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BRIEFING NOTE

ANNUAL CHARGES REVIEW 2025/26

for Finance, Governance & Estates Committee 21 November 2024

1. Background

As part of the budget setting process, the Parish Council reviews its charging schedule each November, with agreed changes taking effect from the start of the next financial year (1 April 2025). In the case of allotment fees, these take effect from 1 October each year when annual renewal invoices are issued.

This briefing note provides further information into the rationale behind the proposed charges for next year. In all cases, the intention is to obtain the correct balance between the Parish Council achieving a reasonable fee to cover the cost of providing the service, and continuing to provide effective, affordable services for residents and other users. Where indicated, benchmarking against other local providers has taken place to provide comparative data for Members' consideration.

At the Finance, Governance and Estates Committee meeting on 17 October 2024, Members agreed to recommend to Council that charges will be reviewed and any increases agreed be applied to the budget. This was ratified by Council on 24 October 2024 and therefore each set of charges has been considered individually with charges applied accordingly for consideration by Members as listed in this report. In general a 1.7% increase has been applied to fees in line with the percentage being added to most expenditure budgets. This figure is based on the September 2024 Consumer Price Index (excluding owner occupiers' housing costs) of 1.7%. Wherever appropriate, calculations have been rounded to the nearest 5 pence to simplify the charging structure for the benefit of both residents and those staff members dealing with queries in relation to fees and charges.

The Parish Council's fee structure is broken down into several categories, and each is examined below with proposed charges for consideration, along with recommendations as set out in the paper.

2. Freedom of Information

The Parish Council Freedom of Information Policy includes a schedule of fees for the photocopying and postage of any request. The Parish Council is charged £0.004 for a black and white A4 copy, and £0.04 for a colour A4, by its photocopier provider. Although the fee below is significantly higher than the cost of a copy, it does not include the cost of staff time or the cost of the lease of the photocopier. However, this service has not been required in 4 years.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION	Current 2024/25	Proposed 2025/26
Photocopying @ 50p per A4 sheet (black & white)	£0.50	£0.50
Photocopying @ £1 per A4 sheet (colour)	£1.00	£1.00

RECOMMENDATION 1 – To agree the Freedom of Information photocopying charges to remain at 50p for an A4 black and white copy and £1.00 for an A4 colour copy.

3. Parking Discs and Dog Bags

The Parish Council sells parking discs and dog bags from the office. All payments for these are made in cash and banked for a small fee. Parking discs supplied by Mid Sussex District Council are charged to the Parish Council at 80 pence each and the Parish Council charges the public £1 per disc to cover the banks cash handling fee. The charge for dog bags purchased via JRB Enterprise Ltd is 75 pence for one pack of fifty bags. The Parish Council charges the public £1 per pack to also cover the banks cash handling fee. It is proposed to make no changes to the fees currently charged for the sale of parking discs and dog bags:

GENERAL	Current 2024/25	Proposed 2025/26
Parking Discs	£1.00	£1.00
Dog bags – pack of 50	£1.00	£1.00

RECOMMENDATION 2 – To agree parking discs and a pack of fifty dog bags to remain at £1.00.

4. Allotments

Members will recall that under the Allotments Act 1922, there is provision that allotment holders must be given 12 months' notice of any change in rental charges, unless otherwise stated in their tenancy agreement. The tenancy agreements were reviewed and updated during 2020, and this now enables the Parish Council to give three months notice of changes in the future. Now the budget is being considered for 2025/26, a price increase to take effect from 1 October 2025 can be agreed.

The tenancy year runs from 1 October to 30 September. A tenant taking on a plot after 1 April and therefore having less than six months of the term until renewal, is charged 50% of the standard plot fee.

Please note that the Hurstpierpoint Allotment Association charge a £5 "membership" fee on top, which the Parish Council collects for them. When issuing invoices, the £5 Association membership fee is added, which is then paid over to the Allotment Association once all invoices are paid.

