



Information Policy and Compliance
bbc.co.uk/foi

7 June 2006

Dear Mr

Freedom of information request – RFI200600305

Thank you for your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2005. You have asked the following questions:

1. *'How many letters of the 'Thank you for informing us ... you do not require a TV Licence' that you send out each year and the actual cost (in postage and management time).*
2. *'How many visits are made by Enforcement Officers, and the number made simply by 'Officers' to check the veracity of what non-payers tell you? and the cost in each case.*
3. *'Since you intend to check back in three years, I also want to know how many such checks you make each year and, again, the cost.'*

First, I can give you my assurance that the need for our agents, TV Licensing, to be cost-effective is an essential requirement. It is their duty to reduce the cost of licence enforcement and it is in their own interests to do so.

We carry out many initiatives to try to ensure that our enquiries are targeted at the right people, and that we find the most efficient ways of minimising future contact with non-television users. The aim is to find ways of positively identifying the latter so that we can safely concentrate resources on pursuing evasion.

When a person notifies TV Licensing that they have no TV set, this information is accepted and a stop is placed on further enquiries for a period of time. However, in order for enquiries to cease for a long period of time, it is prudent for TV Licensing to verify the situation.

The problem we found was that in the last year alone, around 50% of people who claimed not to have a television were found to be telling the truth when the property was visited.

The fairest and most consistent approach is to visit all such addresses. If a visiting officer can verify that no television is in use at an address, they will authorise a stop on all further



contact for a period of four years. After that time, if things are seen to remain the same, we stop enquiries for another six years.

It is true that TV Licensing detection equipment is very effective in the enforcement process by identifying addresses where television is being used at the time of visit, but we are satisfied that personal visits are the most effective method of verification when considering the longer term.

A person is under no obligation to allow entry to visiting officers and if refused, the officer would not pursue the matter at the visit. It would simply mean that they cannot authorise the longer 4-year stop on mailings. I would add that many non-TV users have expressed satisfaction with this process.

In answer to your question about notification by email, I should explain that TV Licensing does not know the email address of most people and so, when they update their records to show an address as having no TV set, an automatic letter is produced acknowledging this.

I have answered your FOI questions below.

1. *'How many letters of the 'Thank you for informing us ... you do not require a TV Licence' that you send out each year and the actual cost (in postage and management time).*

In the 12 months April 05 to April 06, there have been 286,738 such letters sent.

The postage costs for sending out a letter are determined by the number of letters being sent out in that particular batch. The postage tariffs are pre-determined by Royal Mail and range from 14.9p to 21p. We minimise the costs of mailing by sending stock letters third class wherever possible (as opposed to first or second class) and by sending these letters out in monthly batches (rather than daily or weekly and so on). The basis for this is that the price is lower for a larger batch. Thus, the exact price is dependant on when the letter was sent rather than the type of letter.

Regarding management costs, the cost of these in relation to the letter you have asked about is not quantifiable. These costs would be included in the salaries of the staff involved and there are not worked out by time- this is especially so as a number of staff would have provided varying degrees of input. Further, the staff costs of our contractors are not known to us and this we do not hold this information. Even if our contractors could quantify the amount spent on producing this letter, this information would not be held on our behalf. . Under section 3(2) of the Act, therefore, the information is not held by the BBC and is not covered by the Act.

Please note that "TV Licensing" is a trading name used by agents contracted by the Licensing Authority (the BBC) to administer the collection of television licence fees and enforcement of the television licensing system. The majority of the administration of TV Licensing is contracted to Capita Business Services Ltd (Capita), with the administration of cash easy payment schemes contracted to Revenue Management Services Ltd, and marketing and public relations activities contracted to the AMV Consortium. We do not hold information

relating to our contractors' staff costs. This information is not held by our contractor, the AMV Consortium, on our behalf (as per section 3(2) of the FOI Act) and is thus outside the scope of the FOI Act.

