



Response to Request for Information

Reference FOI 003430
Date 04 April 2019

Empty Properties

Request:

I am currently analysing the impact that the increase in council taxes on long-term empty homes has had on the housing market.

For my research, I would need the address of the properties in your council that were empty for more than 6 months (long-term empty) in each year from 2009 to 2018. Would it be possible to access this data?

If this data is available for a fewer number of years or for a different definition of "empty homes", it would still be helpful.

Your request for information has now been considered and the City of Wolverhampton Council is not obliged to supply the information you requested for the reasons set out below.

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires City of Wolverhampton Council, when refusing to provide such information (because the information is exempt) to provide you, the applicant with a notice which:

- (a) states the fact,
- (b) specifies the exemption in question and
- (c) states (if that would not otherwise be apparent) why the exemption applies:

In relation to your particular request, the following exemption applies:

Section 31 – Law Enforcement

We can confirm that the Council holds information falling within the description specified in your request. However, Section 31 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 allows a public authority to refuse a request if disclosure of this information would prejudice law enforcement as defined under Freedom of Information Act, Section 31(1)(a) – Law Enforcement.

In this case, we believe that releasing detailed information such as empty residential properties creates a security risk and is likely to prejudice the prevention or detection of crime.

In line with the terms of this exemption in the Freedom of Information Act, we have also considered whether it would be in the public interest for us to provide you with the information, despite the exemption being applicable. In this case, we have concluded that the public interest favours withholding the information.

You can also find more information by reading the full text of the Act, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/section/31> and further guidance.

When assessing whether or not it was in the public interest to disclose the information to you, we took into account the following factors:

Public interest considerations favouring disclosure

- There is public interest in transparency and accountability of the department,
- Disclosure may promote public understanding
- There is public interest in good decision-making by public bodies
- Consideration of recent decisions by the Information Commissioner's Office related to the disclosure of information in respect of empty properties.

Public interest considerations favouring withholding the information

- Disclosing empty residential properties creates a security risk and therefore the Council recognises that there is a public interest in reducing potential criminal activity at these properties especially owned by private individuals. Having considered the key factors, the decision is to release the information in a redacted form.

To advise and assist you under Section 16 of the Freedom of Information Act, we have provided you with partial information, partial postcodes not full addresses. In the excel workbook attached you will find a worksheet for each year which states the date the information was captured and the number of properties reported empty with the partial postcode for each of those properties.

We are also able to provide you with details of empty properties that were captured and saved on record for the Annual Government Return called the Council Tax Base (CTB1) for the years 2012 to 2018. We do not hold empty property data in this format for earlier years. The return is completed in October of each year and records are as they stood at a stated date (as requested on the form).

If you wish to look at the Council Tax Base Returns for all Local Authorities for all years they can be found on the following Government Website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/council-taxbase-statistics>