



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Health and Environmental Services Committee
Subject:	Consultation Document – Northern Ireland Environment Agency Draft Charging Policy 2010-2013
Date:	3 rd February, 2010
Reporting Officer:	Tim Walker (Head of Waste Management) Ext. 3311
Contact Officer:	Maria McAleer (Policy and Compliance Officer) Ext. 3439

Relevant Background Information

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), by way of this consultation paper, is seeking the views of stakeholders on its proposals for fees and charges.

The Council is invited to respond by 26th February to the policy proposals set out in the consultation paper, a full copy of which is available on the website <http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk>

The NIEA is responsible for the implementation and enforcement of environmental regulations, many of which require operators and their activities to be authorised and monitored. The NIEA is required to achieve full cost recovery for such regulatory functions through the application of fees and charges on the companies they regulate.

The Agency has three units which levy fees and charges: the Industrial Pollution and Radio Chemical Inspectorate (IPRI), the Water Management Unit (WMU) and the Land & Resource Management (LRM) unit. Out of a total NIEA budget of £55 million, collectively, these regulators recover costs of approximately £5 million per year. This figure has grown significantly recently with the introduction of new regulatory responsibilities and controls and the requirement for full cost recovery.

The NIEA is required to set charges for individual schemes and regulations. It is acknowledged that the number and complexity of different charging arrangements and the processes and timeframes for their application can be challenging for businesses to keep abreast of.

To address this, the NIEA has carried out an assessment of its own schemes and that of sister agencies. This exercise has informed the direction of the Charging Policy.

Key Issues

The NIEA proposes to limit increases in line with the GDP deflator on an annual basis for a 3 year period from April 2010 to March 2013. This will allow the NIEA to reflect increasing costs to some degree while a more substantial assessment of individual charging arrangements is carried out, where required.

This consultation exercise was discussed within arc21 last month and its draft response is attached.

In light of the Council's recent accreditations, the following additional comments from Belfast's perspective have also been included for Members' consideration:

1. The Council acknowledges the regulatory and enforcement role of NIEA and welcomes the compliance reassurance and information provided as a result of their inspections. The Council would request however that, as a minimum, a regular programme of inspection is delivered by the NIEA per annum
2. The Council would also seek assurances from the NIEA that, when considering levels of charging, consideration would be given to recognising the low risk associated with the operation of facilities which have consistently performed well in NIEA compliance inspections and have received other external validations in the form of accreditations such as, for example, ISO14001. The NIEA should consider introducing a discounted fees and charges structure in these instances.

Resource Implications

Financial

The NIEA is responsible for the implementation and enforcement of environmental legislation. As such, the Council has to comply with the Waste Management Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 SR 493 and Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 SI 662 in order to operate. Under these, the Council incurs obligatory fees which will be subject to review under the draft NIEA Charging Policy.

Since 2008, the Council has paid approximately £25,000 per annum in licensing fees.

Recommendations

In addition to the comments listed above regarding the need for a regular programme of inspections and recommendations regarding a discount on fees following accreditation, the Committee is asked to approve the arc21 response to the NIEA Draft Charging Policy 2010-2013.

Decision Tracking

The Head of Waste Management will liaise with Members' Services staff to ensure that, following its ratification by Council, the response is forwarded before the deadline date to the NIEA.

Key to Abbreviations

NIEA – NI Environment Agency

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

ISO14001 – International Standards Organisation Environmental Management Standards

Documents Attached

The full consultation paper is available on-line at <http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk>. (If required a paper copy can be obtained from the Waste Management Service Policy and Compliance Officer on Ext. 3439 or 3497).

Appendix – arc21/Council draft response

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