

# Parks and Leisure Committee

Monday, 23rd January, 2012

## SPECIAL MEETING OF PARKS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

- Members present: Councillor Corr (Chairman);  
Alderman Rodgers;  
Councillors Austin, Haire, Hargey, Hendron,  
Kelly, Mallon, McKee, Mullan, A. Newton,  
O'Neill, Robinson and Thompson.
- In attendance: Mr. A. Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure;  
Mrs. R. Crozier, Assistant Director of Parks  
and Leisure;  
Mrs. J. Wilson, Business Support Manager;  
Mr. B. Flynn, Democratic Services Officer; and  
Mrs. P. Scarborough, Chief Executive's Support Officer.

### Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Alderman Humphrey and Councillors Cunningham, McCabe and Mac Giolla Mhín.

### Scale of Charges for Parks and Leisure Facilities 2012/2013

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 17th January, it had agreed to defer, to a further special meeting, consideration of a report on the proposed Scale of Charges for Parks and Leisure facilities for 2012/2013. This would afford Members an opportunity to give due consideration to the revised charges and allow the report to be amended to include an additional column showing the percentage increase/decrease compared to the previous year. Accordingly, the Committee considered the undernoted report and a revised Scale of Charges which had been tabled by the Director and included information on the percentage increase/decrease of the variances proposed, copies of which was made available for inspection on the Council's modern.gov website.

#### **"1 Relevant Background Information**

- 1.1 Fees and charges for the use of facilities within Parks and Leisure Services are reviewed annually in line with the estimates process and revised rates implemented with effect from 1 April.**

- 1.2 At December 2011 Committee the framework for the review of the Boost membership scheme within Leisure Services was agreed. Committee was also asked to note that further work was underway to ensure consistent pricing and concessions across the department and a scale of fees and charges would be presented to committee in January 2012 as part of the annual review of fees and charges within the department.

2 Key Issues

2.1 Concessionary Discounts across the department

The review of fees and charges within the department has highlighted the variety of concessions within the different activities in the department that range from 20% to 70% discount. It is proposed that a concessionary rate of approximately 50% of the full rate will be applied across all activities in relation to over 60s, those on means tested benefits, students and children. Members should note that this would remove all other concessionary memberships including Means Tested Benefits (MTB) membership.

2.2 Belfast Castle and Malone House

These venues have seen income adversely affected by the economic downturn. The venues regularly benchmark against local venues and hotels to ensure that their rates are competitive. The corporate market has been impacted significantly from the reduction in internal customers and from across the public sector. It is proposed to endeavour to stimulate this market by a reduction in room hire charges of up to 20% in some areas. In relation to the weddings market the venues generate approximately 50/35% of their income each year (Belfast Castle/Malone House) and it is proposed that between 4-7% increases are recommended. Other promotions will also be put in place during the year to help stimulate usage and these will be reported back through to committee.

### 2.3 Belfast Zoo

A benchmarking exercise was carried out with other zoos in the UK and Ireland. The results show that Belfast is the cheapest zoo for adult admissions and that currently it does not charge over 60s while all other zoos apply a 10-25% average discount to this group. The proposal is to increase the summer adult admission to £10 (a £1.10 increase) and the winter admission to £8 (a £0.65 increase) and have a concession price of £5 and £4 respectively. This concession would include the over 60s. Family tickets within Belfast were also the lowest at £24.50 summer/£20 winter while others charged from £36-£50. It is proposed to increase a family ticket to £27 summer/£21.50 winter. This still represents a 10% increase on the individual price.

### 2.4 Outdoor Leisure and Open Spaces

- Pitches

A benchmarking exercise was undertaken in relation to the cost of pitches within Northern Ireland which found the average charge for a pitch per hour was £27 while our current price is £21.50 per hour. The grades of the pitches have been removed as a method of charging and we will now charge on the facilities being offered. As part of the pitches strategy; work is underway to bring all pitches up to the same standard. The price differential is now around the facilities with the pitch i.e. changing facilities or floodlights. The proposal is to increase the adult pitch fee from £21.50 to £23 per hour and a juvenile rate from £11.25 to £11.50 per hour.

### 2.5 • Outdoor Bowling

A similar exercise was undertaken in relation to bowling and the average adult season ticket was £38.61 in comparison to our price of £49.35. The proposal therefore is to reduce the cost of the adult season ticket to £30 with a concession ticket of £15; this includes children and over 60s. As is currently the case with the winter bowling a charge will now be levied on clubs for green hire for matches this is £10/20 for the duration of the match.

### 2.6 • Fees linked to FMAs (non pitch bookings)

Charges are levied by FMA partners for the users of the following sites: COB Golf Course, Mary Peters Track, Orangefield Cycling track and these will be increased in line with inflation of 5%.

**2.7 • Cricket**

It is proposed that the charges associated with cricket are increased by 10% to cover the costs of maintenance.

**2.8 • Events**

In relation to events it is proposed not to charge for entry to the Spring/Autumn Fairs and the Garden Gourmet event as the charges were nominal and the administration around collecting the fees is not cost effective. The proposal is to reduce the charges for trade and society stands at these events as the increase in fees over the last 3 years has reduced the uptake of these stands.

**2.9 • High Hedges**

A report was presented to Committee in November regarding the new legislative requirement which will be delivered by Parks and Leisure.

