

FOI ON COSTS INCLUDED IN PET SHOP LICENCE FEES

MAY 2016

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

ONLY 1 OF THE 20 COUNCILS CHARGING THE HIGHEST FEES FOR PET SHOP LICENCES ACROSS THE UK WAS ABLE OR PREPARED TO LIST AND COST EACH ITEM MAKING UP THE FEE.

Table 1. Councils identified as charging £300 or more for a pet shop licence and the information they supplied in response to our FOI request.

COUNCIL NAME	Highest fee charged for a pet shop licence (£)	Items involved in determining licence fees	Breakdown of costs involved in issuing a pet shop licence (£)
Barking and Dagenham London Borough Council	326.10	x	x
Barnet London Borough Council	472.00	✓	x
Bedford Borough Council	400.00	✓	x
Bexley London Borough Council	1,008.00	✓	x
Bracknell Forest Borough Council	463.00	✓	x
Dartford Borough Council	315.00	✓	x
Gravesham Borough Council	330.80	✓	x
Haringey London Borough Council	346.00	No acknowledgement of receipt	
Lambeth London Borough Council	300.00	No acknowledgement of receipt	
Maidstone Borough Council	395.00	x	x
Newham London Borough Council	350.00	✓	x
Pembrokeshire County Council	351.00	x	x
Reading Borough Council	574.00	Awaiting response	
Richmond upon Thames London Borough Council	413.00	✓	x
Slough Borough Council	350.00	✓	✓
Sutton London Borough Council	328.00	✓	x
Torfaen County Borough Council	350.00	✓	x
West Dunbartonshire Council	335.50	x	x
Westminster City Council	782.00	x	x
Windsor and Maidenhead Royal Borough Council	310.00	✓	x

BACKGROUND

In January 2016, OATA sent a freedom of information request to 391 local authorities across the UK in order to gather information relating to pet shop licensing¹.

The results highlighted a series of inconsistencies in the licensing procedure, including a huge disparity in annual fees charged for a licence. These disparities had also been identified in similar surveys in 2012 and 2014, which means they are long standing.

Based on these results, OATA sent out a new FOI request on April 28 (Annex 1) to 20 councils that charge £300 or more for a pet shop licence and asked them to itemise the costs included in their licence fees.

In the UK (with the exception of Northern Ireland), councils have the power to set their own local fees for pet shop licences which would enable them to recover its **reasonable costs**.

The Treasury has issued official guidance on measuring the full cost of a service² and states that (with agreed exceptions), fees for services should generally be charged at cost and that it is important that the calculation is comprehensive. It further recommends that so far as possible, the calculation should use actual costs, where they are known. This same guidance document, in Box A6.1A provides a list of elements to cost in measuring fees and examples of what should not be included in full cost recovery.

RESPONSES FROM COUNCILS

- Of the 20 councils that were sent our request for information on the costs involved in issuing a pet shop licence, only Slough Council provided a comprehensive list of the elements involved and their actual cost in £ and time, and Bedford Borough Council was the only one that seemed to have a standing/ reference document outlining the costs that may be recovered through licence fees.
- 11 councils provided more ambiguous responses, mainly stating that the costs involved relate to the actual inspection visit (i.e. travel costs and time) and administrative and financial costs, though they do not specify how these costs accrue to over £300.
- One council said 40% of the fee was apportioned to Environmental Health for enforcement and the remaining 60% was apportioned to the administration process. The council provided no further details of what “enforcement” and the “administration process” involved.

¹ OATA. 2016 Freedom of Information Request on Pet Shop Licensing. <http://www.ornamentalfish.org/wp-content/uploads/Pet-Shop-Licensing-Report-2016.pdf>

² HM Treasury. Managing Public Money. July 2013 with Annexes revised as at August 2015. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/454191/Managing_Public_Money_AA_v2_-jan15.pdf

- City of Westminster Council (based on a Supreme Court ruling of April 2015³), charges a fee in two parts: £682 (for a new pet shop) upon lodging the application and a further £100 if the application is successful to cover the costs of the running and enforcement of the licensing regime. Again, no further breakdown of the costs was provided.
- 5 councils did not itemise their costs and limited themselves to confirm the fees charged for pet shop licences (*i.e.* did not provide a response to the second part of the FOI even when this was pointed out to them through follow up e-mails).
- Two councils did not acknowledge receipt of our request and one council contacted OATA to apologise for the delay in providing a response saying they would try to respond within 2 weeks of the deadline. Their response is still pending at the time of writing.



³ R (on the application of Hemming (t/a Simply Pleasure Ltd) and others)(Respondents) v Westminster City Council (Appellant). April 29, 2015. <https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/uksc-2013-0146.html>

ANNEX 1:

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST SENT TO 20 LOCAL AUTHORITIES ON APRIL 28, 2016



Dear Sir or Madam,

Please confirm the charges you make for issuing

1. a new pet shop licence
2. a pet shop licence renewal

Please also provide a detailed itemised list of the costs incorporated in the charges made for a pet shop licence in your area.

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