



**Winchester**  
City Council

**COUNCIL MEETING – 20 July 2005**

**Question under Council Procedure Rule 14(2)(a)**

**Minute 55 Cabinet 1 June 2005**

**QUESTION 10**

From: Councillor Pearson

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning

"While agreeing that it is appropriate that the 'Nuisance High Hedges' fee should be cost-neutral could the Portfolio holder give members a break down to demonstrate how the high figure of £450 was reached? Further could the Portfolio illustrate any situations when a 'fee' has been reduced after it was established?"

**Reply**

"No local authority has been in a position to predict with any degree of certainty what the number of complaints regarding high hedges might be and therefore what the work load they create might be. This has created a significant problem in determining reasonable fees because, as in all services, volume is a significant factor in calculating pro rata costs.

Across the South East of England, the charges agreed by local authorities range from £135 to £650. Winchester's charge is the same as that of New Forest, Eastleigh and East Hampshire. I would remind Members that we will also offer a discounted rate of £100 to those in receipt of a qualifying benefit in accordance with our Social Exclusion strategy.

The calculation that £450 might represent a reasonable fee is based on the assumption that were we to receive 100 applications in a year this would require one full time equivalent member of staff to deal with them. If 80 applications are received at £450 and 20 at £100 this would produce income of £38,000. This would cover the salary and on-costs of one scale 5 post – which is considered the appropriate level of seniority to deal with what would sometimes be complex and difficult cases. That post would also be responsible for the production of publicity material, training, the giving of 'pre-complaint' advice and work on appeals to the Planning Inspectorate. The fee income would also cover the associated costs of these. This would provide for a good level of service and the reasonable expectation that the Council would deal with complaints efficiently and quickly. Were a lower fee to be charged we could not provide staff time to deal with them and, though cheaper, the service to complainants would be much slower. If we have significantly fewer applications then we will use the income in a different way to provide the staff time needed to progress the complaints.

Of course, we have no way of knowing for certain whether there will be 10, 100 or 300 applications in a year, although it would be reasonable to assume that the work load will reduce over time as many complaints will have been awaiting resolution at the time the legislation came into force.

I cannot give Cllr Pearson an example of a fee reduction but I do repeat that we have to ensure that the cost of a dispute resolution service to what I hope will be a small group of residents does not fall as an extra burden on Winchester's council tax payers. Clearly many other local authorities have arrived at a very similar conclusion to our own regarding the likely costs and adopted the same approach."