

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILCABINET4 March 2021Report by Director of EnvironmentPROPOSALS FOR CHARGES FOR NON-STATUTORY PLANNING SERVICES**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval to introduce charges for some non-statutory planning services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The Cabinet is asked to approve the introduction of charges for the following services, subject to the rates and conditions contained in this report, to come into effect from 1st April 2021.

- a) The provision of pre-application planning advice [charges in Appendix 1, Table 1];
- b) The processing of Non-Material Variations (NMVs) [charges in Appendix 1, Table 2];
- c) An administration charge for handling applications submitted in paper rather than online (subject to certain exemptions) [charges in Appendix 1, Table 3]; and
- d) An administration charge for providing the street naming and numbering service largely to the development industry [charges in Appendix 1, Table 4].

BACKGROUND

3. The Council is looking to make savings in 2021/22 and departments have been requested to find savings or further income.

4. Planning application fees are set nationally so the Council has no scope to vary these. The Scottish Government through its modernising the planning system agenda indicates that planning fees will increase but no date has been set to introduce this. Given the lockdown and downturn in the economy it is anticipated that this will not be introduced in the short term.

5. All non-statutory planning services currently provided free of charge have been considered to establish where there are opportunities to introduce charges for additional non-statutory services and increase the income received by the Planning Service. These are services which customers are not obliged to utilise but which do involve time commitment from officers to deliver. It is therefore considered reasonable for a charge to be made which helps cover the cost (mainly staff time cost) of providing the service.

REPORT

The provision of pre-application planning advice

6. The first proposal below would involve introducing a charge for giving pre-application planning advice. Providing pre-application advice is a time-consuming task for which no income is received. In 2019/20 the planning service received 433 written pre-application enquiries.

7. The introduction of pre-application charges may have a number of implications, including:

- Reducing the number of pre-application enquiries received,
- Increasing the amount of work involved for the enquiries that we do receive,
- Increased reliance on (and scrutiny of) the advice by applicants and the public.

8. The workload involved in running the pre-application service therefore may not alter significantly but the Council will receive an income in reflection of the work that is carried out and as a result more time may be available for individual responses.

9. If charges are introduced the service would:

- provide as much information as possible on the Council's website, so that people can 'self-serve' and get information themselves without the need to pay for the service (this will save the customer time and money and reduce the workload on officers)
- be clear about what charges apply to what proposal and have a simple and easy to understand charging regime;
- have charges that are fair and reflect the amount of work undertaken;
- be clear to the customer about what service and feedback customers will receive for their paid service;
- give a timescale for responding; and
- be clear that the advice at that stage is informal and would not prejudice the full and proper consideration of a planning application if/when that is made.

10. The service is developing a form on the Council's website to make it easy for people to apply for the advice.

11. The charges as proposed below will not apply to people wanting to find out if their development needs planning permission. There is already a formal separate process for that. People can apply for a *Certificate of Lawfulness*, which will tell them whether the use or development that they are proposing (or which they have already undertaken) is lawful i.e. that it doesn't need planning permission. There are nationally-set fees for that process. Additionally, we already have good guidance available for the public on our website which explains what permitted development rights are for their particular site are i.e. what they can do without planning permission.

12. The proposal for charging for pre-application planning advice is contained in **Appendix 1, Table 1**. Rates would be on a sliding scale, starting at £50 for advice on a householder application (an alteration/extension to a house), and then rising up to a maximum of £2,000 for a major development. Most of the charges would be based on 50% percent of what the planning application fee would be.

Non-material variations (NMV)

13. The Council also offers the opportunity for applicants to apply for a ‘non-material variation’, which enables small changes which are not considered to involve a ‘material change’, to be made to a planning permission which has already been granted. Many Councils already charge for this service. These applications involve an assessment and a formal approval, and particularly for housing development sites, can involve quite a number of houses and considerable work.

14. The proposal for charging for non-material variations is contained in **Appendix 1, Table 2**. Rates would be on a sliding scale, starting at £75 for a householder application (an alteration/extension to a house), and then rising up to a maximum of £300 for a major development.

Fee for submitting paper planning application

15. There are significant additional administration costs involved in processing a planning application submitted in paper rather than using the online portal (including document scanning and data entry). We therefore propose to charge an administration fee for all paper submissions, which is in addition to the relevant statutory application fee and any advertisement fee (if required) when there is an online form available. We therefore encourage all our customers to make electronic submissions where possible. The national planning portal does warn people that some Councils charge an additional administration fee to process paper applications.