The budgeted income for the Allotments in 2024/25 is £3,100. Income for the year currently stands at £1,906 (61.5%) at 30 September 2024. Each year the allotment tenants are invoiced in early September and required to pay by early October. Most outstanding payments will have been made before the deadline and any outstanding ones are meticulously chased. 100% of the income is always achieved as if a tenant does not pay their fee, they forfeit the plot and with a waiting list, empty plots are immediately filled. Applicants currently wait approx. 12 months to reach the top of the waiting list.

Other local parish councils also provide allotment plots. The Parish Council plots range from 2 rods to our biggest plot of 10 rods. One rod is approx. 25m² and 5 rods is approx. 125m². The current rod fee is £5.45 per annum. The following table provides a comparison of other local sites for this current year:

Cuckfield PC	Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common PC	Rustington PC	Burgess Hill PC
£5.00 per rod 2.5 rod plot £12.50 5 rod plot £25.00 (No increase on last year)	£5.45 per rod 2.5 rod plot £13.63 5 rod plot £27.25	£7.75 per rod * 2.5 rod plot £19.38 5 rod plot £38.75 (up to £8 from 1.1.25*)	£22.12 per rod 2.5 rod plot £34.67 5 rod plot £54.44 (Plus over 65 discounts)

The Parish Council fee is therefore less expensive than Rustington and significantly less expensive Burgess Hill, and slightly more than Cuckfield.

The proposal is to increase the current charge of £5.45 by 1.7% gives £5.54. This has been rounded to £5.55 which is an increase of 10 pence.

ALLOTMENTS	Current 2024/25	Proposed 2025/25
Allotment rental (per rod)	£5.45	£5.55

RECOMMENDATION 3 – To agree a 1.83% increase change to the allotment fees for 1 October 2025 to 30 September 2026, a rise of 10p from £5.45 per rod to £5.55 per rod.

5. South Avenue Cemetery

The 2024/25 budgeted income is £10,083. Whilst this is purely a budgeted figure and clearly not a target, income for the year currently stands at £6,335 (62.8%) at 30 September 2024.

In assessing the price increase for next year, a review of other local cemeteries was completed to assess how our fees compared. The charges for Henfield Parish Council, Burgess Hill Town Council and Hassocks Parish Council's cemeteries have been reviewed and are set out below. Each has a similar charging structure and shows the rising scale for a single grave purchase and interment as £582 at Hassocks, £701 at South Avenue, £1,100 at Henfield and £1,417 at Burgess Hill:

Coffin Burials

Henfield Parish Council has recently opened a newly constructed extension to an older cemetery which may, in part, explain the difference in their fees. Newer cemeteries such as Burgess Hill cost more to construct and operate due to having to comply with up-to-date legislation, in particular around watercourse management.

Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common PC	Burgess Hill TC	Hassocks PC	Henfield PC
Single Width Plot £467 Double Width Plot £874* Grave Interment £234	Grave Plot £747 Plus Interment Fee: Single Depth £670 Double Depth £725	Grave Plot & First interment: Single depth £582 Double Depth: £617 Second interment £182	Grave Plot £600 First Interment £500

It is proposed that the double width plot fee (*) is now abolished as it is not used.

Memorials

Memorial permits for the right for a headstone to be placed on a grave can be compared as shown below i.e. £200 at Henfield, £223 at Hassocks, £230 at Burgess Hill and £233 at South Avenue. Cemeteries intended to be laid out as lawns do not allow kerb-set but these are permitted at South Avenue Cemetery:

Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common PC	Burgess Hill TC	Hassocks PC	Henfield PC *
Memorial £174 Extra Inscription £59 Kerb-set £174	Memorial £168 Extra Inscription £62	Memorial £149 Extra Inscription £74	Memorial £100 Extra Inscription £100

Ashes Plots

A single ashes plot purchase and first interment is £292 at South Avenue, £378 at Hassocks, £500 at Burgess Hill and £500 at Henfield:

Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common PC	Burgess Hill TC	Hassocks PC	Henfield PC
Ashes Plot £174 plus: 1st Interment £118 2nd Interment £118	Ashes plot £325 plus: 1st Interment £175 2nd Interment: £186	Ashes Plot & 1st Interment: £378 2nd Interment £128	Ashes Plot & 1 st Interment: £500

