

APPENDIX 1

HAMPSTEAD HEATH

Charging Policy

Introduction

Hampstead Heath offers opportunities for people to participate in a wide range of informal and formal sports and recreational activities, from bowling to croquet to swimming.

“What is the right price for activities?” appears a straight forward question but it disguises a very complex challenge. There are a large number of factors that affect charging that need to be considered. The diagram appended to this policy prepared by the Audit commission illustrates many of these competing and often controversial issues that need to be considered in developing a robust framework for setting charges.

Over recent years the City has used comparative prices for other local/equivalent services as a means of benchmarking prices for sports and recreational activities, which are then increased by inflation annually. Whilst this approach provides a means of assessing broad charges it hasn't addressed the more strategic question about what principles should underpin our charging policy.

Objectives Underpinning the Charging Policy

The City utilises charges to achieve a number of service objectives, these are set out below, in no order of priority:

- Maximising the use of the services and promoting the benefits of Club membership;
- Encouraging participation by all, but particularly young people, in healthy outdoor activities;
- Enabling access for all, recognising that some people have less ability to pay for services;
- Pay for some or all of the cost of providing the service (where costs can be attributed to delivery of the service);
- Ration use of a service where demand exceeds supply, particularly at peak times of use.

What Factors Influence Use

A major factor that determines the impact of charges on service use is the price sensitivity for current and potential service users. People will have different levels of price sensitivity, influenced by:

- Their ability to pay – how charges relate to an individual's level of disposable income;
- Perceptions of value for money – whether charges are judged to provide value for money for the level of service being offered and influenced by the extent to which service is deemed to be a necessity, or a choice; and

- The availability of alternatives – whether the same or similar services can be obtained from other public, private or voluntary sector providers at lower cost or with greater value.

Price sensitivity of what individuals are prepared to pay influences what priorities the Heath have in terms of meeting its charging objectives for delivering sport and recreation activities. Other factors that also influence individuals' use of services are:

- Accessibility – how easy is it for individuals to access services, for example, availability of local transport or the extent of opening hours.
- Awareness – whether people know what services are available (from which providers) and what benefits they might derive from using them.
- Attitudes – the beliefs and values of individuals particularly in relation to their personal rights and social responsibilities, for example, whether they believe they have a right to drive a car regardless of the environmental impact, or whether they consider they have a social responsibility to use more sustainable forms of transport
- Quality – whether people consider that the quality of provision offered in terms of customer care, standards of cleanliness of the facility, level of service and also condition of the asset itself in relation to its use and adherence to any governing body certification requirements.

Priority Groups

In developing the charging policy it is important to be clear about which priority groups the Heath should be targeting in terms of increasing use. It is proposed that these should include:

- Young People
- Older People
- Unemployed
- Black and Minority Ethnic Groups
- Disabled People
- Health promotion target groups,(including people with chronic health conditions)

New Sports and Capital Investment

Where a potential new sport or recreation activity is considered, it must first meet the requirements set out in the Strategic Management Plan under Essential Action S5 and S6.

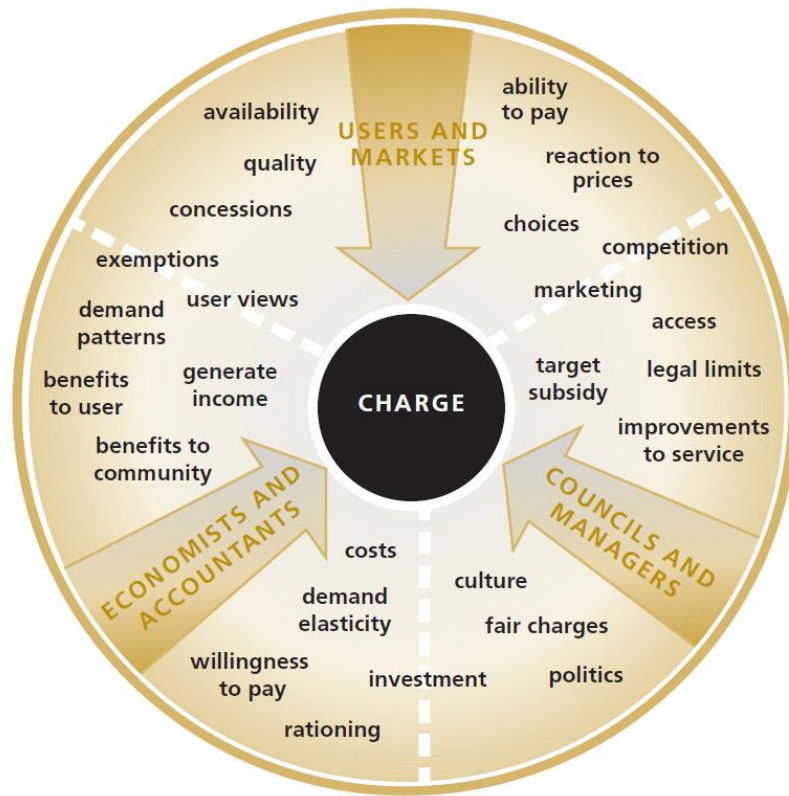
Where enhancements to the current service level are proposed for example as a result of new investment in the infrastructure of the facility then the charges will need to be reviewed.

Adopting a Differentiated Approach to Charging

Given all the above complexities it is recommended that the City adopt a “differentiated approach” to charges delivered on an activity by activity basis. This will enable the City to achieve its service objectives.

Appendix 1

The Factors that Complicate Charging



(Audit Commission, The Price is Right, 1999)