

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

Executive - 23rd May 2005

Report from the Director of Environment

For action

Wards affected:
All

Report Title: Review of Fees and Charges for Sports Facilities in Parks

Forward Plan Ref: ES 04/05-312

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the main findings of a review of the pricing policy for sports pitches and courts in Parks. The report makes recommendations for changes to the policy in order that it better helps meet objectives within both the Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity and the Parks Pitch Strategy and that where applicable it aligns with the pricing policy for leisure centres.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Executive agree to the changes to the Parks pricing policy as summarised in paragraph 3.13 and resolves to set the actual charges for 2005-6 as set out in Appendix 2.
- 2.2 The new charging policy will have immediate effect, sports clubs have been informed of the likely increase

3.0 Detail

Background

- 3.1 In 2004 the Council adopted two documents which have an important role in the future strategic provision of sport in the Borough: the Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity in Brent and the Brent Playing Pitch Strategy. Both of these documents identify the need to review charges for sports facilities to ensure the wider aims of both strategies are achieved. As a result of this, members agreed a new charging policy for sports activities at leisure centres in Brent at the April 2005 Executive. This report considers similar issues for charges for sports pitches and other sports facilities in parks.
- 3.2 Most Local Authorities provide sports pitches in parks and open spaces for use by the local community and sports clubs and, as with Leisure Centres, in general they are subsidised (i.e. the cost paid by the customer is less than the cost of providing the pitches). It is generally accepted that users are expected to pay some of the cost for using a pitch.
- 3.3 It should be noted that traditionally in Brent pitch prices have been set by considering the historical price, adding inflation and then comparing this charge with those set by neighbouring boroughs. Little consideration has been given to wider strategic objectives and how pricing can contribute to achieving these aims. This report considers the policy decisions taken in the April 2005 Executive report and where appropriate applies them to the pricing policy for pitches. As with the charges to leisure centre pricing, it should be remembered that we are not starting from a 'blank canvas' and that it could be counter-productive to significantly hike-up prices in a single step as this could result in users simply stopping their use and so causing an overall drop in sports pitch usage and therefore sports participation.

Adults

- 3.4 The background work conducted for the Brent Playing Pitch Strategy identified that there were eight football clubs that considered themselves as 'Brent Teams' that play matches outside the borough. Conversely, there were two clubs who play their matches in the borough that consider themselves as 'non-Brent clubs'. In setting the charge for pitches, it is necessary to ensure prices are not set too low so as to encourage external clubs into the borough and thereby providing a large level of subsidy on non-residents. On the other hand, we do not want to set prices too high so as to encourage Brent clubs to look outside the borough.

- 3.5 Research was conducted amongst sports clubs using Brent pitches in order to inform the pitch strategy. Generally, clubs rated the pitches in the borough as poor. The main reasons being poor drainage, uneven playing surfaces and poor changing/showering facilities. Clubs also indicated that they would be willing to pay more if the quality of the pitches was improved. The pitch strategy identifies the priorities for pitch and changing room improvements and the Parks Service have started to implement an improvement programme. As well as improving the quality of service to existing clubs, the changing room improvements will also ensure facilities are DDA compliant and that they allow access by female teams. Given these improvements, it is believed there is scope to increase prices above inflation to reflect the significant increase in quality.
- 3.6 It is recommended that the pricing policy compliments that set for leisure centres and that the charge for pitches be increased above the rate of inflation to reflect the improved quality of pitch provision. It is also recommended that adult prices should be set at approximately the average of that for surrounding boroughs. Where this results in a large single increase it is recommended that the increase be stepped over 3 years. A comparison with charges in other London boroughs can be found at Appendix 1.

Young People

- 3.7 Supporting children and young people is a key priority within the Council's corporate plan. This priority is reflected within the Brent Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity where 'increasing sports opportunities for young people' is an identified key theme. Evidence shows that if foundation skills and an interest in sport are developed at an early age, the individual is more likely to develop a lifelong interest in physical activity and lead a healthier lifestyle. There are also growing concerns about the increase in obesity and diabetes in young people, both of which can be linked with low levels of physical activity. To address the issue of increasing physical activity and participation in sport by young people a number of new sports pricing policy recommendations were agreed by the Executive in April 2005. Where applicable, it is recommended that these are also adopted as part of the Parks pricing policy. These are:
- Juniors should be classified at 16 years and under – this ensures that young people in their final compulsory year of secondary school (year 11) who have already reached their 16th birthday still pay the junior charge.