Each of the cemeteries charges a multiplier for non-parishioners. All the councils apply this multiplier to grave or ashes plot purchases and interments, but only some apply this to ancillary fees relating to installation of monuments, administrative fees, etc. Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common Parish Council currently charge 5 x fees to non-residents of the parish for plot purchases and interments but removed the multiplier for other services in 2021/2022. The definition as to what classes as a resident is as follows:

“Where the person to be interred, or in respect of whom the right is granted, is a resident of the parish of Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common. Should the original grave purchase have been made by a resident, no longer living within the Parish for the last five years, this fee can be reduced at the discretion of the Clerk.”

The published fees are therefore broken down into two parts:

Part 1 – Purchase and Interments

The Parish Council continues to charge 5 x fees to adults who do not live in the parish. The Parish Council does not charge a fee for 18 year olds and under, as under law, children’s burials are free to the family. If applicable, any claims for costs can be made to the Government’s Children’s Funeral Fund.

Currently there are 23 unsold adult graves and 10 graves in the children’s section, so a total of 33 available for purchase. There are 2,048 occupied graves and 175 graves that have sold but not yet been used.

There are 96 unsold ashes plots and 39 ashes plots sold but not yet used. The following proposed increases are of approx. 1.7% on all fees which are in line with the level of the September 2024 CPI:

Part 1 - Purchases and Interments	Current 2024/25	Proposed 2025/26
Single width burial plot	£467	£475
Double width burial plot	£874	£889
Grave Interment	£234	£238
Ashes plot	£174	£177
Ashes interred into existing grave	£118	£120
Ashes scattered on existing grave, or interred in Ashes plot	£118	£120

RECOMMENDATION 4 – To agree the proposed charges for part 1 of the cemetery charging schedule, where a 5 x fees multiplier will be applied to non-residents of the parish and the double width plot fee is abolished.

Part 2 – Monuments, Administration and Chapel

The Parish Council charges a single fee for both residents and non-residents of the parish. Approx a 1.7% increase has been applied to these figures for 2025/26 in line with the level of the September 2024 CPI:

Part 2 – Monuments, Administration and Chapel	Current 2024/25	Proposed 2025/26
For the right to install a headstone	£174	£177
For the right to install a kerb-set	£174	£177
For the right to add an inscription to an existing stone	£59	£60
For the right to place a Garden of Rest tablet or vase	£76	£77
Burial record search/grant amendment	£53	£54
Use of cemetery chapel	£118	£120

RECOMMENDATION 5 – To agree the proposed charges for part 2 of the cemetery charging schedule which is the same for both residents and non-residents of the parish.

6. Hire of Recreation Grounds

South Avenue Recreation Ground, Reeds Lane Recreation Ground and the Village Garden are occasionally hired out for events most notably for the St Lawrence Fair, the Hurst Festival Super Sunday event and the High Street Traders Christmas event. The Parish Council has an events policy and this includes the option to charge a hire fee for a commercial event. Traditionally, fun fairs and circuses have visited South Avenue Recreation Ground and not paid a hire fee. A £400 good order deposit is paid and refunded if ground conditions and waste etc are left in a reasonable state. Following a survey of other councils, many charge for the hire of recreation grounds or village greens for small commercial events or fun fairs and circuses.

A fee was introduced in 2022/23 for commercial events. There is no intention to charge for the regular non-commercial events held. There are also a small number of requests from residents to hold short private events for which a small admin fee is charged. It is proposed that the fees are increased by approx. 1.7% for 2025/26 as follows:

OUTDOOR COMMERCIAL EVENTS (such as Fun Fairs and Circuses)	Current 2024/25 Per Day	Proposed 2025/26 Per Day
Hire of Outdoor Space for Commercial Events for operational days (plus a £400 good order deposit)	£135	£138
Set Up / Dismantle Days	£57	£58
One-off hire by residents for small private events	£35	£36

RECOMMENDATION 6 – To agree the proposed charges for the hire of outdoor space for a commercial event of £138 for operational days, £58 for set up days and £36 for a one-off small private event.