16. Our proposal for the administration charge for processing paper planning applications is contained in **Appendix 1, Table 3**. Rates would be on a sliding scale, starting at £50 for a householder application (an alteration/extension to a house), and then rising up to a maximum of £300 for a major development. Various exemptions to the application of the charge are set out in the table, including where there is not an online form available and in circumstances where people who are registered disabled with a visual impairment or other condition which means that they have difficulty using computer equipment.

Street naming and numbering

17. Several local authorities charge for the administration involved in providing the Council’s *Street Naming and Numbering* service. There is a considerable amount of administration involved in this service, including liaison with other outside organisations such as the Royal Mail and the Emergency Services plus links to the National Address Gazetteer. It is therefore considered reasonable to charge developers for this service.

18. Our proposal for the administration charge for street naming and numbering is contained in **Appendix 1, Table 4**. Rates would be on a sliding scale, starting at £50 for a single change of an existing house number or name, up to £200 for the naming of a new street and £800 for numbering of over 100 houses.

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

19. The recommendations within this report should allow the planning application process to function smoothly and to bring some additional income into the Council.

CONSULTATION

20. Consultation in relation to financial income has taken place with the Department's finance partners.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

21. There was no partnership working associated with this report.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS

22. There are no implications in terms of staffing, property, legal, IT or sustainability. Access to services has been maintained by allowing exemptions to the pre-application consultation service for charities etc; and exemptions to the additional fees for submitting paper applications for people who cannot utilise a computer, disabled people etc.

CONCLUSIONS

23. It is considered that the introduction of the charges for these non-statutory services and to cover additional administration costs, as explained in this report, are justified and will bring additional income to the Council to help maintain service provision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

24. It is recommended that the Council approve the introduction of charges for the following services, subject to the rates and conditions contained in this report, to come into effect from 1st April 2021.

- a) The provision of pre-application planning advice [charges in Appendix 1, Table 1];
- b) The processing of Non-Material Variations (NMVs) [charges in Appendix 1, Table 2];
- c) An administration charge for handling applications submitted in paper rather than online (subject to certain exemptions) [charges in Appendix 1, Table 3]; and
- d) An administration charge for providing the street naming and numbering service largely to the development industry [charges in Appendix 1, Table 4].

Director of Environment

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Table 1 – Charges for planning pre-application advice

Householder development	<p>£50</p> <p>Additional £50 if the applicant requests a meeting (face-to-face or 'virtual') or a site visit.</p>
Local development (excluding householder and new housing development) and all other consents, approvals, notifications and certificate types	<p>50% of the cost of the planning application fee, subject to a maximum of £500.</p> <p>Additional £100 if the applicant requests a meeting (face-to-face or 'virtual') or a site visit.</p>
Local development (new housing)	<p>50% of the cost of the planning application fee, subject to a maximum of £1000.</p> <p>This fee includes one meeting (face-to-face or 'virtual') with the applicant. Additional meetings, including site visits, will be charged at £200 each.</p>
Major development	<p>50% of the cost of the planning application fee, subject to a maximum of £2000.</p> <p>This fee includes one meeting (face-to-face or 'virtual') with the applicant. Additional meetings, including site visits, will be charged at £300 each.</p>
Exemptions	<p>No fee will be payable for enquiries relating to listed building consent, conservation area consent, development/alterations to facilitate disabled access and tree works.</p> <p>Charities and not-for-profit community groups (including Housing Associations (RSLs) who are proposing 100% affordable housing).</p>

Table 2 – Planning Non Material Variation (NMV) Charges

Householder development	No fee for the first NMV application, if made within 12 months of the date of the decision of the application. Otherwise: £75
Any new housing development (local or major)	£75/house or flat
Other Local Development (and other applications for consent, prior notifications, certificates of lawfulness etc)	£100
Other Major Development	£300

Table 3 – Administration charge for planning applications submitted in paper

Householder Applications	£50
Other Local Applications (and other applications for consent, prior notifications, certificates of lawfulness etc.)	£100
Major Applications	£300
Exemptions to this charge would include:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> any application which cannot be submitted on the national planning portal at www.eplanning.scot (including pre-application screening notices, proposal of application notices, modification or discharge of planning obligations and high hedge applications); customers who are registered disabled with a visual impairment or other condition which means that they have difficulty using computer equipment. 	

Table 4 – Charges for street naming and numbering

The naming of a new street (price per street)	£200
Change of street name	£200
Single change of an existing house number or name	£50
Registering/numbering of new properties. Sliding scale as follows (number of properties per application):	
1	£100
2-10	£200
11-50	£400
51-100	£600
100+	£800
Re-numbering a new development after earlier naming/numbering has been confirmed (price per street)	£200