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ANNEX 6.3 CHARGING FOR INFORMATION

This annex discusses how public sector organisations should charge for information. There are exceptions to the general policy of charging at full cost.

A.6.3.1 It is government policy that much information about public services should be made available either free or at low cost, in the public interest. Anything originating in Crown bodies, including many public sector organisations, has the protection of Crown copyright. So people may need to pay if they want to duplicate or process (reuse) such material for profit.

A.6.3.2 Information products have an unusual combination of properties: typically, high cost of production combined with low cost of reproduction. So information products are frequently licensed for the use of many customers simultaneously rather than being sold or otherwise transferred. This can make for complex charging arrangements to recover costs accurately.

Rights to access

A.6.3.3 Most public organisations freely post information about their activities and services on the internet. It is good practice to make available recent legislation, public policy announcements, consultation documents and supporting material sufficient to understand the business of each public sector organisation. In addition, some of this information, eg about benefits and taxes, may also be available in free leaflets.

A.6.3.4 More extensive paper or IT (eg CD ROM) versions of information available on the internet may carry a charge to cover the cost of production. This should also apply to printed versions of material viewed for free in public offices. There should be no additional charge for material made available to meet the needs of particular groups of people, eg in Braille or other languages.

A.6.3.5 Most public sector organisations choose, as a matter of policy, to make available on the internet copies of information disclosed in response to requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environment Information Regulations 2004.

Information carrying charges

A.6.3.6 A number of public sector organisations supply information for which charges are made. These include:

- services commissioned in response to particular requests;
- services where there are statutory powers to charge;
- information sold or licensed by trading funds (trading funds are free to choose how they allocate their fixed costs to their various products when pricing their information services);
- publications processing publicly gathered data for the convenience of the public, through editing, reclassification or other analysis;
- retrieval software, eg published as a key to using compiled data.

A.6.3.7 The terms on which this information are made available should be made clear at the point of sale or licensing. There is a clear public interest in maximising access to much public

sector material, and this should be borne in mind when deciding what charges should be levied. For this reason many publications can be reused by others free of charge. However, public sector organisations should take a careful policy view of the copyright issues, using legal advice as necessary.

A.6.3.8 However, public sector organisations can charge for supplying some information which recipients intend to process, eg for publication in another format. The norm is:

- **Raw data:** license and charge at marginal cost;
- **Value added data** and information supplied by trading funds: charge at full cost plus an appropriate rate of return (see paragraph A.6.2.6).

Licenses supplied in this way may take a number of forms, including royalties on each additional copy sold in the case of the most commercial applications.

A.6.3.9 Public sector organisations should maintain information asset registers as part of their asset management strategy. For further information see www.opsi.gov.uk , which includes links to public sector organisations' information asset registers listing the databases in existence. OPSI can also advise on compliance with the Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations.