

Integrated Impact Assessment Statement – Item CP077 – Upfront Payments

The Council's [Corporate Debt Policy](#), initially approved by the Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee in September 2013 and subject to a number of subsequent updates, sets out the key principles guiding the collection of sums due to the Council. At its heart, the policy seeks to strike a fair balance between the financial needs of the Council and the social needs of its customers. In the context of fees and charges, the policy additionally states that charges should, wherever possible, be obtained in advance of the goods and/or services being provided, thereby removing the need for retrospective invoicing and the attendant costs of processing and debt recovery. The policy is the subject of regular elected member scrutiny, an annual assurance review and was, additionally, examined in detail by elected members in 2015, resulting in no change to this basic principle.

This policy of upfront payment for sundry debt has, however, not always been applied, in part due to a lack of appropriate ICT capability. Analysis undertaken in 2017 indicated the raising of some 65,000 annual invoices, of which nearly a quarter were for values under £50. Detailed mapping of the service areas raising sundry debt invoices, particularly those of a lower value, is currently underway to identify the potential, subject to putting in place robust alternative arrangements for collecting sums due, for staffing efficiencies across this process. Automated upfront payment systems are, additionally, consistent with many customers' expectations and preferences.

It is recognised, however, that, depending upon the service involved, some customers may prefer to use other payment methods. In this regard, the key observations emerging from recent initiatives, particularly registration for the garden waste scheme, are being examined with a view to striking an appropriate balance between cost-effectiveness and customer preference, with the overarching aim of helping people pay all sums due.

While the Council already has an upfront payment policy, all transactions being migrated to online or otherwise-upfront payment methods will continue to be subject to explicit consideration of their potential impacts on particular groups with protected characteristics to ensure that the arrangements in place continue to maximise both on-going service access and the overall level of resources available for frontline services across the Council. On that basis, and in view of the existing general policy in this area, there is no anticipated material impact on people with protected characteristics, those vulnerable to falling into poverty, geographical communities or staff, nor on the economy or environment and as such no specific IIA required at this stage.

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