

ALERC

Association of Local Environmental
Records Centres



Position Statement

LERC Charging

ALERC recommendations

- Regardless of their current status and hosting arrangements, ALERC members report on the full cost of running their LERC
- That LERCs are consulted during the development of projects to establish what they're able to offer. Where projects are funded, it is essential to establish the full cost of LERC participation so that it can be built in to bids and project outlines.

All Local Environmental Records Centres (LERCs) have a clearly defined policy setting out who they charge for their services. They are not-for-profit businesses, meaning that rather than benefiting a select group of shareholders, any surplus income is reinvested into the organisation and its activities to benefit its stakeholders. They tend to conform to one of three main organisational models: some are hosted by a local authority, some by the local wildlife trust, and others are run as independent not-for-profit companies.

LERCs set their charges to cover their running costs, which differ from area to area across the UK. All LERCs need to cover the costs of employing a team of experts and developing and maintaining data systems. Some LERCs receive 'in-kind' benefits from their host organisation, such as free office space and support services, whilst others have to cover these costs too. LERCs must also cover the costs of their core services, including supporting the local recording community, sourcing and mobilising data that were previously inaccessible, the development of new products and services, and the provision of expert advice that makes these data accessible and suited to the requirements of their stakeholders.

The focus of our members' services are necessarily different from area to area too, and reflect the variation in local demand for access to an up-to-date evidence base on the natural environment. In some areas, the main focus will be on facilitating decision-making relating to development management planning, whilst in other areas nature conservation and land management are the main drivers. These differences are accompanied by a big variation in the membership of each LERC's stakeholder groups based around service use. In some counties our members will have many partners and few clients; in other areas the opposite may be true.

The LERC partner to client ratio is a key consideration in setting fees. LERCs with a large funding partnership and small client-base will have very different service level agreement rates and commercial fees compared to LERCs with a large client-base but relatively few partners. These differences, as well as the variations in employment and office costs

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across the UK, are the reason that members' charges differ, and will never be fully aligned.

As members diversify their business by applying their services to new sectors and collaboration with non-typical stakeholders, they increase their turnover and in turn are able to do more and keep the per-use cost of accessing services as low as possible. The business driver is always ensuring that the evidence base is robust and accessible to anyone.

