

East Lothian Council

FOI Ref: 2018/515708

Please can you provide some detail about your council's policy on storing the belongings of homeless applicants while they are in temporary accommodation and awaiting rehousing?

Please can you tell me:

1) How much you charge to store the belongings of an individual applicant or applicant family?

The policy was agreed by the Council in January 2014 as part of a report on charges for homeless services which included both B and B charges and storage charges.

<https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/5374/cabinet>

The full report is publicly available on the above link, below is an extract in relation to storage:

3.13 With regard to removal and storage the Council agreed in 2009 that applicants who did not qualify for assistance with housing costs through the Benefit System would be charged 50% of the storage costs for their belongings. These costs range from approximately £27 per week for the contents of a 2 bed-roomed house to £46 per week for a 4 bed roomed property. For those in receipt of income support or some other form of means assessed benefit, the charge was set at £5 per week.

3.14 In addition to the storage costs, the Council incurs costs for the initial uplift of goods into storage and their return to the accommodation eventually secured by the applicant.

3.15 In comparison, a person in receipt of benefit assistance out-with the homeless process who moves home is not guaranteed any assistance. An applicant moving between council houses or from a private sector property into a council house has to fund the removal or storage costs they incur.

3.16 In order to bring our costs more into line with those faced by others moving home it is recommended that all applicants are charged the same i.e. 50% of the cost of uplifting, storing and returning the goods.

3.17 In all cases the charge will be collected at the conclusion of the storage period and where appropriate arrangements will be made for the charge to be recovered in instalments.

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2) Can you explain if/how this price is affected by the number of items stored, the space required, the storage location required, the length of time the items are stored, etc.

The costs are dependent on the size of storage required which is based on the number of goods etc.

3) How much do you charge applicants to access their stored belongings?

Within our contract we ensure that applicants have free access to their goods on 1 occasion, thereafter it is a matter between themselves and the contractor

I'm also interested in the storage units you use. Please can you tell me whether you use council-owned storage facilities or privately-owned facilities?

The goods are stored by a private contractor in their storage facilities. This contractor provides a range of storage and removal services to the council including "homeless" storage

Please can you also tell me:

4) How much you have charged homeless applicants to store their belongings in council-owned storage facilities in the last five years?

Not applicable, East Lothian Council does not have any council owned storage facilities.

5) How much you have charged homeless applicants to access their belongings in council-owned storage facilities in the last five years?

Not applicable

6) How much you have charged homeless applicants to store their belongings in privately-owned storage facilities in the last five years?

£47,482.53

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7) How much you have charged homeless applicants to access their belongings in privately-owned storage facilities in the last five years?

Not applicable

For questions 4-7, please can you break down the figures by year, and, if possible, by applicant, or applicant family.

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|--------------------|------------------|
| 2015 | 22,865.03 |
| 2016 | 9,600.87 |
| 2017 | 10,824.28 |
| 2018 | 4,192.35 |
| Grand Total | 47,482.53 |

Please note that the total of £47k is broken down into financial years as the invoices have been raised, not necessarily in the period that storage costs were incurred and service used by the tenant. For example, invoices at the beginning of 2015 would most likely relate to invoices covering a period in 2014.

If the latter is not possible, please can you provide the number of of applicants and/or applicant families who have had their belongings stored in both council-owned and privately-owned storage units in the last five years.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to break down the information by year and again by applicant. We can confirm, however, that 195 applicants had their belongings stored.