

**TITLE OF REPORT:** Fees and Charges 2023/24

**REPORT OF:** Darren Collins, Strategic Director, Resources and Digital

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### **Purpose of the Report**

1. The review of fees and charges is an integral part of the annual budget process. The purpose of this report is to request Cabinet to agree to recommend to Council the level of fees and charges across all Council services for 2023/24.

### **Background**

2. The Council raised £22.958m from Fees and Charges in 2021/22. The forecast for 2022/23 is to raise in the region of £26.125m (£0.979m less than the £27.104m budgeted income). The forecast income for 2022/23 is substantially more than the amount raised in 2021/22 mainly because of the re-opening of Sport and Leisure facilities which were closed during the pandemic. Whilst some areas continue to be impacted by Covid-19 it should be noted that there will be no further Government support for lost fee income.
3. The Council reviews its fees and charges annually with revised and new charges implemented from 1 April each year. As part of the annual review, all fees and charges have been considered. The review of fees and charges has been undertaken in the context of guidance indicating a general uplift where appropriate of 10.1% to reflect the inflationary increase for the year (12-month CPI 'Consumer Price Index' rate was 10.1% in September 2022).
4. In the Council's Constitution under delegations to individual managers, the Strategic Director, Resources and Digital has delegated authority to:
  - Amend statutory fees and charges and those tied to service level agreements or charged annually;
  - Approve commercially sensitive traded fees and charges in consultation with the Leader and the Deputy Leader of the Council;
  - Amend fees and charges during the financial year for any changes in legislation, changes to statutory fees or any changes to the rate of VAT.

### **Proposal**

5. A summary of the recommended changes to fees and charges for Gateshead Council in 2023/24 is presented in Appendix 1 and the full listing is presented in Appendix 2.
6. The overall impact of additional income generated as a result of proposed fees and charges increases is currently to increase income base budgets by £0.591m in

2023/24. This is largely in Adult Social Care where the additional income is expected to be offset by additional costs.

### **Recommendations**

7. It is asked that Cabinet agrees to recommend to Council:

- (i) The fees and charges as set out for 2023/24 in Appendix 2;
- (ii) Authorisation for the Strategic Director, Resources and Digital to make any necessary adjustments to correct any errors in the schedule of Fees and Charges.

For the following reasons:

- To ensure that Fees and Charges are set in accordance with Council priorities.
- To support the delivery of the Council's budget and the strategic approach to making Gateshead a place where everyone thrives.

**Policy Context**

1. The proposals in this report are consistent with the Council's strategic approach 'Making Gateshead a place where everyone thrives'. The Council recognises there are huge financial pressures on not just Council resources, but those of partners, local businesses and residents. This means that the Council's decision making, including the setting of fees and charges to support the budget, will be policy and priority led and driven.
2. In the Council's Constitution under delegations to individual managers, the Strategic Director, Resources and Digital has delegated authority to:
  - Amend statutory fees and charges and those tied to service level agreements or charged annually;
  - Approve commercially sensitive traded fees and charges in consultation with the Leader and the Deputy Leader of the Council;
  - Amend fees and charges during the financial year for any changes in legislation, changes to statutory fees or any changes to the rate of VAT.
3. The Council has explored the potential for new fees and charges for discretionary services afforded to it under its trading and charging powers.

**Background**

4. A review of fees and charges has taken place and the outcome of this review has informed the changes to fees and charges for 2023/24.
5. As part of the annual review, all fees and charges have been considered.
6. Proposals have been made to increase 45% of charges by 10.1%, to increase 8% of charges at a rate lower than 10.1% and a further 6% by above this level. In doing so it's judged that demand and delivery of Council objectives will not be adversely affected.
7. 32% of charges remain unchanged, 2% are new charges, 1% are proposed to decrease and 6% are to be removed as the Council no longer offer the service, changes to service delivery are proposed or charges have been consolidated.

**Changes to Fees and Charges**

8. The main changes to proposed fees and charges are listed below and the full listing of all fees and charges for 2023/24 is attached at Appendix 2.

