

Fees and Charging

As with Freedom of Information (FOI), it is possible to charge a fee for providing environmental information on request, although the specific charging rules are different. In particular, in marked contrast to FOI, there are no upper or lower limits to the fee which may be charged. Instead the Regulations merely state that the fees shall not exceed 'a reasonable amount' and must not exceed the actual costs of producing the information requested. It is possible (as with FOI) to require payment in advance of providing the information, but written notice of this fact (equivalent to an FOI fees notice) must be given to the applicant, who then has 60 working days to pay. The compliance timescale clock is stopped during this time. The Council is obliged to publish a Schedule of Fees and information on circumstances in which a fee may be charged, waived or required to be paid in advance. It is not permitted to charge for allowing access to registers of environmental information, or for allowing an applicant to examine information at Council offices (as opposed to being given a copy of it).

The following is North Ayrshire Council's Schedule of Fees for the purposes of the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004.

Costs of locating, retrieving and assembling information

- Chargeable elements will be included in the calculation in accordance with the Freedom of Information (Fees for Required Disclosure) (Scotland) Regulations 2004, but without any disregard for the first £100 and without any discount on the elements above £100;
- Staff costs will be charged on the basis of the actual cost to the Council of employing the staff in question for the time spent

This means the Council will calculate the fee for an environmental information request on the basis of the same elements as can be included in fees for compliance with FOI requests. However, in contrast to FOI fees, actual staff time is not capped at a maximum of £15 per hour but is charged at the actual cost. The lowest grade member(s) of staff available to carry out the task (being of an appropriate grade to be dealing with the information in question and having the requisite skills and knowledge) will be used. In addition the fee will include any costs associated with putting the information into a particular format, copying and postage costs.

Situations requiring payment in advance

- All fees for environmental information requests require to be paid in advance. This is to maintain consistency with the FOI rules.

Situations where the fee may be waived

- The Council may elect to waive the fee if satisfied that there is a genuine and widespread public interest in the publication of the information in question.

This is unlikely to be the case where a request appears to be driven by commercial interests or is highly specific in terms of focus or geographical area.

- The Council may elect to waive the fee if satisfied that it would be uneconomical to issue a fees notice and process payment.
- The Council may elect to waive the fee where information is requested which consists of a mixture of environmental and non-environmental information, and the non-environmental information would be subject to a fee in terms of the FOI legislation.
- The Council may elect to apply a disregard of the first £100 of any fee and charge only 10% of the marginal costs between £100 and £550 if it has processed an environmental information request as a mainstream FOI request. This should not be taken as an indication that the same disregard will be applied to any similar requests in future.

A fee may be charged in all other cases based on the full chargeable elements.

Fees

Planning

Plans - £95.55 per planning application