



Subject:	Review of Local Authority Property Certificate Fees 2023
Date:	26th June, 2023
Reporting Officer:	Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control
Contact Officer:	Ian Harper, Building Control Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To inform the Committee of a proposed increase in fees for the Local Authority Property Certificates.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report.
3.0	Main Report
	<u>Background</u>
3.1	The Committee will be aware that The Council Property Certificate system arises from an agreement in the early 1990's between the Law Society (representing solicitors) and local Councils, as a means of ascertaining information, which is useful in legal searches relating to the conveyancing process for land and property. The Council Property Certificate is a series of questions asked about a specific address which, in the Belfast Council area, are coordinated and answered by Building Control with support from Environmental Health.

Key issues

3.2 Members may recall that in 2020, councils agreed to increase the Council's Property Certificate fee from £60 to £70 fixed until a further review in 2023.

3.3 This review has now been undertaken by officers at a regional level and, given the increasing cost pressures on councils, officers have obtained SOLACE approval for the following proposal.

3.4 To mitigate against future inflationary costs to councils, officers have obtained SOLACE approval to the concept of applying a 3-year inflationary fee review cycle meaning a further review would not be required until 2026, unless there were significant changes to the Council Property certificate process. In which case, Councils would reserve the right to review the fees.

3.5 Therefore, if we build in an assumption for future rises to Consumer Price Index's (CPI's), along with other increasing cost pressures on councils, officers feel it would be reasonable to propose an increase the Councils Property Certificate fee from £70 to £90, fixed for three years.

3.6 This proposed increase would assist councils in maintaining adequate resources to ensure that the service is delivered in a prompt, efficient and professional manner. The slight differential between the Regional Property Certificate and Councils Property Certificate would also address the previous concerns raised by the Law Society that the two fees being the same had sometimes led to confusion in applications from solicitors and agents.

3.7 Allowing for establishment of new councils after the forthcoming election, this would increase the fees as outlined below from 1st July 2023:

3.8 **Standard Charges**

	<u>Current Fee</u>	<u>Inflationary cycle added</u>
a) Standard 10-year search	£70	£90
b) Search back to 1973	£95	£122
c) Specified 10-year search	£70	£90
d) Follow-up 10-year search	£30	£38

<p>3.9</p> <p>3.10</p>	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There would be significant increase to the income raised but the exact figure will depend on the number of applications received.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>Officers are not aware of any equality or good relations implications in relation to this report.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Document Attached</p>
	<p>None</p>