7. Court Bushes Community Hub

The budgeted income for Court Bushes in 2024/25 is £40,000. Income for the year currently stands at £21,053 (52.6%) at 30 September 2024. Although some payments have been received in advance for events in the second half of the year, the use of the Function Room continues to be well used and the target is expected to be achieved. From 1 August 2024 the Club Lounge was hired exclusively to Kiddie Capers for 12 months providing a guaranteed income over that period. This will significantly enhance the income received this year.

A simplified approach to the pricing structure is applied that uses a single base level fee to be agreed for each room, then a simple factoring for other time slots is applied evenly, as set out below:

- Weekday daytime, Sunday daytime – base level
- Weekday evening, Saturday daytime, Sunday evening – base level plus 25%
- Friday/Saturday evening – base level plus 75%
- Affiliate Fees are a 25% reduction on the full fees.

Therefore, the annual review of charges only needs to consider the base level price for each room, and then factor up accordingly for each session.

For regular hirers of more than ten session, the fee structure is based on a single standard fee, and then a 25% discount applied to qualifying hirers. Confirmation of who qualifies for the discount was agreed as follows:

“The discounted rate applies to local groups or clubs who can demonstrate that they are not for profit and are providing a service for community or social engagement, or for hirers booking a minimum of ten sessions at a time.”

A benchmarking exercise has been conducted, reviewing the fees charged by providers of other local facilities namely, Ditchling Village Hall, Adastra Hall in Hassocks and Westmeston Parish Hall. Based on an hour for hour comparison our fees are a lot less than other halls but it is important to note that Court Bushes cannot be hired by the hour and hire sessions are only sold in five hourly slots from 8am-1pm, 1pm to 6pm and 6pm to 11pm. If a hirer only wants to hire a room for say two hours, they are still required to pay for the five hour session thereby making their booking slightly less favourable than other venues available on an hourly rate. Due to the current demand for the Function Room, it is not proposed that the Parish Council's five hour sessions hiring policy is changed.

Ditchling Village Hall seats approx. 125-150 people (Court Bushes Function Room seats a maximum of 150 people) charges £21 per hour on a weekday and £24 per hour on the weekend. Westmeston Parish Hall seats up to 80 people and charges £10 per hour on a weekday morning or afternoon, and £20 per hour on a Friday or Saturday night. When these hourly rates are multiplied by 5 the fees become far greater than Court Bushes e.g. Ditchling: £21ph x 5 hours = £105 per "session" compared to £42 at Court Bushes and at Westmeston it would be £10ph x 5 hours = £50 per session.

Adastra Hall in Hassocks charge on a sessional basis so a more direct comparison is possible. While the size and range of facilities at each venue differs, the comparisons are useful to gauge where our current fees sit within the local market. The Adastra main hall aligns to the Function Room size (both seat up to approx. 150 people). The following table shows that Court Bushes is on average far cheaper than Adastra Hall (except for on a Friday evening).

<u>Adastra Hall, Hassocks</u> <u>Current Charges 2024/2025</u>	<u>Court Bushes Community Hub</u> <u>Current Charges 2024/2025</u>	<u>% age</u> <u>Difference</u>
Main Hall (Sessions): Weekday morning or afternoon - £78 Weekday evening – £78 Weekend morning or afternoon - £82 Friday evening - £100 Saturday & Sunday evening - £165	Function Room (Sessions): Sunday-Friday morning or afternoon - £42 Sunday-Thursday evening – £52.50 Friday & Saturday evening - £73.50	-46% -33% -56%
Green Room: Weekday morning or afternoon - £55 Weekday evening - £55 Friday evening - £70 Saturday/Sunday morning/afternoon- £65 Saturday & Sunday evening - £120	(The Club Lounge is currently exclusively by Kiddie Capers Childcare. Should this cease the charges are as follows): Club Lounge: Sunday-Friday morning or afternoon - £33 Sunday-Thursday evening - £41.25 Friday & Saturday evening - £57.75	 -40% -25% -52%