**Increases by Inflation**

It is proposed that 59% are to increase (41% in 2022/23): 53% are proposed to increase by inflation or below, and 6% are proposed to increase by above inflation. These proposals include:

- a. **Adult Social Services:** The proposal is to increase Residential Accommodation, Day Services, Care Call fees, Installation charges and shopping services by inflation. The charges for the Home Care Service and Extra Care follow the commissioned rate for the service and based on the NLW increases from April 2023 the fees would increase slightly below inflation. The actual commissioned rate may differ due to other factors. The hourly rate for the Supporting Independence Service is to increase by only 4.69% (lower than CPI inflation), a full costing exercise has been completed and the price level set is to ensure full cost recovery.
- b. **Building Control:** As well as there being some proposed increases in prices above inflation, many price increases have been slightly below CPI inflation, this is mainly due to roundings in fees set.
- c. **Business Centres:** Below CPI inflation increases in prices are proposed to be applied for the occupancy at Blaydon Business Centre, Greensfield Business Centre and Gateshead International Business Centre with the justification that only gradual price increases should be applied, to stay in the market. Other below CPI inflation increases are due to price roundings.
- d. **Car Parking:** Below CPI inflation increases are proposed to be applied for 12-month seasonal parking permits (specified days) at Back Regent Terrace, Back Walker Terrace and Heworth Metro station, this is due to larger discounts being given for permits with a longer period attached.
- e. **Cemeteries and Crematoria:** 8.25% inflation (subject to price roundings) is proposed to be applied when increasing prices to ensure Gateshead's prices are in-line with our nearest neighbours.
- f. **Children's Services:** Below CPI inflation price increases are proposed to be applied for the replacement of lost bus passes and the Early Years Childcare Training Service as instead of using CPI, pay award inflation for various staffing levels has been applied.
- g. **Corporate Services:** Most prices are proposed to increase by CPI inflation.
- h. **Development and Public Protection:** Apart from the majority of charges which are statutory and have remained unchanged, all other charges are proposed to increase in line with CPI inflation.
- i. **Highways and Transport:** The majority of prices are proposed to be increased by CPI inflation.
- j. **Housing Related Charges and Licensing:** It is proposed to apply the recommended inflationary increase to the charges relating to the Baltic Road Gypsy and Travellers' site, Housing Act 2004 Actions, Mandatory HMO Licencing, Renewal of Mandatory HMO Licencing, Immigration Inspections and caution charges for housing or anti-social behaviour related offences.
- k. **Libraries:** Charges for the reservations of books by pensioners (currently on loan or on order), vocal scores and the rental of compact discs are proposed to increase by CPI inflation.

- l. **Licensing:** The charge for the 'Application to Transfer' and 'Application for reinstatement' at Betting Premises and Adult Gaming Centres is proposed to be increased by a smaller percentage than CPI inflation to £1,200 as that is the maximum prescribed limit, similarly 'New with Provisional Statements' at Adult Gaming Centres are proposed to only increase by 3.45% to £1,200 (maximum prescribed limit). The majority of non-statutory licences are proposed to be increased by CPI inflation.
- m. **Hire of Facilities:** The majority of charges are proposed to be increased in line with inflation.
- n. **Recreation:** The majority of charges are proposed to have the recommended inflationary increase applied.
- o. **Registrars:** Some charges are proposed to increase but by a lower rate than CPI inflation as the amounts to be charged are statutory amounts such as the charge for changing the time or date of a wedding (6.28% increase). The charge for the hire of Ravensworth is proposed to increase by lower than CPI inflation (between 2.86% and 6.38% depending on which day) to keep in line with the Thrive agenda in offering affordable ceremonies and due to market conditions, including legislation being anticipated which will allow lawful weddings to be conducted in most locations. Lower than CPI inflation increases are proposed to be applied at Tyne Suite, this is also the case for the attendance at an approved premise for civil marriages and civil partnerships.
- p. **Planning:** Charges for non-householder enquiries as to whether a development needs planning permission are proposed to only increase by 8.7% (lower than CPI). S106 monitoring charges are proposed to increase in line with CPI inflation, as are charges for the formal confirmation that planning application conditions have been fulfilled for major and minor applications in respect of Planning history searches.
- q. **Property and Land:** All charges except those for drafting and negotiating Section 278 and 38 agreements are proposed to be increased by CPI inflation.
- r. **Sport and Leisure:** A large number of non-statutory prices are proposed to increase in line with CPI inflation.
- s. **Waste Services and Grounds Maintenance:** The charge for supply and delivery of bagged rock salt and rodent control are proposed to be increased in line with CPI inflation.

### **Increases Above inflation**

6% of charges are proposed to increase by more than inflation. Proposals are;

- a. **Adult Social Services:** The charge for the provision of meals at Day Centres is proposed to be increased by 16.28% to £5, a clear understandable price which also provides value for money.

- b. **Business Centres:** There are several slight increases in prices above CPI inflation proposed due the rounding of prices, however occupancy charges based on area have increased by 21.15% at Baltimore House.
- c. **Car Parking:** Above inflation (between 12.5% and 25%) parking charge increases are proposed to be applied at the Coach Park, partly as a result of increases being in multiples of 50p and also as this has been the first price increase in several years. Bus Lane Enforcement penalty charge notices have increased from £60 to £70 as the Government changed the statutory amount earlier in 2022.
- d. **Building Control:** Increase in charges above inflation are proposed for over 80 lines within the Fees and Charges booklet, a large number of above inflation increases are only slightly higher than CPI inflation and are due to roundings in prices to the nearest pound. It is proposed to increase the fee for skip permits by 36.36% to reflect cost recovery of the work undertaken.
- e. **Hire of Facilities:** Charges for the hire of a room at Caedmon Hall Library are proposed to increase by 25%, an increase of 14.29% is proposed for the use of the Community Library room in the Central Library, this is partly due to price roundings.
- f. **Libraries:** Charges for the reservation of books by adults that the Council does not currently own and has had to purchase are proposed to increase by 25% to £1, the increased cost is partly to compensate for the removal of charging for the reservation of books that are already held by the library. The charge for borrowing an item from another library service is proposed to increase by 19.05% to £5, this is due to increased costs in receiving an item from another library service.
- g. **Planning:** Some charges for pre-planning advice are proposed to increase by a higher amount than CPI inflation. This is to reflect the true costs of providing this non-statutory service and align more closely with neighbouring authorities.
- h. **Registrars:** Booking fees for all ceremonies are proposed to increase by 33.33% to £40 but there will no longer be a requirement for a deposit to be made, reducing the initial outlay required by customers and improving the administrative process.
- i. **Sport and Leisure:** There are higher than CPI inflation price increases proposed for swimming lessons but customers will receive more than they previously did such as receiving free certificates and badges which are currently paid for. Concessions (29.3% proposed price increase) will receive free swimming outside of their lessons and can bring a child with them for free. Similarly Children (23% proposed price increase) who book a swimming lesson when a public session is available will receive free swimming outside of the lesson and can be accompanied by an adult for free.

Previous years group 5, 6 and 7 swimming lessons have been merged and will have the same price, now classified as Group 4 GO Access, this is to simplify the pricing structure. Group 4 GO Access swimming lesson price is proposed to increase by 34.67% to £5.80, the difference between the proposed new charge for swimming lessons is still roughly the same discount as the proposed new fee for GO Access.

The monthly non-contract membership rate for GO Unlimited for Juniors is proposed to increase from £25 to £49.50 to re-align with the Concession rate which

as well as including adults aged 66+ and students, now includes Junior GO Card holders, the intention is that the significantly lower £26 per month Concession GO Unlimited annual membership rate will encourage take up of the annual membership option instead.

## **No Change**

32% of charges are proposed not to change. These include:

- a. **Building Control:** The charge for the inspection of certain work in respect of non-residential buildings is proposed to remain unchanged due to current market conditions. Inspection charges in respect of the conversion of a garage to a dwelling are to remain unchanged.
- b. **Business Centres:** Charges are proposed to remain the same for the Virtual Office Service and Dedicated Desk (PROTO) due to market conditions and the need to protect income. Charges for photocopying and replacement key fobs are also proposed to remain the same as the income covers its costs. Similarly fees for Business Planning Support are not proposed to change and are only included in the Fees and Charges booklet to demonstrate support offered when bidding for external funding, residents aren't actually charged for this support.
- c. **Children's Services:** It is proposed not to increase most of the charges to ensure the Council continues to be affordable to families from the most deprived areas.
- d. **Car Parking:** The minimum and maximum on and off-street penalty charges are proposed to remain unchanged as the amounts are statutory amounts set. Some fees for car parks are proposed to remain unchanged as there are currently petitions to remove fees in these areas, others are proposed to remain unchanged as due to the nature of the service fees are increased in multiples of 10p which would have resulted in high percentage increases which would not be received well during a cost of living crisis (these will be reviewed for 2024/25). Replacement permit fees charges are proposed to remain unchanged as the charge is only intended to ensure recovery of admin costs incurred. Most parking permits including resident zone and visitor annual permits are proposed to have the price frozen pending a review of resident's zones.
- e. **Corporate Services:** Prices are proposed to remain frozen for statutory charges relating to Electoral Services and copies of marked register.
- f. **Development and Public Protection:** The majority of the charges are not proposed to change as they are set by statute, this includes application fees.
- g. **Property and Land:** Charges for drafting and negotiating Section 278 and 38 agreement charges are proposed to be frozen due to a streamlining of the legal process.
- h. **Highways and Transport:** Various charges within Road Works and Street Works Permit Scheme are proposed to remain frozen as the amounts chargeable are set within statutory limits and the Council is unable to increase the charges for the first

three years (this is year 3). Permit schemes are also not allowed to generate a surplus.

- i. **Hire of Facilities:** There are no proposed increases in the rate per hour for the hire of the following rooms; Sowerby Room (Central Library), Blaydon Community Library room and St Mary's Heritage Centre due to market conditions
- j. **Housing Related Charges and Licensing:** No proposed change to the Selective Landlord Licensing fees as these cannot be changed part way through the 5-year scheme. The charge for Licence Variations is proposed to remain unchanged. The majority of charges such as for each incomplete/deficient application received are to remain frozen. Charges for Redress schemes for Lettings Agency Work and Property Management are proposed to remain frozen.
- k. **Libraries:** No change is proposed for the majority of library charges. This includes charges for photocopying, as it already makes a surplus in terms of cost recovery and also to ensure the Council remains competitive. Similarly with the Fax Service, increasing charges would result in a further decline in income for this service. NEW – The charge for the reservation of junior books that are on loan or on order is to remain at 30p per item.
- l. **Recreation:** Allotments prices are set every 3 years, this is the second year of the three year cycle so prices are to remain unchanged, potentially new prices will be brought in from 1 April 2025.
- m. **Registrars:** The majority of statutory charges will remain the same as they were in 2022-23.
- n. **Sport and Leisure:** Tokens for lockers are proposed to remain frozen in price as customers (especially GO members) resent this charge. The joining fee for Junior swimming lessons is proposed to remain frozen to counteract the increased cost of swimming lessons for Juniors. GO Unlimited membership monthly (12-month membership) prices are proposed to remain frozen. Keeping the price frozen will also encourage service users to transfer from GO Unlimited non-contract monthly membership which has significantly higher fees than annual membership.

GO Kids monthly membership prices are proposed to remain frozen, as well as this a GO kids 0-7 years old membership is to be given to households with an Adult GO membership. The GO Kids 8-13 years old monthly membership is proposed to remain frozen and may need removing when the Council reviews which facilities may close and whether Clip N Climb and Flowrider both remain unavailable.

GO Gateshead membership joining fees are proposed to remain frozen.

Gateshead GO card prices are proposed to remain.

- o. **Licensing:** None of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire fees can be increased until a thorough cost recovery review is undertaken. No increases can be applied to statutory maximum fees which are set for licences, certificates and permits under the Licensing Act 2003 and the Gambling Act 2005.



- p. **Waste Services and Ground Maintenance:** It is proposed not to increase the charges for supply of replacement and new property bins and charges for green waste collection. Increasing the charge for green waste collection may result in a reduction in customers and could result in increased disposal charges if customers then decide to put garden waste in refuse bins. No increase in special collection charges to Bulky Household Waste Collections is proposed as increases could lead to increased fly tipping. MOT tests charges are proposed to remain at the same amount as they were in 2022/23, they are currently set at the maximum statutory level. Taxi licence fees are not proposed to be increased without a cost recovery analysis and consultation. The administration fee for the recovery of stray dogs from kennels is proposed to remain unchanged as it's a statutory level externally set.
- q. **Planning:** Planning fees are set nationally and cannot be changed.

