

The Vale of Glamorgan Council

Cabinet Meeting: 26 March, 2018

Report of the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Planning

Fees and charges at Countryside Service sites

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek agreement to proposed changes to charges levied at Cosmeston Lakes Country Park & Medieval Village, Porthkerry Country Park and the Glamorgan Heritage Coast Centre.
2. To seek agreement to develop income streams for the Public Rights of Way network.

Recommendations

1. That the charges detailed in Appendices A, B, C, D, E and F be agreed, for implementation in April 2018, subject to the scrutiny process being complete.
2. That these charges be the maximum, with the Operational Manager for Regeneration being granted delegated authority to vary the charges for promotional purposes.

Reasons for the Recommendations

1. To reflect costs, opportunities and market conditions and secure income to support the costs of running Countryside facilities.
2. To allow prices to be used as a marketing tool.

Background

3. Existing admissions and other charges are normally reviewed annually for Countryside Service sites.
4. As part of the Council's Reshaping Services Programme, Cabinet will be aware that income opportunities are being actively pursued as a way of generating revenue at a time when the Council's budget is under significant pressure.
5. Cabinet approved the Income Generation and Commercial Opportunities Strategy in October 2017 which set out a framework for considering existing and new income streams. In reviewing the admissions and other charges for Countryside Services sites, the objectives and policy principles contained within the Income Generation and Commercial Opportunities Strategy have been considered and this is reflected in some of the increased charges recommended within the appendices.

Relevant Issues and Options

6. Appendices A-F show proposed charges to be implemented from April 2018. The remainder of this report draws attention to some key changes proposed but does not detail all changes which are set out in full in the appendices. The appendices show figures for the current year for comparison.
7. A 30% discount was previously offered to all Vale of Glamorgan Council departments (including schools), non-profit making community uses and charitable organisations, specifically in relation to the hiring of space at all Countryside Service locations. It is proposed that this be reduced to a discount of 20% ensuring that services can still be provided in a sustainable manner whilst offering continued value to these organisations. This reflects the scarcity of resources and the need to fund the costs of providing these non statutory facilities.
8. Cosmeston Lakes Country Park - [Appendix `A`](#) shows proposed changes to charges. In some cases charges remain unchanged, in others they increase by around the rate of inflation or a little more, reflecting take up of services and the cost of delivery.
9. Market research has shown that the current fees for launching vessels on to the lake at Cosmeston are not comparable with other locations and are currently considerably undervalued, with other locations currently charging considerably more per launch. Larger increases are therefore proposed for these activities, with a degree of protection for non-commercial operations. To further realign the fees charged for launches, consultation will be undertaken with any organisation or group that may be adversely affected during 2018/2019, which will inform a potentially more substantial review for charges in 2019/20.
10. This approach will reflect the true value of the unique facility and recognise the need to recover costs incurred to sustain the operation of the country parks.
11. Cosmeston Lakes Country Park has been successful in obtaining grant funding from the Rural Communities Development Fund to develop a new outdoor learning area. This area will be used by the Countryside Service to provide curriculum based activities to schools and community groups and will also be available for private hire by external organisations, the proposed costs for hire are reflected in Appendix `A`.
12. Cosmeston Medieval Village - [Appendix `B`](#) shows that the majority of prices have remained unchanged.
13. Income has increased, especially in respect of entry fees, which has been a target area for growth. The implementation of paid visits at all times other than the free entry period (without a tour/wand) Monday – Friday, 9:30am – 12 noon during term times (since April 2017) has seen substantial growth and demand for guided costumed tours and self-guided audio tours, has led to increased income generation; helping raise income to support the running costs of the facility.
14. It is proposed that the current free entry period for unaccompanied members of the public Monday – Friday, 9:30am – 12 noon during term times will cease, enabling the project to generate extra income which will contribute further to financially supporting the project.
15. Porthkerry Country Park - [Appendix `C`](#) shows proposed charges for Porthkerry showing that the majority of prices have remained the same and similar to Cosmeston.

16. Established car park charges are not proposed to be increased as part of this report. Currently, car parking is only charged in peak season on weekends/bank holidays, to raise sufficient income to cover traffic management. However, it should be noted that work is on-going regarding car park charging across the Vale of Glamorgan and proposals will be reported in due course for consideration and scrutiny.
17. There is a proposed increase in the cost of a memorial / dedication bench at Cosmeston Lakes Country Park and Porthkerry Country Park. Previously the Countryside Service Team manufactured the benches in-house; however due to increased costs this practice is no longer viable. It is proposed that recycled plastic benches will be purchased and offer a sustainable, low maintenance alternative that will provide value for money and longevity. The proposed costs are set out in Appendices A & C. It is proposed dedications are available in addition to the previous memorials, to broaden the market.
18. The Countryside Service has received a number of enquiries from members of the public wishing to dedicate memorial plaques at both Cosmeston Lakes Country Park and Porthkerry Country Park, and to date this service has not been available. As there has been a need identified, to facilitate these requests it is proposed that the Countryside Service identify appropriate areas to accommodate requests. The proposed costs are set out in Appendices A & C.
19. The Glamorgan Heritage Coast project - proposed charges are set out in [Appendix D](#), which are largely unchanged and in line with the Country Parks.
20. The Country Parks and Medieval village have received a number of requests from commercial photographers wishing to utilise the sites unique settings for promotional shoots. To reflect the increased interest and to ensure that costs are equitable across all sites, a new charging structure has been proposed in Appendices A, B & C.
21. The Countryside Team has identified the need and opportunity to provide teacher training days in relation to the Welsh Government's learning objectives with regard to `Outdoor` learning. This new service will be promoted across all countryside sites; these sessions will be open to all schools and community organisations. The new charging structure has been proposed in Appendices A, C & D.
22. To aid in the delivery and continued maintenance of the Public Rights of Way network members of the public will be offered the opportunity to dedicate furniture (such as stiles) to the Public Rights of Way network as set out in [Appendix E](#). Dedicated or memorial furniture will be located in areas identified by the Public Rights of Way Team and with the approval of the land owner.
23. Over the past 18 months the Countryside Service has been successful in obtaining very substantial amounts of income from private developers who require natural safe havens for the translocation of protected species as required by planning consent conditions. The proposals in [Appendix E](#), set out the proposed charges for reptile translocation to Countryside sites and reflect management costs and expenditure. The works involved will not impact on current service delivery as they will be incorporated into the daily management regime.

Resource Implications (Financial and Employment)

24. The proposals will enable the Country Parks to plan for the future management of the sites in a sustainable manner in times of reduced funding, consistent with the aims of the Reshaping Services programme.

25. Saving targets for the Countryside Service include the generation of additional income and these proposals seek to raise income from users of services which require resources to maintain and/or deliver, in a fair and balanced way, whilst also maintaining viable competitive services and attracting visitors and tourists as appropriate.

Sustainability and Climate Change Implications

26. The Income Generation & Commercial Opportunities Strategy was developed as part of the Council's integrated planning activity which is consistent with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. The Act requires the Council to contribute to the national Well-being Goals and to work in line with the sustainable development principle. Revenue generation will contribute to the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan, including the four well-being outcomes and corporate health activity.
27. In terms of environmental sustainability, the Countryside Service offers a comprehensive environmental education package to schools, community groups and users.
28. Charges seek to ensure the economic sustainability of sites and promote local economic development and employment through tourism.
29. Increased leisure and tourism activities within the Vale of Glamorgan will reduce the need to travel for residents, contributing to social and environmental sustainability.

Legal Implications (to Include Human Rights Implications)

30. The Council will be required to negotiate terms and conditions and enter into appropriate agreements e.g. short term hire agreements, filming licences etc. with users generally of property and facilities under countryside services.

Crime and Disorder Implications

31. Investment in facilities will create higher levels of use and effective supervision in the evenings, helping to reduce vandalism and antisocial behaviour.
32. Appropriate charges allow the Council to provide staff at sites which reduce crime and disorder.

Equal Opportunities Implications (to include Welsh Language issues)

33. Concessionary rates are identified.
34. All third party organisations will be required to adhere to the Council's Welsh language policy.
35. In most respects changes are minimal and are not envisaged to have any adverse impacts. In some areas there are proposals to raise fees by more than the rate of inflation. These increases have been targeted in areas where activities are primarily of a commercial nature, with 20% discount for Vale Council (including schools), non-profit making community use and charitable use in many cases.
36. An equalities impact screening has been completed and negative impacts are deemed to be insignificant. As noted above, a more substantial review of boat launching charges at Cosmeston lakes is proposed for the coming year and impacts on user groups will be considered during that review, which will be reported to Cabinet in due course.

Corporate/Service Objectives

37. The operation of the service contributes to the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan and the Well-being Outcomes and Objectives which have been set as our corporate priorities. These proposals will assist in the delivery of "An environmentally responsible and prosperous Vale" and "An active and healthy Vale" as well as the Council's business planning through raising income from activities that will help contribute to the sustainable management of the Countryside Service sites and rights of way network.
38. The Service has worked closely with the Council's Business Improvement Team in the context of the opportunities to ensure cost recovery and maximise opportunities to realise value. This has led to a review of 'memorials' such as trees/benches and plaques, and an alignment with proposals for other service areas for consistency.

Policy Framework and Budget

39. This is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet.

Consultation (including Ward Member Consultation)

40. No Ward Member consultation has taken place in relation to this report as proposals cover all areas of the Vale.

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

41. Environment & Regeneration.

Background Papers

Income Generation and Commercial Opportunities Policy December 2017 (Min.C158).

Contact Officer

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Officers Consulted

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