As the Court Bushes rates are still so favourable, it is proposed that the fees are increased for the Court Bushes Community Hub Function Room by 1.7% in line with CPI. The base rate of £42 has therefore becomes £42.71, rounded up to £43:

FUNCTION ROOM	Current Fee 2024/25	Proposed Fee 2025/26	Proposed Affiliate Fee 2025/26
Base Fee (Plus 1.7%) Sunday-Friday Daytime (AM & PM)	£42.00	£43.00	32.25
New Base Fee Plus 25% Sunday to Thursday Evenings & Saturday Daytime (AM& PM)	£52.50	53.75	40.30
New Base Fee Plus 75% Friday and Saturday Evenings	£73.50	75.25	56.45

The same approach to the Club Lounge would result in the hire fees as proposed below (with the 25% discount to be applied to affiliate hirers). The base rate of £33 would become £33.56 rounded up to £34.

CLUB LOUNGE	Current Fee 2024/25	Proposed Fee 2024/25	Proposed Affiliate Fee 2024/25
Base Fee (Plus 4%) Sunday-Friday Daytime (AM & PM)	£33.00	£34	£25.50
New Base Fee Plus 25% Sunday to Thursday Evenings & Saturday Daytime (AM& PM)	£41.25	£42.50	£31.90
New Base Fee Plus 75% Friday and Saturday Evenings	£57.75	£59.50	£44.65

RECOMMENDATION 7 – To agree the Court Bushes base level charges of £43 for the Function Room, an increase of 2.38%; the base level charges of £34 for the Club Lounge, an increase of 3% (should it become available for hire again); and the affiliate fees showing a 25% discount.

There are other fees applied to the hire of Court Bushes, and these are outlined below:

COURT BUSHES ADDITIONAL FEES	Current Fee 2024/26	Proposed 2025/26
Deposit (normal hire)	£50.00	£50.00
Deposit (party hire)	£200.00	£200.00
Locking up charge (Friday/Saturday evenings)	£35.00	£36.00
Crockery/Cutlery Hire	£10.00	£10.00
Cage Hire Per Month	£9.00	£9.15
Container Ground Rent Per Month	£20.00	£20.00

There are two proposed changes to the Court Bushes additional fees for 2025/26. One of which is the storage cage fee. The storage cage fee has been increased by 1.66%. The second is the Locking Up Charge for Friday and Saturday evenings whereby our out of hours alarm company ensure the buildings are secure after a hiring. This fee is recharged to the customer.

A fee is charged to the Melting Pot Café for electricity and storage hire of £40 per month. It is proposed that there is no change to this fee for 2025/2026.

RECOMMENDATION 8 – To agree no change to the Court Bushes additional fees for 2025/26 except for the storage cage fee which has been increased by 1.66% to £9.15 and the Locking Up Charge for Friday and Saturday evenings which has been increased by 2.9% to £36.

8. Village Centre

Village Centre Hall Hire

The Village Centre charging structure for room hire is for the Trustees to determine. Last year the following charging principles were agreed by the Trustees, i.e.

- Weekday daytime, Sunday daytime – base level
- Weekday evening, Saturday daytime, Sunday evening – base level plus 25%
- Friday/Saturday evening – base level plus 75%
- Affiliate Fees are a 25% reduction on the full fees.

The following proposed fees will be put to the Trustees at the 28 November 2024 Trustees meeting:

MAIN HALL	Current Fee 2025/26	Proposed Fee 2025/26	Proposed Affiliate Fee 2025/26
Base Fee (Plus 1.7%) Sunday-Friday Daytime (AM & PM)	£42	£43	32.25
New Base Fee Plus 25% Sunday to Thursday Evenings & Saturday Daytime (AM& PM)	£52.50	£53.75	40.30
New Base Fee Plus 75% Friday Evenings	73.50	75.25	56.45
Main Hall & Conference Room on Saturday Nights (See Note 1)	123	125	93.75

Note 1 - The anomaly with the Main Hall is the existing requirement that if you hire it on a Saturday evening, the hire fee includes the use of the Conference Room (which is unavailable to hire on its own on a Saturday evening). The proposed fee for the Saturday evening is based on the charging principles of combining the Friday night fees for the main hall of £75.25 and the conference room fee of £49.90 = £125.15.

