

Response to question from Cllr Bevan

Local authority searches

I refer to Home Information Packs and local authority searches and the need for Haringey to make changes to retain its share of the market. Some of the areas where changes are required are as follows, the fees charged, turnaround times, access to information by private firms, using electronic links, which will subsequently also reduce the need to resource for personal callers.

Please may I be advised as to all actions that have been taken, since the introduction of Home Information Packs, to enable Haringey Council to maintain its business / revenue levels concerning local authority searches. Please also advise me as to the number of working days it is currently taking to deliver a search compared with prior to Home Information Packs. Please also advise me as to the revenues being earned by this service now as compared to prior to the introduction of Home Information Packs.

Response

The introduction of Home Information Packs (HIPs) in July 2007 has seen an increase in the number of personal searches and a resultant reduction in official searches and revenue as a personal search costs £11 and an official search costs £190 or £125 for a paperless search.

Local authorities are in a difficult position to compete with personal search companies and HIPs providers, as some are including the personal search in the pack free of charge, for example. Local government's ability to compete against these changes is very tightly restricted by legislation such as the Competition Act. The statutory personal search fee of £11 is set by the government.

Haringey has used the National Land Information Service (NLIS) to receive search applications electronically and to send results electronically from a fully computerised system as a means of competing with personal search companies.

Since HIPS became compulsory for all property in November 07 the situation has become more difficult. The month of January 2008 saw a major change, when the number of personal searches (411) exceeded the number of official searches for the first time.

Please see the chart below, which shows the decline in number of official and increases in the number of personal searches carried out for the period between September and January over the last three years. The increase in personal searches is clearly evident since the introduction of HIPS:

LOCAL LAND CHARGES OFFICIAL & PERSONAL SEARCHES I

YEAR	September		October		November		December		January	
	Official	Personal	Official	Personal	Official	Personal	Official	Personal	Official	Personal
2005/06	444	188	425	149	534	227	384	161	482	168
2006/07	519	229	636	218	598	253	392	167	444	216
2007/08	333	267	420	322	388	301	252	190	285	411

The impact on revenue can also be seen in the chart below which shows the income received by Local Land Charges over the last three years, especially since the introduction of HIPS and the increase in the number of personal searches:

LOCAL LAND CHARGES - ACTUAL SEARCH INCOME

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	
	£	£	£	
April	76,874	65,739	54,696	
May	82,899	82,390	68,779	
June	78,111	85,176	84,828	
July	67,168	78,618	71,879	
August	66,968	75,610	44,770	
September	61,430	70,611	56,456	
October	62,987	87,463	55,997	
November	73,890	76,244	51,573	
December	54,986	52,299	35,762	
January	67,927	60,591	33,781	
February	64,306	66,182	37,046	projected
March	92,014	76,240	38,452	projected
Total	849,560	877,163	634,019	

Haringey has consistently had a response time to official searches of around **four** days both before and after the introduction of HIPS. We have a project to automatically answer planning history information and Building Control information automatically in the next few months, which will improve the consistency of our response time as it will remove the need for human intervention.

We are taking part in the recent launched Department of Justice consultation about setting of fees for searches.

We will also take the opportunity to feed into a meeting that has been planned between the Local Land Charges Institute and the Land Registry – the meeting has been requested by the Minister for Housing with the purpose of finding out what can be done to improve the searches market for local government.