

<b>Report on</b>	Property Certificates
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	11 <sup>th</sup> February 2020
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	William Wilkinson

<b>Is this report restricted for confidential business?</b>	Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	X

1.0	Purpose of Report																
1.1	To advise Members on the fees in relation to the submission of Property Certificates to Mid Ulster District Council.																
2.0	Background																
2.1	Currently, approximately 2000 applications are submitted to the Building Control Department on an annual basis producing an income of approximately £120,000.																
2.2	A property certificate application is usually submitted by a solicitor acting on behalf of a client. In most cases, a property certificate is submitted due to the sale of a property, mortgaging of a property, transfer of ownership or other related issues regarding a property.																
2.3	The primary respondents to a property certificate application within Mid Ulster are the Building Control Department and the Environmental Health Department with the internal process being primarily administered by the Building Control Department.																
2.4	<p>The online portal for accepting property certificate applications within Mid Ulster was launched in October 2017 whereby all solicitors submitting applications were encouraged to avail of the online portal. The table below details the uptake to date of the online portal for the submission of property certificate applications.</p> <table><tr><th>Financial Year</th><th>Total Applications</th><th>Online</th><th>% Online</th></tr><tr><td>2017-18</td><td>2118</td><td>246</td><td>11.6%</td></tr><tr><td>2018-19</td><td>2265</td><td>778</td><td>34.34%</td></tr><tr><td>2019-20</td><td>1750</td><td>635</td><td>36.28%</td></tr></table>	Financial Year	Total Applications	Online	% Online	2017-18	2118	246	11.6%	2018-19	2265	778	34.34%	2019-20	1750	635	36.28%
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2.5	It should be noted from the above table that there has been an increase in the number of applications being submitted online on an annual basis. Currently approximately 36% of the applications for property certificates are received via the online portal which is accessed through the Council Direct Website.																

3.0	Main Report															
3.1	The current fee structure for property certificate applications was introduced across Northern Ireland on 1 <sup>st</sup> January 2004 and there have been no reviews or increases since that date. Following discussions with Law Society in Northern Ireland, it has been agreed that the fees structure should be revisited on a four yearly basis.															
3.2	<p>The new fee structure – see table below, which has been agreed with the Law Society for all property certificate applications across Northern Ireland in effect corresponds to a 16% uplift in the fees income realised by the Council.</p> <table><tr><th>Nature of Search</th><th>Current Fee</th><th>Revised Fee from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020</th></tr><tr><td>Standard 10 year search</td><td>£60</td><td>£70</td></tr><tr><td>Search back to 1973</td><td>£85</td><td>£95</td></tr><tr><td>Specified 10 year search</td><td>£60</td><td>£70</td></tr><tr><td>Follow-up 10 year search</td><td>£25</td><td>£30</td></tr></table>	Nature of Search	Current Fee	Revised Fee from 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2020	Standard 10 year search	£60	£70	Search back to 1973	£85	£95	Specified 10 year search	£60	£70	Follow-up 10 year search	£25	£30
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3.3	It is anticipated that based on the current number of applications which have been submitted to Mid Ulster District Council annually for the past number of years, that the revised fee structure will produce an annual income for the administering of property certificates of approximately £140,000.															
3.4	In addition, the standardised questions on a property certificate application have been updated and agreed in conjunction with the Law Society. This is to ensure that the response from the Council is relevant and the information required by the Law Society is obtained.															
3.5	In relation to the provision of the online application facility for property certificates, following its introduction by Mid Ulster District Council in October 2017, there has been an increase in the number of applications being submitted online to its current levels that are approximately 36%.															
3.6	It has been noted that the administration time of an application in paper form is significantly higher than an application submitted online. This is primarily due to the internal process required to ensure that the relevant information is uploaded onto the Tascomi system to enable the application to be effectively processed.															
3.7	<p>The introduction and promotion of the online portal for the submission of property certificate applications has resulted in a more streamlined service, with the following areas being identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No paper</li><li>• No money handling within the offices</li><li>• No requirement for storage of application forms/certificates</li><li>• Ease of submitting applications and the paying of fees</li><li>• Increased efficiency in processing applications within Council</li></ul>															

3.8	It is therefore considered that an additional administration fee of £10 is charged for applications that are submitted in paper form.
3.9	It is proposed that the charge will not be introduced until 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2021 to ensure that all customers submitting property certificates have adequate time to register and familiarise themselves with the online portal facilitated by Tascomi on Council Direct.
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Other Considerations</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Financial, Human Resources &amp; Risk Implications</b>
	Financial: Within current resources
	Human: Within current resources
	Risk Management: None
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Screening &amp; Impact Assessments</b>
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: None
	Rural Needs Implications: None
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Recommendation(s)</b>
5.1	It is recommended that Members agree to the increase in fees for Property Certificate Applications as detailed in 3.2 as negotiated with The Law Society.
5.2	It is recommended that Members agree to the introduction of a £10 administration charge on Property Certificate applications submitted in paper form commencing on 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2021.
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b>
	N/a