

Our ref: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
via email

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

21 December 2017

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email dated 23 November 2017 received under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The specific details of your request have been extracted from your email and are highlighted in bold within the body of this letter.

Regarding the frequent references you make in your FOI request to 'Dartford Tolls' and 'Toll collection', I respectfully advise that Dart Charge is a road user charge and not a toll charge. Toll charges were levied until 2003 when the debts associated with the construction of the QEII Bridge and the tunnels had been fully discharged. A road user charge was introduced in 2003, to manage the high demand for use of the crossing, after a study reported that traffic levels would be 17% higher if payment was removed. The charges imposed and collected are used to fund transport improvements in accordance with the Transport Act 2000, though not exclusively Dartford related improvements.

In response to your Freedom of Information request –

The latest accounts that are publicly available are those for 2015-16. These were only published in March 2017. Are the account figures for 2016-2017 available in any form, and if so then can we have a copy?

The Dartford Accounts dated from 2002 through until 2016 are available via <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications> searching 'Dartford Accounts' in the search box. The most recent accounts published in January 2017 cover the period from when Dart Charge was introduced in November 2014 to March 2016 and include revenue from enforcement action. The next Dartford accounts covering 2016/17 will be published in due course.

We are interested in is the gross cost of tolling collection and enforcement. For 2015-16 the gross cost seems to be the £25,399K paid to Emovis plus the £32,432K Dart Charge. There is a reference on page 27 to various, mainly one off works related to the Dart Charge. I assume that the reference on page 27 is referring to the expenditure figures as shown on page 26, but on page 20 there are figures for 'capital expenditure' on the Dart Charge of £28,935K (2015-16) and £53,137K (prior year). These 'capital expenditure' figures are part of what is shown as Dart Charge on Page 26, but what is the rest of it (£3,497K for 2015-16 and £6,361K for prior year)?

I can confirm that the variance is operational expenditure costs.

A note on page 27 says that "Highways England staff costs have increased by £1.1m following the creation of a Dart Charge team within Highways England to manage the Dart Charge contract with Emovis." This indicates that there are costs within the accounts that are related to toll collection and enforcement that are not included in either the Emovis Operations or Dart Charge expenditure figures. Can you tell us approximately what the toll collection and enforcement cost is that is included in your 'Other Expenditure' figures on page 26, other than that shown for Dart Charge?

With regard to your comment that *"This indicates that there are costs within the accounts that are related to toll collection and enforcement that are not included in either the Emovis Operations or Dart Charge expenditure figures"*, I can advise this is not indicated by the statement on page 27 to which you refer.

Please see page 26, it is explained that Highways England Staff cost was £3.2m for 2014-15 and £4.3m for 2015-16 following the creation of the Dart Charge team – this represents a £1.1m increase.

The accounts do not show any figures but according to the Traffic Penalty Tribunal report for 2015-16 in that year there were 2,678,438 penalty charge notices issued at Dartford. Your Dartford Accounts for 2015/16 show that before bad debt provisions of £26 million there was a gross amount for penalties etc of £53 million. That would seem to mean that the average penalty before bad debts was about £20. But the minimum payable is £35 (if paid within 14 days) and the penalty is £70 after 14 days, and £108 after 28 days. Costs can increase the sum. So obviously the figures shown in the accounts are not gross figures for Enforcement and presumably the figures for the Road user charges are also not gross. We would like to know what the gross position is, as detailed below.

The £26m to which you refer includes road user charges and impairment rather than just allowance for doubtful debt relating to enforcement. The enforcement bad debt provision is £21m. I can advise that not all PCNs are allowed for or written off, many are de-recognised.

The amount of road use charge income shown in the accounts for 2015-16 is £107,983K (£76,665K for accounts and £31,318K for non-accounts). What was the gross amount of this income for the year and how much of the income for 2015-16 or earlier years was written off * in 2015-16?

The figures you refer to are stated on page 25 and I can confirm this is the gross amount. The write off is £80,000 and is listed as impairment on page 26.

The amount of Enforcement income shown in the accounts for 2015-16 is £53,103k... What was the gross amount of income for penalty charges in 2015-16? (That is gross excluding penalties that were 'derecognised' for any reason.) How much of the penalty charge income for 2015-16 or earlier years was written off * in 2015-16?

To be clear, the figure you refer to is £53.1m and I can confirm that this is gross income for enforcement not including de-recognised items. The write off is listed as impairment on page 26 (£1.1m).

What was the amount that was derecognised in 2015-16 for "first time offender" and the crossing charge was paid within a certain time then?

This information can be found on page 32 - "the road user charge was paid within the 14 day warning letter period (£51m)".

What was the amount that was derecognised in 2015-16 "Where on appeal the penalty is not enforced, the amount receivable is derecognised"?

This information can be found on page 32 - "successful representations and appeals and invalid PCNs (£17.2m)".

What was the gross amount for enforcement costs (i.e. bailiff fees etc) chargeable in 2015-16 to drivers who had not paid the road user charge? How much of the enforcement costs for 2015-16 or earlier years was written off * in 2015-16?

I can confirm that no fees are paid to debt recovery companies by Highways England. Enforcement fees are charged directly to the customer and are at the discretion of the enforcement agent company.

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the legislation, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless exempt. We may therefore be publishing the information you requested, together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context, via the [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website.

If you are unhappy with the way we have handled your request you may ask for an internal review. Our internal review process is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/highways-england/about/complaints-procedure>

If you require a print copy, please phone the Information Line on 0300 123 5000; or e-mail info@highwaysengland.co.uk. You should contact me if you wish to complain.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me. Please remember to quote reference number [REDACTED] in any future communications.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]