

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**CABINET MEMBER FOR STRATEGIC HOUSING AND
PLANNING**

**CHARGING FOR DISCRETIONARY HOUSING INSPECTIONS RELATED TO
VISA APPLICATIONS.**

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To seek permission for full cost recovery for discretionary housing inspections related to visa applications.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Every year the housing service is asked to carryout a number of inspections of residential accommodation for immigration purposes. This is a discretionary service which the council offers. It does not form part of its statutory housing duties.
- 2.2 When a UK resident asks for a relative from a country not within the EU to either come to this country permanently or for a specified period of time they must obtain a visa.
- 2.3 As part of the visa application, they are required to obtain confirmation that the address that the applicant will be living at is suitable for their occupation, both with regards to the number of people currently living there and the number it can reasonably accommodate and that the property is safe and healthy to live in.
- 2.4 This service has been provided by North Lincolnshire Council since 1996. For the last few years a charge has been applied, which currently with the increase in VAT is £65 for a full inspection, assessment and covering letter and £10 for further copies of the letter where there may be a change in circumstances, for example, to cover the administration if the inspection took place within the last 12 months.
- 2.5 Last year 78 service requests for immigration inspections were received by the Housing Standards and Performance team. This year so far that figure is 47 and is anticipated to reach around 60 by the year end.

- 2.6 Currently, the average time taken to do an immigration inspection is 2 hours. To reissue a letter, the time taken is approximately 45 minutes.
- 2.7 Based on the hourly rate for a housing technical officer, who provides this service, including on costs, support costs and an apportionment of central establishment charges to achieve full cost recovery for this service it is proposed to charge £64.17 (£77.00 including 20% VAT) and £24.17 (£29.00 including 20% VAT) for the issuing of a letter under the circumstances described above,
- 2.8 The charge is increased annually by the Council in line with inflation and it is proposed to introduce this revised charge with effect from the 1 April 2011. This will allow time to inform local community groups that may be affected by the revised charges.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 Option one – To withdraw the availability of the service.
- 3.2 Option two – To continue with the current practise of charging a fee which increases annually in line with inflation, but does not represent full cost recovery.
- 3.3 Option three – To increase the charges as outlined above to £77.00 and £29.00 inclusive of VAT to ensure full cost recovery for this service commencing on the 1st April 2011 which will then allow some awareness raising to be undertaken with the appropriate community groups.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

- 4.1 Option one – This is a discretionary service and therefore could just be stopped. However, that would impact on the minority ethnic groups that make most use of the service and who would then struggle to find a private organisation offering the same service.
- 4.2 Option two – With the current budget pressures and resource implications being faced by the council, the service cannot continue to be provided on a subsidised basis as at present.
- 4.3 Option three – This is the preferred option since it would allow the service to continue but all costs incurred would be recovered from the person requesting the service.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

- 5.1 Financial implications – Option One – this would end the service and reduce the fees earned by the Housing Standards and Performance team by around £2000. Option Three – would ensure a small amount of

fee generation continued but more importantly the cost of the service was fully covered.

5.2 There are no other resource implications.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

6.1 Diversity implications - Option three, the preferred option, would ensure that the minority ethnic groups, who benefit most from this service, continue to be able to access this service from the council, albeit the requirement to pay an increased amount of money.

6.2 Risk and other implications – An integrated impact assessment has been completed and no significant issues were identified.

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

7.1 The report has been circulated to Finance and Human Resources but no comments have been received.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 That the Cabinet Member for Strategic Housing and Planning gives approval for Option 3 to be commenced from the 1 April 2011 in relation to discretionary immigration inspections.

DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD AND ENVIRONMENT

The Angel
Market Place
BRIGG
North Lincolnshire
DN20 8LD
Author: Liz Webster
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Background papers used in the preparation of this report - None