**2.10 • Cemeteries**

Party group briefings took place in December 2011 in relation to the development of the cemetery and crematorium. During those briefings proposals were discussed regarding the charges for burials and cremations. Therefore it is proposed that all historic charges in relation to double and treble fees be replaced by resident and non-resident charges. A reduced charge will still apply to Castlereagh Borough Council residents of one quarter of the difference between a resident and non resident. The administration fee applied to Castlereagh is currently being reviewed as it has been the same for a number of years.

**2.12** It is proposed that for burials a 5% increase is levied for both residents and non-residents. Following discussions at the Party Group briefings most groups agreed that an increase in crematorium charges for Belfast residents was appropriate and therefore it is proposed to increase cremation by £50 for Belfast residents. A 10% increase is to be levied on non-residents for cremations as already agreed by the Parks and Leisure Committee at its meeting in February 2011. It is proposed that other charges will rise in line with inflation and ancillary charges will be charged in relation to the direct costs i.e. memorialisation, urns, foundations and the use of the organist and the same charge will apply to residents and non residents.

### 2.13 Indoor Leisure

At Committee last month the framework for the review of the Boost Discount Scheme within Leisure Services was agreed. The emphasis of the framework is to promote membership rather than casual use and the charges reflect that membership provides better value for money. There will no longer be a joining fee and if you pay a year's membership you can get a discounted annual price (i.e. you pay for 10 months only). There would be one fully inclusive membership scheme at a price of £25 per month instead of two schemes (Max Boost) at £37.80 cash or £32.55 direct debit and (Big Boost) £21 currently in place. There would also be one concessionary scheme instead of the current four. The concession has been set at 50% discount for all activities except for classes and the fitness suite which are used most by casual users. The rate is 60% discount for these activities to ensure the rates are kept competitive. The concession rates of £12 per month apply to:

- 16s and under.
- students in full time education
- over 60s - entitled to free use for access before 11 a.m. Monday to Friday. Concession price applies after this.
- Means Tested Benefit charge applies at all times and is available to recipients of the following benefits and their dependent children 16 and under or in full time education: income support, job seekers allowance income based, tax credits (accompanied by health charges exemption certificate), housing benefit, pension credit, training for success scheme, asylum seekers.

2.14 Family memberships will be replaced by family sessions to promote the use of the facilities and more sessions will be made available. Family Sessions are for a family group for a maximum of five people, with no more than two adults for non-book able activities only. Currently family sessions run for only 2-3 hours per day mainly at the weekend and are for swimming. The new scheme will increase the availability of these sessions and will include access to the gym.

2.15 Legacy memberships will no longer exist and work is ongoing to move these onto the more favourable rate in the current scheme.

- 2.16 The new management structure within leisure will help to support the promotion of the service with the introduction of participation officers who will deliver a programme of activities and promotions to increase participation and retain existing members.
- 2.17 A loyalty scheme is also proposed to promote usage of the centres. The proposal is that for a casual user they will get their 10th visit free. For a monthly paying member who has 160 visits over a 12 month period they will receive 1 months free access (13th month free). The department is continuing to develop the concept of a loyalty card and would propose that there will be further promotions that will include other activities such as visiting the zoo.
- 2.18 Consultation sessions with users and non users regarding these proposed changes were undertaken within leisure centres and local shopping centres using the questionnaire attached at Appendix 6.

### **3 Equality and Good Relations Implications**

There are no equality implications in agreeing the 2012/13 scale of charges. The outcome of any current or proposed reviews, which may impact on the scale of charges, will however be subject to equality screening.

### **4 Resource Implications**

#### **4.1 Financial**

Currently the impact of the economic downturn is affecting a number of the services and it is hoped that reviewing how we charge our customers will generate additional income either through increased participation, new services or the retention of existing users. The review has considered the impact of reductions in fees and there will be a financial impact if participation does not increase. However this will be addressed with an extensive marketing campaign to increase membership and to include incentives to retain members including a loyalty card.

#### **4.2 Human Resources**

There are no additional human resource requirements in relation to implementation of the proposed scale of charges.

## **5. Recommendations**

**It is recommended that Committee adopts the Scale of Charges for 2012/13, as detailed in the attached appendices, for implementation in April 2012.”**

After discussion, the Committee agreed to the following:

### **2.1 Concessionary Discounts Across the Department**

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of a standard concessionary rate to be applied across all Parks and Leisure facilities, subject to further discussion and consideration of a Council-wide position on concessionary rates.

### **2.2 Belfast Castle and Malone House**

The Committee adopted the recommendations within the proposed Scale of Charges.

### **2.3 Belfast Zoo**

The Committee adopted the recommendations within the proposed Scale of Charges. It was noted that a report would be submitted in due course regarding the operational efficiency of the Zoo, which would include an analysis of the running costs, together with an outline of future options for improvement.

### **2.4 to 2.9 Outdoor Leisure and Open Spaces**

The Committee adopted the proposed Scale of Charges in relation to the use of pitches, outdoor bowling, Facilities Management Agreements, cricket, events and the proposed charges in connection with the new legislation in respect of high hedges.

### **2.10 Cemeteries and Crematorium**

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the proposed Scale of Charges for burials and cremations to enable further discussion at a Committee Briefing to be held in advance of its next scheduled meeting.

### **2.13 Indoor Leisure**

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the proposed Scale of Charges to enable further discussion at the aforementioned Committee Briefing and noted that further options would be provided by the Department to inform that discussion.

**Next Meeting**

The Committee agreed that its next scheduled meeting, to be held on 9th February, would commence at 4.30 p.m. with a briefing session in respect of the outstanding issues within the revised Scale of Charges and that the normal business would follow at 5.15 p.m.

Chairman