### Reduced Charges

1% of charges are proposed to be reduced in 2023/24.

- a. **Corporate Services:** The charge for enhanced and standard DBS checks are proposed to be reduced by 1.78% and 11.64% respectively as DBS have reduced their portion of this charge. The remaining administration charge part is proposed to be increased by CPI inflation.
- b. **Registrars:** Charges for the re-affirmation of vows and child naming ceremonies at all locations available are proposed to be reduced to ensure the amount charged is the same as that charged for wedding and civil partnership ceremonies. Non-religious ceremonies are likely to become more important in generating income, there is currently a low take up level for these services meaning a reduced price for this service may stimulate demand.

### New Charges

The following charges are proposed to be included in 2023/24:

- a. **Adult Social Care:** New charges for Weekly Home Visits and Weekly Phone Calls are proposed to be introduced to assist members of the Community that have relatively little contact with the outside world.
- b. **Building Control:** New charges are proposed to be introduced for consideration of applications for Guardian Conservatory roofs which are a new and growing process to replace glass roofed conservatories with insulated solid roofs.
- c. **Business Centres:** New charges are proposed to be introduced for an office cleaning service and telephone handset rental.

- d. **Car Parking:** Six month season permits are proposed to be introduced at Cross Keys Lane and Whickham Shopping centre (West) long stay car park.
- e. **Highways and Transport:** New charges are proposed to be introduced for temporary traffic regulation orders.
- f. **Hire of Facilities:** Two-hour period for hire of Caedmon Hall Library is proposed to be introduced, along with the Wailes and Dodds' rooms combined hire for half a day at the Central Library.
- g. **Planning:** New charges are proposed for providing Pre-Planning Advice, a Bespoke Pre app or agreeing a Planning Performance Agreement. Charges are to be introduced for processing Invalid Applications and checking Validation requirements. To ensure some cost recovery for this non-statutory part of the service, consultation with agents and developers has confirmed that they would support this fee provided a good standard of service is provided.
- h. **Registrars:** Charges have been introduced for the hire of the Angel Room on Monday to Thursday for £80 (plus an additional cost for a certificate).
- i. **Sport and Leisure:** A new category is proposed within GO Unlimited Membership, 'GO Group' where there must be at least 8 people and the group can never fall below 8, this is to replace 'GO Corporate'. The intention is to encourage groups to join and stay together within a group as people who train together as part of a group are likely to remain members for a longer period. GO Corporate which is proposed to be replaced initially required companies to have over 50 employees and required companies to pay an annual fee based on the numbers of staff they employ. This fee has not been charged for several years, employee membership take up within companies is also low. If membership in the proposed 'GO Group' falls below 8 people, the group will be given a period (potentially one month) to recruit a new member to their group, otherwise fees would revert to the standard default fee. An admin fee of £10 is proposed to be introduced (this is already in place for Swimming membership) for all memberships, the GO Gateshead membership £15 joining fee is proposed to be removed.

## Removals

The following charges are proposed to be removed from the 2023/24 brochure:

- a. **Adult Social Care:** Telephones for Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons service is no longer available.
- b. **Building Control:** Building notice charges when the estimated cost of internal alterations or installation of fittings is less than £2,000 have been removed. A charge for the retrospective application for skips on highways has been removed as there is already a charge in place for all types of Retrospective skips.

