responsibility of the Economic Development Directorate.

The report set out the proposed charges in relation to Planning Services including Development Control income; Building Control income; Building Control Discretionary Charges; the Home Life Grant Scheme; Shop Mobility and Investment and Policy Income.

Acceptance of the charges highlighted within the report would result in an anticipated level of income of £595,200 against the Medium Term Financial Plan target of £637,000.

The Executive had on 9 November 2020 (EX.124/20) received the report and decided:

“That the Executive agreed for consultation the charges, as set out in Report ED.38/20 and accompanying Appendices, with effect from 1 April 2021; noting the impact those would have on income generation as detailed within the report.”

In responding to a question the Corporate Director of Economic Development confirmed that the membership offer for the Shopmobility Scheme was being addressed.

RESOLVED – That the Charges Review Report 2021/22 – Economic Development Services had been received (ED.38/20).

(iii) Governance and Regulatory Services

The Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Service submitted report GD.48/20 which detailed the proposed fees and charges for areas falling within the responsibility of the Governance and Regulatory Services Directorate.

The report set out the proposed charges relative to Environmental Health and Housing; Homeless, Prevention and Accommodation Services; and Legal Services, and the Corporate Director noted that all the increases proposed were in-line with the Council approved, Corporate Charging Policy.

The introduction of the proposed charges was forecast to generate income of £845,300 in 2021/22 as summarised in the table at paragraph 5.9.1 of the report.

The Executive had on 9 November 2020 (EX.125/20) received the report and decided:

“That the Executive agreed for consultation the charges as detailed within Report GD.48/20 and accompanying Appendices, with effect from 1 April 2021; noting the impact those would have on income generation as detailed within the report.”

In considering the report, Members raised the following questions or comments:

- The Panel raised a number of questions with regard to pest control charges and the Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services clarified the following:
 - there was no discount scheme in place for pest control, however, the Council always sought to help residents. Should individuals find the charges expensive the Council would discuss the matter with them;
 - pest control services were discretionary; therefore it was necessary to make a charge to cover the cost of the services;
 - the introduction of a charge for rat control had been necessary to continue the service. The subsidy of the charge had impacted the other services provided by Regulatory Services;
 - it would not be possible to introduce a charge on developers for the displacement of rats during ground works as it would be difficult to prove that the rats were a result of the development;
 - along with its Enforcement Policy the Council could also use legislation to deal with households that were the cause of pest issues.

A Member commented that she felt the introduction of the charge for rat control would be detrimental at this stage due to the current issues households were facing.

- A Member was concerned that the 3% increase to Homeless Accommodation rental charges would negatively impact those on Universal Credit and Housing Benefit and asked for a breakdown of the eligible charges and ineligible charges within the increase.

The Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services agreed to provide a written response to the Panel with regard the eligible and ineligible charges. He assured the Panel that the increase had been discussed and agreed as acceptable with the Revenue and Benefits Service Manager.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Charges Review Report 2021/22 – Governance and Regulatory Services (GD.48/20) had been received.

2) That the Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services provide the Panel with a breakdown of the eligible and ineligible charges and the impact of the 3% increase to the Homeless Accommodation rental charges.

EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE ECONOMIC GROWTH SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON 26 NOVEMBER 2020

EGSP.59/20 BUDGET 2021/22 – 2025/26

(b) Review of Charges 2021/2022

The Corporate Director of Finance and Resources presented the Review of Charges reports informing the Panel that there was a 3% increase on the overall level of income in line with the Corporate Charging Policy.

Community Services

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted report CS.30/20 which set out the proposed fees and charges for 2021/22 relating to those services falling within the Community Services Directorate.

The charges highlighted within the report would result in an anticipated level of income of £2,518,400 against the MTFP target of £3,006,000 which represented a shortfall of £487,600 against the MTFP target. Details of the proposed charges in relation to those areas within the Panel's remit as detailed on the agenda, were contained within the report.

The Executive had on 9 November 2020 (EX.123/20) received the report and decided:

"That the Executive:

1. Had reviewed the proposed charges as set out in the body of Report CS.30/20, the Addendum and relevant appendices with effect from 1 April 2021, noting the impact those would have on income generation as detailed within the report.
2. Made the report of proposed charges and the Addendum available to relevant Scrutiny Panels for their review and comment."

In relation to car parking charges, the Neighbourhood Services Manager advised that the 3% increase in charges had been applied, in addition the charges were rounded up to the nearest 10p figure. As part of the Review of Charges parking permit prices had been standardised to provide a 10% discount, it was anticipated that the continued impact of Covid 19 would reduce the take up of permits as commuters continued to work from home. Therefore, Officers would monitor and assess levels of take up going forward.

Analysis of Paddy's Market car park demonstrated that it was principally used as an all day car park, therefore it was proposed to remove the hourly rate payment options from that facility. The Council also operated an "early bird" scheme which offered a reduced fee for all day parking, take up of that scheme had been very low in West Walls car park, which was used rather more by shoppers than commuters, therefore the early bird offer would be removed from that car park and would be replaced by a "check in – check out" systems where users would only pay for the actual time they used the facility for. A trial of that scheme had commenced but data on its usage had been limited by the impact of the second national lockdown.

In considering the report, Members raised the following questions or comments:

- Were the Council's car parks competitive with those offered by other providers in the city?

The Neighbourhood Services Manager responded that the Council's car parking fees were competitive. There were a number of providers in the city, therefore, their pricing structures needed to be taken into account when considering what level of fee to apply to the Council's facilities.

The Deputy Chief Executive added that the Council had also made improvements to its car parking sites in terms of surfacing, layout and different payment methods. He was of the view that the Council's fees were competitive, and that its sites were safe and sited in good locations.

- What was the level of admin fee associated with parking permits?

The Neighbourhood Services Manager explained that the production of permits generated an admin fee by the service provider of 92 pence per transaction that was currently charged to the Council; for an annual permit that charge was applied once, for monthly permits the Council had to pay that charge 12 times. It was proposed that the administrative fee now be incorporated into the permit price.

- A Member expressed support for the use of the "check in – check out" payment model at West Walls car park, considering it would support the economic vitality of the city centre by affording users greater flexibility.
- The report proposed to increase the cost of a parking permit at Talkin Tarn from £55 to £60, which was a 9% increase, were the number of permits for that car park still restricted?

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the additional percentage increase was as a result of cost rounding. The permit scheme at Talkin Tarn had been in operation for several years, with 50 permits being made available on an annual basis. It was likely there was sufficient usage data available to assess effectiveness of the permit scheme. Therefore, if Members were minded to have the scheme reviewed, subject to the agreement of the relevant Portfolio Holder, Officers could undertake that work.

The Neighbourhood Services Manager noted that the scheme was significantly 'over-subscribed', moreover as existing permit holders were invited to renew permits. This effectively created a waiting list for new people to be able to access the permit, was an issue that could be considered as part of any future review of the scheme.

A Member considered that the scheme ought to be reviewed as it was an issue that caused concern for a number of residents.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Charges Review Report 2021/22 – Community Services be endorsed (CS.30/20).

2) That a review of the parking permit scheme at Talkin Tarn be carried out.

Economic Development

The Corporate Director of Economic Development submitted report ED.38/20 which set out the proposed fees and charges for areas falling within the responsibility of the Economic Development Directorate.

Members were reminded that Development Control fees was set nationally and that any income from those fees was ringfenced to be spent on the service. Similarly, Building Control Fees were ringfenced and the service was not permitted to generate either a profit or a loss. However, that service operated in a commercial market, therefore, proposed fees were considered in that context.

In response to Covid 19, the annual fee for use of the Shopmobility Scheme had been replaced by a daily usage charge.

The Executive had on 9 November 2020 (EX.122/20) received the report and resolved:

“That the Executive agreed for consultation on the charges, as set out in Report ED.38/20 and accompanying Appendices, with effect from 1 April 2021; noting the impact those would have on income generation as detailed within the report.”

RESOLVED – That the Charges Review Report 2020/21 – Economic Development be endorsed (ED.38/20).