- Junior charges for pitches – it is recommended that the current junior rate of 60% of the adult price be retained for pitch hire. (This will only apply to constituted sports clubs hiring the facilities for junior teams and will not apply to adult coaches hiring the facility to run commercial activities for juniors) It should be noted that at the April Executive, Members agreed a junior charge of 75% of the adult price for use of sports halls and synthetic pitches at leisure centres. These facilities have better ancillary facilities than grass pitches and generally have a higher subsidy level.

3.8 In addition to providing a junior rate for pitch hire, the Brent Playing Pitch Strategy recommends a concessionary rate should be introduced for schools. This will encourage use by schools who do not have access to their own sports pitches and would currently have to pay the full adult pitch price. In line with the policy for junior pitch hire it is recommended that schools are charged 60% of the adult charge.

Tennis

3.9 Tennis is one of the eight priority sports within the Sport and Physical Activity Strategy and it has been prioritized as one of the first sports in Brent for a specific sports development plan. This plan is nearly complete and has been co-ordinated by the Sports Service with input from the Parks Service, local tennis clubs, Leisure Connection, the PE advisor, local schools and the Middlesex Lawn Tennis Association.

3.10 The tennis courts at Gladstone Park were refurbished during 2004 using lottery funding. The Tennis Development Plan will identify and prioritize sites for further refurbishment of tennis courts. Initially courts in Parks with permanent wardens will be prioritised for refurbishment. Some capital funding has already been identified for these and external funding will be secured for further refurbishments where possible. The refurbished courts will be used to deliver a tennis development programme led by the Sports Development Team, including training and coaching sessions.

3.11 To encourage participation by young people and to further the Sports Development Team Programme it is proposed that tennis court hire be free to juniors. Current charges to juniors are £3 per hour per person. The loss of income to the Council is negligible in that Gladstone Park is the only facility in Brent Parks which currently charges for tennis use and we have yet to realise a full season usage.

3.12 Recent consultation with local sports clubs has indicated that an increase of charges by the proposed amount will not deter them from using Brent Parks Service sports pitches and local clubs have indicated that an increase in sports pitch charges if linked with pitch and changing facility improvements is justified. Substantial improvements have been made to all Brent Parks Service changing room facilities during the 2004-05 period and are ongoing.

Summary

3.13 To summarise the recommended changes to the Parks Sports charges policy:

- Brent sets its prices at approximately the average of that charged by surrounding boroughs.
- Some prices are increased above the rate of inflation to reflect the improved quality of pitches and to off-set new lower charges designed to increase participation.
- Juniors are classified as 16 years and under for purposes of the charging policy.
- Junior teams pay 60% of the adult price for pitch hire.
- Tennis court hire is made free for juniors.
- Schools pay 60% of the adult price for pitch hire.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 Brent Parks Service has estimated for the period 2005-06 an increase in sports income of £13801 against the projected income for 2004-05. The estimated income for the period 2004-05 was £50400. The income target for the period 2005-06 therefore is £64201.

4.2 The detail shown in appendix 2 shows where the additional income will be achieved. On average the cost of pitch charges will be increased by 10% to Seniors with an increase in the Junior pitch subsidy being offset by increased uptake on improved tennis facilities at Gladstone Park where courts have been upgraded to a good standard.

4.3 Actual income achieved for the period 2004-05 was £55539.

4.4 If the price increases recommended in this report are not agreed there will potentially be a shortfall in income which will require savings to be found elsewhere from within the Parks Service or Environmental Service Area budgets.

5.0 Legal Implications

5.1 Local Authorities have wide ranging powers to provide sport and leisure facilities, including the power to charge for them.

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 The Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity identifies that the Council's development work should focus on a number of target groups that are currently under-represented in terms of participation in sport. The Playing Pitch Strategy identified a number of areas where pitches are under-used by target groups, including women's teams, junior teams and by disabled people. A programme of changing room refurbishment and pitch improvements is currently underway which will help address this issue. The proposed new pricing policy will help achieve this aim by reducing price as a barrier, particularly to young people.

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications

- 7.1 Non specific.

8.0 Environmental Implications

- 8.1 Non specific.

Background Papers

A Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity in Brent 2004 – 2009
Brent Playing Pitch Strategy 2003 – 2008
Exec Report – 14th June 2004 – A Strategy For Sport and Physical Activity in Brent 2004 – 2009
Exec Report – 14th June 2004 - Brent Playing Pitch Strategy 2003 – 2008
Exec Report – 12th April 2005 - Review of Fees and Charges - Sport

Contact Officers

Any person wishing to inspect the above papers should contact (Shaun Faulkner, Head of Parks Service).

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