- c. **Business Centres:** Hire of spaces at PROTO are no longer available as the facility has now been leased out. Additional refreshments and stationery are no longer available.
- d. **Children's Services:** Active Kidz is proposed to be removed as there is currently no capacity for an external offer.
- e. **Highways and Transport:** Traffic Regulation Orders (part of NRASWA Inspection Fees (Statutory fees)) charges are proposed to be removed, along with Multiple phase temporary traffic signal application within Network Management.
- f. **Libraries:** Charges for the reservation of books by both adults and pensioners and audio visuals are proposed to be removed as the intention is to only charge for library items that are not in stock. Fines previously charged for the return of overdue items are to be removed, they were suspended at the outset of the covid pandemic.
- g. **Registrars:** The Mayor's Parlour, Bewicks, Blaydon Room and Lamesley Room have been removed from the premises available for ceremonies. This is due to changes in how the public use the Civic Centre and also a reduction in Registrars employee numbers, the closure of the offer of catering at Bewicks, Blaydon Room have never been previously used for ceremonies and furniture has been removed there. All of these locations are still being kept as approved places for ceremonies for licence in emergency circumstances.
- h. **Sport and Leisure:** Many charges are proposed to be removed, including the previously separate rates for services for Junior GO Card holders, instead Group 3 'Concession', as well as including pensioners (66+, previously 65+) now includes Junior GO Card members (Aged 0-17) and still includes full-time students (18+ and studying over 16 hours per week). There is a reduction in the number of pricing options for 4 badminton courts per hour (Major Games).

Lifestyle Fitness (e.g., Birtley Leisure Centre) set their own fees and charges which do not fall within the Council's responsibility.

The loyalty free 10<sup>th</sup> visit for a customer that has paid for nine visits at the GO Bears Den is proposed to be removed.

There is no longer a Café at Clip n Climb and GO Bears Den, both facilities had a category that included drinks which can no longer be provided. Some group categories of swimming lessons have been removed, this also included premium small group lessons.

The Flowrider at Heworth Leisure Centre is currently not operational as repairs need to be carried out, a business case would need to be put forward justifying paying for repairs, therefore currently charges in respect of the Flowrider have been removed.

The gymnastics programme is no longer available within Leisure buildings, therefore charges for this have been removed. There is no longer a GO Unlimited corporate membership option.

GO Unlimited Corporate membership is proposed to be removed, instead a GO Unlimited Group rate has been proposed (see proposed new charges discussed earlier) where there must be at least eight people within the group.

There is currently a review taking place of facilities available within Sport and Leisure. Previously there was a vast range of pool hire rates which were dependent on numerous factors, instead these rows have been removed from the Fees and Charges booklet and replaced with 'Pool Hire per hour including staff' and 'Gala hire including staff'. The proposed charge for these two services has been put as POA 'Payment on Application' enabling Sport and Leisure to work out the pricing based on various factors such as current pool usage and staffing requirements. Similarly for Studio and Room hire, there was a range of rates, instead these rows have been replaced with 'Room/Studio hire' and the proposed charge being POA 'Payment on Application'.

GO Gateshead membership £15 joining fee has been removed, this was previously not charged and instead used as a marketing tool as being free to encourage new memberships, instead, however an administration fee has been introduced.

## **Consultation**

9. Council services have engaged with portfolio holders on proposed changes as part of the budget setting process. Where there is a change to existing fees and charges these will be communicated to services users.

## **Alternative Options**

10. There are no alternative options proposed.

## **Implications of Recommended Option**

### **11. Resources**

- a. Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Resources and Digital, confirms that the financial implications are detailed in the attached appendices and that the full financial implications of this report are included in Council's Budget and Council Tax Level 2023/24 report presented elsewhere on the agenda. The overall impact of additional income generated as a result of proposed fees and charges increases is currently to increase income base budgets by £0.591m in 2023/24.
- b. Human Resources Implications** – There are no direct human resource implications as a consequence of this report.
- c. Property Implications** – There are no direct property implications as a consequence of this report.

12. **Risk Management Implications** - The risks associated with the impact on demand for services have been assessed when considering increases in fees and charges.
13. **Equality and Diversity Implications** - These are reflected in the proposed fees and charges, which also consider where appropriate the individual's ability to pay. Integrated impact Assessments have been completed for any of the new or significantly increased fees and charges within the report and will be used to evaluate and take action, if necessary, to mitigate the effects of any equality and diversity implications.
14. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – There are no immediate crime and disorder implications arising from this report.
15. **Climate and Sustainability Implications** – There are no immediate sustainability implications arising from this report.
16. **Health Implications** - There are no immediate health implications arising from this report.
17. **Human Rights Implications** - There are no immediate Human Rights implications arising from this report.
18. **Area and Ward Implications** – The recommendations apply to all Areas and Wards.