CONFERENCE ROOM	Current Fee 2024/25	Proposed Fee 2025/26	Proposed Affiliate Fee 2025/26
Base Fee (Plus 1.7%) Sunday-Friday Daytime (AM & PM)	28.00	28.50	21.40
New Base Fee Plus 25% Sunday to Thursday Evenings & Saturday Daytime (AM& PM)	35.00	35.65	26.75
New Base Fee Plus 75% Friday Evenings (Saturday Not Available)	49.00	49.90	37.45

CLUB SUITE	Current Fee 2024/25	Proposed Fee 2025/26	Proposed Affiliate Fee 2025/26
Base Fee (Plus 1.7%) Sunday-Friday Daytime (AM & PM)	32.65	33.20	24.90
New Base Fee Plus 25% Sunday to Thursday Evenings & Saturday Daytime (AM& PM)	40.80	41.50	31.15
New Base Fee Plus 75% Friday and Saturday Evenings	57.15	58.10	43.60

The small meeting room has now been exclusively hired by the West Sussex Association of Local Councils and is no longer available to other hirers.

There are other fees applied to the hire of the Village Centre, and these are outlined below:

VILLAGE CENTRE ADDITIONAL FEES	Current Fee 2024/25	Proposed 2025/26
Deposit (normal hire)	50.00	50.00
Deposit (party hire)	200.00	200.00
Locking up charge (Friday/Saturday evenings)	35.00	36.00
Crockery/Cutlery hire	10.00	10.00
Cupboard hire – annual (used by 4 groups)	22.40	23.00
Shed hire – monthly (The Sanctuary)	9.00	9.15
Storage – Hurstpierpoint Gym Club (annual)	397.00	404.00
Storage – Hurst Pre-School (annual)	324.00	330.00
Office Rent – Hurst Pre-School (termly)	1120.00	1140.00

Village Centre Management Re-charge

The Parish Council staff undertake work for the Village Centre Charity and a re-charging arrangement is in place. This is based on 11 hours per week (5 for bookings, 3 for management and 3 for maintenance) at the average hourly total cost of staff members (including Employer NI and Pension contributions).

Last year's increase was based purely on adding a 7% increase on the previous year's hourly rate of £23.94, making £25.62 as the average hourly rate. The total cross charge for the current year was therefore £25.62 (average hourly cost) x 11 hours per week x 52 weeks = £14,655.

A new way and hopefully more accurate way of calculating this figure is now recommended below.

In most cases a 1.7% increase has been applied to fees and charges to take effect from 1 April 2025, however the 2025/26 employee costs have been increased by 6%, as agreed by Council. The Government has also increased Employer's National Insurance Contributions from 1 April 2025. The total staff costs estimated for 2025/26 are therefore £243,664.04. Six staff working 191.5 hours per week gives an annual hours worked as 9,958. £243,664.04 divided by 9,958 gives an average hourly rate of £24.47.

This results in a total cross charge for the year (assuming no change in the 11 hours per week) of £24.47 (new average hourly cost) x 11 hours per week x 52 weeks = £13996.84 (rounded up to £13,997). This rate will also require the agreement of the Trustees.

VILLAGE CENTRE MANAGEMENT FEE	Current Fee 2024/25	Proposed 2025/26
Staff cross charging hourly rate	£25.62	£24.47
Annual Management Fee	£14,655	£13,997

RECOMMENDATION 9 – To agree a decrease in the staff cross charging hourly rate to £24.47 with effect from 1 April 2025, which results in a re-charge of £13,997 for 2025/26.

9. Recommendation

The Parish Council's fee structure is broken down into several categories, and each category has been examined above with proposed charges listed for consideration by the Committee along with the associated recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Committee AGREES the nine recommendations highlighted in blue throughout the report and recommends them to Council for adoption.