

<b>Decision maker:</b>	<b>Assistant director technical services</b>
<b>Decision date:</b>	<b>Tuesday, 14 January 2020</b>
<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Street naming and numbering charges</b>
<b>Report by:</b>	<b>Building Control Manager</b>

## **Classification**

Open

## **Decision type**

Non-key

## **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

## **Purpose and summary**

The council has a statutory duty to provide a street naming and numbering (SNN) service. Over the years the use of electronic address data has increased the demand on the service and the role undertaken. The service currently provided therefore has evolved to include statutory and discretionary elements.

Through the registration and distribution of new addresses and postcodes, developers receive a service which is of clear commercial value to them. Without an address they have difficulties procuring service connections and processing property sales. Their customers, the purchasers of the properties, would in turn have difficulty accessing a range of services after they move in as their address will not appear on any database or mapping system. As a general principle there is greater acceptance of charges where a clear benefit is visible in return.

This report is looking at introducing a scheme of charges on the discretionary element of the work, it will summarise the SNN legislation, look at the reasoning and explore available options. A scheme of charges (appendix A) is proposed which will aim to recover the cost of the discretionary element of the work, thus helping to maintain service delivery.

## Recommendation(s)

That:

- (a) **the scheme of charges (appendix A) for additional discretionary street naming and numbering services be introduced with effect from 1 April 2020.**

## Alternative options

1. Do nothing and continue as we currently are. The benefit of this is that we would not need to amend or alter our processes. The disadvantages of this would be that the current workload associated with street naming and numbering will continue as a non-recoverable cost in the face of continuing budget pressures. As work is non fee earning it will not be classed a priority service above our building control work, causing delays and user dissatisfaction. In financial terms one technical support officer spends on average 1 day a week responding to SNN queries and applications. On a salary of £21,166 - £24,799.
2. Stop undertaking the additional non-statutory work: The statutory requirement is to consult with the LLPG (Local land Property Gazetteer.) The service goes above and beyond this by circulating address with interested parties, such as all the utility services, emergency services, internal departments such as Council Tax, electoral registration for example. Not consulting with the organisations will result in the addresses not being circulated efficiently and the new home owner may incur third party cost and inconvenience. The emergency services response time could also be affected.
3. The effect on individuals and communities from incomplete and inaccurate addressing data is likely to be undesirable and contentious. Other parts of the Council rely heavily on the address data collated by the SNN team and there may be repercussions and additional costs from finding other ways of maintaining citizen records/property databases.

## Key considerations

4. The council carries out the Street Naming and Numbering process under the legislation of the Public Health Act 1925 sections 17 to 19.
5. Over the years, the use of electronic address data and electronic mapping information has proliferated both for businesses and for private individuals, with postcodes being central to this. The SNN process has accordingly become much more important to users of the service, since, with input from Royal Mail, it culminates with the issue of a formal address and postcode, data which is subsequently distributed to a range of interested parties whose electronic address databases play an important part in people's lives; please see appendix B.
6. A by-product of this is that over time the process of street naming and numbering has become much more involved, in line with the increased expectations of service users. This has led many councils over recent years to review the scope of the service they provide and to compare this with the basic statutory duty with a view to charging for the non-statutory elements. Such a review has now been carried out for Herefordshire Council's SNN services.

7. The review concluded that the service provided typically goes far beyond the basic statutory duty, and as such a substantial part of the process can be defined as discretionary. Section 93 of the Local Government Act permits a council to charge for any services which it is authorised but not required to provide, i.e. services which it does not by statute have to deliver.
8. The proposed scheme of charges therefore relates to the discretionary elements of the street naming and numbering service. The statutory element will continue to be free of charge. The ability to charge for the service would ease pressures on council budgets by generating an income stream corresponding with the resources employed in delivering it.
9. Charges would also allow for the service to continue at its current levels. If the charges scheme as outlined in the appendix A had been adopted in year 2018-2019 an additional income of circa £26k would have been generated.
10. Without an element of cost recovery there will be increasing pressure to reduce or withdraw altogether from carrying out the discretionary elements of the service. This however would lead to a deterioration in the quality of address data across the county, which would be to the detriment of citizens and communities as well as to other council departments who make use of the data the street naming service collates as address information will be incomplete on electronic databases. Individuals will have difficulties obtaining utility connections, mortgages, bank accounts etc.
11. Whilst it must be accepted that charging for a service which has previously been free is unlikely to be popular, a number of points are relevant to user perceptions:

Through the registration and distribution of new addresses and postcodes, developers receive a service which is of clear commercial value to them. Without an address they have difficulties procuring service connections and processing property sales. Their customers, the purchasers of the properties, would in turn have difficulty accessing a range of services after they move in as their address will not appear on any database or mapping system. As a general principle there is greater acceptance of charges where a clear benefit is visible in return.
12. A survey of council websites as part of this review showed that of 100 councils whose websites included a street naming page, 64 had already introduced a scheme of charges. All of our neighbouring councils have already introduced a scheme of charges, the proposed scheme is in line with other councils in surrounding counties.
13. As many councils have already introduced charges, developers have become more accustomed to it no longer being a 'free' service. Anecdotal evidence from developers using the service in Herefordshire suggests that many express surprise that they will not be charged.
14. Informal feedback from some councils who have introduced charges indicated that there had not been any widespread dis-satisfaction, with most developers accepting that they should reasonably be expected to pay for the benefit they receive.
15. Given the difficulties developers are known to experience without registered address data, it is expected that most would prefer to pay if that were the price of maintaining the quality and completeness of the service. Developers have requested on occasion that they would prefer to pay for the service if it enabled applications to be processed quicker.

16. The council already charges for changing a house name.
17. The service user will still have be able to select the 'free' statutory option if they wish.
18. If accepted the proposed scheme of charges will be implemented on 1 April 2020.

## **Community impact**

19. The introduction of a scheme of charges will affect all wards. Adopting the scheme will ensure that address data is dealt with efficiently ensuring a complete and accurate data. This complies with the council's current charging principles available at <http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=2243> and helps ensure the council meets its corporate plan priority to secure better services, quality of life and value for money.

## **Equality duty**

20. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
21. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. We do not believe that this decision will have a detrimental impact on those that share a protected characteristic. The scheme proposed that is a non-statutory function will be open to all regardless of any characteristic protected under the Equality Act.

## **Resource implications**

22. The introduction of a scheme of charges will not create any additional expenditure with regards to human resources or ICT, it will however generate an income that will cover the cost of carrying out the non-statutory function.
23. If the charges scheme as outlined in the appendix A had been adopted in year 2018-2019 an additional income of circa £26k may have been generated. Projected future income will be dependent on the housing market.

## Legal implications

24. Sections 17 to 19 of the Public Health Act 1925 and clause 64 of the Town Improvement Clauses Act 1847 require street numbers and road names to be displayed. Both the Town Improvement Clauses Act 1847 and the Public Health Act 1925 also confer authority on the Council to name or alter street names.
25. Charging for street naming and numbering may be made using powers contained in section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 which allow councils to charge for discretionary services where there is no other power to charge provided that the charge does not exceed the cost of providing the service .

## Risk management

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
The risk of not introducing the proposed scheme is the ability to continue to sustain the current level of service.	If the proposed scheme is not adopted, a review of the service will be required to see what elements of the service can be reduced/withdrawn to enable the basic function to be maintained.
The risk of introducing the proposed scheme is the adverse publicity.	As the charge relates generally to developers of new properties, this risk appears to be minimal. This can be managed at service level.

## Consultees

None.

## Appendices

Appendix A - Proposed scheme of charges.

Appendix B - Street naming and numbering distribution list.

## Background papers

None identified

## Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

SNN: Street naming and numbering.