

Equality Impact Assessment

Woking Borough Council ('the Council') – Review of Fees and Charges

Assessment Date: January 2025 but this assessment is a working document and will be received as appropriate.

This a proposed new policy/procedure/practice. It has been developed by the following:

EIA Author: Rachel Basham, Strategic Lead, Improvement & Recovery	Head of Service: This EIA covers a number of services
Strategic Director: Stephen Fitzgerald, Strategic Director for Finance	Date last updated: January 2025

This Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) seeks to identify whether the proposal would have a disparate impact on persons with a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. As part of this assessment, consideration will be given to ways in which any such impact can be avoided or mitigated. Any negative impacts arising from this proposal will be assessed and actions to mitigate any potential negative impacts will be included in the EIA action plan.

The purpose is to provide impartial information to assist in the decision-making process and inform rather than determine policy. The objective is not to make the decision but to assist decision makers through the provision of relevant information.

1. Introduction

Woking Borough Council has been in government intervention since May 2023. This is due to failing to comply with its best value duty under the Local Government Act 1999. As a result of its historic investment strategy, the Council has over £2 billion of debt. To address these severe financial challenges, the Council must make significant savings in order to be able to 'live within its means' in the future. Further details are set in the Review of Fees and Charges Report 2025 – 2026.

It is the Council's policy to review its discretionary fees and charges at least once a year. The Executive report sets out the review of Council's discretionary fees and charges for the coming 2025-26 financial year, including the approach, principles, risks and issues with implementing the new charges. In general, increases are proposed to help services move towards full cost recovery where possible and to mitigate the Council's projected budget gap.

2. Impact on Services

The majority of the fee increases are being proposed in order to enable discretionary services provided by the Council to move towards full cost recovery. Due to the Council's financial position, it is unable to subsidise the delivery of discretionary services. Therefore, without these fee increases, the future provision of a number of discretionary services would be at risk. In some cases, fee increases are being scheduled across the life of the MTFS to help residents adjust to the new costs.

3. Equalities Impact

		Positive impact?			Negative impact?	No specific impact	What will the impact be? If the impact is negative how can it be mitigated? (action) This section needs to be completed as evidence of what the positive impact is or what actions are being taken to mitigate any negative impacts
		Eliminate discrimination	Advance equality	Good relations			
Gender	Men					X	Fees and charges increases may cause negative impacts across all groups but with no <i>specific</i> impacts on this group.
	Women					X	Fees and charges increases may cause negative impacts across all groups but with no <i>specific</i> impacts on this group.
Gender Reassignment						X	Fees and charges increases may cause negative impacts across all groups but with no <i>specific</i> impacts on this group.
Race	White					X	Fees and charges increases may cause negative impacts across all groups but with no <i>specific</i> impacts on any individual ethnic group.
	Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups					X	
	Asian/Asian British					X	
	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British					X	
	Gypsies / travellers					X	
	Other ethnic group					X	
Disability	Physical				X		The majority of community meals, careline, and day care service users have a physical or mental disability and will therefore be disproportionately impacted by the proposed fees and charges increase for these services.
	Sensory				X		
	Learning Difficulties				X		

	Mental Health				X	<p>impacted by the introduction of a small administration fee to cover the costs of enabling free parking in WBC car parks for blue badge holders.</p> <p><i>Mitigations</i></p> <p>Service users will be provided with early notice of the proposed fee increases, to enable them to prepare in advance.</p> <p>The Living Well team will continue to explore efficiencies in service delivery, in order to reduce costs and keep fee increases to a minimum. This includes discussions with neighbouring District and Boroughs to see whether there are any opportunities to work in partnership.</p> <p>Meals can be purchased at a slightly cheaper cost from national meal delivery providers such as Parsley Box or Wiltshire Farm Foods. However, it is recognised that these national services do not provide the same level or service to disabled services users (e.g. plating up meals, providing cutlery).</p> <p>There are also alternative providers available for personal alarms systems, for example Age UK.</p> <p>Although alternative day care options do exist within Woking, they tend to be more expensive than Hale End Court. However, charities and voluntary groups within Woking do provide some free drop-in activities/cafe provision for both physical and mental disabilities which may be suitable for some service users.</p>
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		Positive impact?			Negative impact?	No specific impact	What will the impact be? If the impact is negative how can it be mitigated? (action) This section needs to be completed as evidence of what the positive impact is or what actions are being taken to mitigate any negative impacts
		Eliminate discrimination	Advance equality	Good relations			
Sexual Orientation	Lesbian, gay men, bisexual					X	Fees and charges increases may cause negative impacts across all groups but with no <i>specific</i> impacts on this group.
Age	Older people (50+)				X		The majority of community meals, careline, and day care service users are 50+ and will therefore be disproportionately impacted by the proposed fees and charges increase for these services. <i>Mitigations</i> As detailed above.
	Younger people (16 - 25)					X	Fees and charges increases may cause negative impacts across all groups but with no <i>specific</i> impacts on this group.
	Children (0-15)					X	Fees and charges increases may cause negative impacts across all groups but with no <i>specific</i> impacts on this group.
Religion or Belief	Faith Groups					X	Fees and charges increases may cause negative impacts across all groups but with no <i>specific</i> impacts on this group.
Pregnancy & maternity						X	Fees and charges increases may cause negative impacts across all groups but with no <i>specific</i> impacts on this group.

Marriage & Civil Partnership				X	Fees and charges increases may cause negative impacts across all groups but with no <i>specific</i> impacts on this group.
Socio-economic Background			X		<p>Fees and charges increases could have a negative impact on residents from lower socio-economic backgrounds who may find it more difficult to pay.</p> <p><i>Mitigations</i></p> <p>In many instances, fee increases are proposed to take place over a three-year period, to minimise the impact on residents and enable them to adjust to the costs.</p> <p>The Council and relevant service providers (such as Freedom Leisure) will communicate the fees and charges increases to service users in advance, to enable them to prepare for the upcoming changes.</p> <p>The Council will continue to promote concessionary rates for fees and charges where they apply. The Council also has a Cost of Living webpage which provides general advice and signposting for residents.</p> <p>The Council and relevant service providers will continue to explore service efficiencies to keep future fee increases to a minimum.</p> <p>Freedom Leisure also holds targeted free or low-cost activities for low-income individuals and families. This requirement will form part of the re-tender agreement when the Leisure contract is renewed.</p>

Carers			X		<p>Fee increases to Community Meals, Careline, day care services and disabled parking permits may have a negative impact on carers who utilise these services to support them in caring for friends and/or relatives.</p> <p><i>Mitigations</i></p> <p>As above.</p>
Other identified groups					<p>No other groups identified.</p>

Action Plan

Actions identified from EIA	Target completion date	Responsible Officer	Comments
Where appropriate, spread proposed fees and charges increases across the life of the MTFS to enable residents to adjust to increased costs.	April 2025	Strategic Director for Finance	
Service users to be provided with early notice of proposed fees and charges increases.	February 2025	Various officers but primarily in services within the Communities directorate, under the Strategic Director for Communities.	
Proposed fees and charges increased to be advertised on the Council's website.	February 2025	Marketing Communications Manager	
Continue to look for service efficiencies, to keep service user fee increases to a minimum. This includes, where appropriate, discussions with other Councils regarding partnership delivery.	April 2025	Various but particularly within Living Well Service under the Head of Living Well.	
Concessionary rates for services, where applicable, to be clearly communicated to service users.	Ongoing	Service Heads	

Sign-off

Legal Services:	Date:
Strategic Director: Stephen Fitzgerald	Date: 28 January 2025