2. & 3. *'How many visits are made by Enforcement Officers, and the number made simply by 'Officers' to check the veracity of what non-payers tell you? and the cost in each case and 'Since you intend to check back in three years, I also want to know how many such checks you make each year and, again, the cost.'*

In 2004/05, 52.3% of people who claimed not to have a television receiver were found to be using television, and required a licence, when TV Licensing checked the premises. This is why TV Licensing verify all claims by visiting the addresses. If an officer is able to confirm that no licence is likely to be needed, he/she will authorise a stop of 4 years on future contact. I do appreciate that we ask for the co-operation of non-television users, however, our intention is to identify who they are and to minimise future contact with them.

I can confirm that we do hold information relating to the number of visits made to addresses that were made to premises that did not have a television receiver, however, we believe that this information is exempt under section 31 of the FOI Act. Section 31 states that information is exempt information if its disclosure under this Act would be likely to prejudice the prevention or detection of crime.

It is a criminal offence to install and use television receiving equipment to watch or record television programme services without a valid licence. TV Licensing investigates and prosecutes such unlicensed use of television receiving equipment. It visits unlicensed addresses to confirm that a television is not in use.

Releasing information relating to how many visits we make by category would enable people to determine which categories receive more or less visits and thus to calculate their probabilities of being visited. This means that releasing any information on how our visits might be prioritised would be likely to prejudice the prevention or detection of crime.

It is in the public interest for people to have general information about visits carried out by TV Licensing. The public interest in this case is served by knowing the why TV Licensing carries out visits. Further information on TV Licensing's visiting policy and how visiting officers should conduct themselves is available in our *About TV Licensing* document (this is available from the below URL: <http://www.tvlicensing.co.uk/aboutus/index.jsp>). The public interest is not served by releasing information that will be of most use to potential evaders. We are satisfied, in terms of section 2 of the Act that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

In relation to the cost of such visits, the BBC does not hold this information. The BBC contracts the visiting function to Capita and Robinson Way Co Ltd and matters relation to Capita's internal costing are not held on our behalf. Under section 3(2) of the Act, therefore, the information is not held by the BBC and is not covered by the Act.

At Attachment A is a cost breakdown which you may be interested in.

Internal review

If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to an internal review by a BBC senior manager. Please contact us at the address provided, explaining what you would like us to review and including your reference number. If you are not satisfied with the internal review, you can appeal to the Information Commissioner. The contact details are: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF, telephone 01625 545 700 or see www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Policy Advisor
BBC TV Licensing Management Team

TV Licensing Costs of Collection	2005 £m	2004 £m	2003 £m
Collection costs incl call centres, field force, detection and over the counter services (net of recharges re 075s)	113.9	117.7	120.9
Depreciation of new systems	1.3	2.0	0.4
Communications including reminders and information campaigns	19.9	18.3	11.5
Postage	12.2	9.4	10.4
Administration and contract management	4.7	3.6	3.2
	<u>152.0</u>	<u>151.0</u>	<u>146.4</u>
		<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>
Licence fee revenue	2,940.3	2,798.1	2,658.6
Costs as % of revenue	5.2%	5.4%	5.5%
Licences in force (excl ARC)	24,161,532	23,898,74	23,485,61
Cost per licence	£6.29	£6.32	£6.23
Cost per licence as % of licence fee	5.2%	5.4%	5.6%
Collection costs incl call centres, field force, detection and over the counter services (net of recharges re 075s)	£4.71	£4.92	£5.15
Depreciation of new systems	£0.05	£0.08	£0.02
Communications including reminders and information campaigns	£0.82	£0.77	£0.49
Postage	£0.50	£0.39	£0.44
Administration and contract management	£0.19	£0.15	£0.14
	<u>£6.29</u>	<u>£6.32</u>	<u>£6.23</u>

Further breakdown of the specific aspects of the collection contracts is not readily available as the fee structure

for our main contractor Capita is based on licence sales and encompasses all aspects of the service provision across the call centres and the field operations.

The cost per licence reflects the average cost, most cost less, some cost more depending on the level of chasing required.

Fines collected are not given to the BBC or TV Licensing - they are a matter for the courts.