

Staffordshire County Council

Property Search Services Charges 2009/10

In setting costs (charges) for property search services, authorities must now comply with the Local Authorities (Charges for Property Searches) Regulations 2008.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has also produced associated costing and charging guidance in January 2009, which establishes a framework setting out what a local authority can charge for and what it cannot. Section 5 of the guidance starts with the following:

"This section sets out a process for providing transparency over the setting of charges for unrefined data. It should be read in conjunction with regulation 9 of the Local Authorities (Charges for Property Searches) Regulations 2008.

These Regulations require that:

- every local authority must publish an annual statement setting out the estimates of costs and volumes it has used to calculate the charges it proposes to make for access to the unrefined data for the following year. This statement should be a public document (eg published or web based) which is signed off by the person having responsibility for the administration of the financial affairs of the authority (see reg 9(4)(b) of the Charges Regulations);*

The County Council's methodology described in this note broadly follows the DCLG guidance and together with the calculations referred to and appended will form the "annual statement".

In a number of instances it has been necessary to make some broad assumptions and the County Council is committed to improving the collection of raw data so as to be able to produce more robust information in the annual summary and to be better informed for next year's charges calculation.

The 2009-10 charges calculation is based on the 2009-10 budgets, the record of searches undertaken in the last 12 months and the analysis of time spent on each activity by each member of the team during 2008-09 (based on the first 43 weeks of using the revised time recording codes).

Stage 1 of the calculation analyses the salary cost of each individual working in the Land Charges Team by category according to the 2008-09 Land Charges team time analysis.

Stage 2 adjusts the total pay costs to reflect the "internal" work (work undertaken that does not relate to the requests of external customers, based on approximately 640 hours of the time included in the Land Charges category – 40 searches per week taking 20 minutes each), and to transfer the estimated costs of Con 29O work combined with Con 29R work in 2008-09 (249 hours based on the supplementary calculation).

Stage 3 apportions the non-salary costs of the Land Charges team and the management costs on the basis of the adjusted salary costs arrived at in Stage 2.

Stage 4 adds in the costs of other sections working on Property Search Services and, as this is based on the number of searches undertaken by these sections, is apportioned

across categories on the basis of the total number of searches undertaken during the year in each category. A sub total is then arrived at.

Stage 5 reallocates the categories headed Land Charges indirect and unproductive costs on the basis of the sub-total, to arrive at a total cost for each category.

Stage 6 divides the total cost for each category by the number of searches to arrive at an average cost per search.

The calculated cost for the Con 29R is £28.30.

The time analysis gives rise to an average time spent on each Con 29R of 18.6 minutes, but this reduces to 16.3 minutes after taking out the estimated 249 hours spent on undertaking Con 29O alongside the Con 29R. The analysis of time spent on Con 29O estimated an average 9.3 minutes are spent on the base / set-up work, which leaves 7 minutes for each of the 11 questions or groups of questions.

On a pro-rata basis this gives rise to a basic fee of £16.20 and a cost of £1.10 for each of the 11 questions or groups of questions.

The average cost for a Con 29O question is £19.97, but this ignores the number of questions asked, the different time to answer different questions and the fact that many questions are asked with the Con 29O, thereby avoiding the booking-in / set up costs. The calculation has therefore used a basic fee of £16.20 (as with the Con 29R), where the question(s) are asked in isolation of a Con 29R, and an additional fee for each question. The calculation for the costs of individual questions is set out under the time analysis for processing combined 29O and the higher fees for questions 5.1 & 5.2 (together) and 9 reflect the greater time estimated to be spent on these questions.

At this point it was recognised that there is much merit in having a consistent charging structure and given the extent of assumptions that have had to be made throughout the calculation it is proposed that for all searches (Con 29R, Con 29O and LLC1) there should be a basic fee for each time of entering the system and a charge then for each question. A subsequent customer request would incur a second basic fee.

The proposed fees are therefore as follows:

Basic Fee	£16.20 plus			
<u>Con 29 R</u>		<u>Con 29O</u>		<u>LLC1</u>
2a) – d)	£1.10	5.1 & 5.2	£3.25	£1.10
3.2	£1.10	8.1	£3.25	
3.4a)	£1.10	8.2	£3.25	
3.4b)	£1.10	9	£3.25	
3.4c)	£1.10	22.1 & 22.2	£3.25	
3.4d)	£1.10			
3.4e)	£1.10			
3.4f)	£1.10			
3.6a) – l)	£1.10			
3.7e)	£1.10			
3.11	£1.10			

Subsequent requests for information following on from Q22.2 will be charged at £16.20

The calculation of the Highway Correspondence fee arrives at a charge for 2009-10 of £64.35.

Approved on behalf of the authority's Section 151 officer

Director of Development Services

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