

11 March 2021
Our ref: 7020368

Thank you for your request received on 13 February 2021, for the following information:

Please provide a breakdown of the enforcement costs (fees to debt collection agencies and court costs) incurred in seeking to collect minor amounts (less than £100 or if you use a similar threshold for data aggregation purposes, such similar threshold) of Council Tax under Class C (Long Term Empty) and amounts collected.

Please provide figures for the previous three complete financial years. The purpose of the request is to analyze the efficacy of instructing debt collection agencies to pursue small amounts instead of adopting a policy as per other councils of waiving small amounts.

We have processed this request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Response

We are refusing your request under section 12 because we estimate that compliance with your request will exceed the "appropriate limit" under section 12.

The appropriate limit is £450 which is equivalent to 18 hours at £25 per hour. The per hour figure is set by Regulations rather than actual salary paid to any officers handling requests. The appropriate limit includes the time it will take the council to discover if it holds the information requested, to locate it, extract it and collate it as well as putting it into any particular format requested by the requester.

We have calculated that it will take approx. 2000 plus hours to comply with your request.

Our calculation is as follows:

The London Borough of Barnet has issued 78,754 summonses over the last 4 financial years (including the current year). We would have to check 78,754 accounts and estimate it would take 2 minutes per account which totals 2000 plus hours.

Advice and Assistance

The costs charged for Council Tax summonses and the fees charged by the Enforcement agents (EA's) are the same irrespective of the size of debt (apart from the EA's fees which increase if over £1,500).

Further information

If you are interested in the data that the council holds you may wish to visit Open Barnet, the council's data portal. This brings together all our published datasets and other information of interest on one searchable database for anyone, anywhere to access. <http://open.barnet.gov.uk/>

Advice and Assistance : Direct Marketing

If you are a company that intends to use the names and contact details of council officers (or other officers) provided in this response for direct marketing, you need to be registered with the Information Commissioner to process personal data for this purpose. You must also check that the individual (whom you wish to contact for direct marketing purposes) is not registered with one of the Preference Services to prevent Direct Marketing. If they are you must adhere to this preference.

You must also ensure you comply with the Privacy Electronic and Communications Regulations (PECR). For more information follow this Link www.ico.org.uk

For the avoidance of doubt the provision of council (and other) officer names and contact details under FOI does not give consent to receive direct marketing via any media and expressly does not constitute a 'soft opt-in' under PECR.

Your rights

If you are unhappy with the way your request for information has been handled, you can request a review within the next 40 working days by writing to the Information Management Team at: foi@barnet.gov.uk. Or by post to Information Management Team (FOI) London Borough of Barnet, 2 Bristol Avenue, Colindale, NW9 4EW

If, having exhausted our review procedure, you remain dissatisfied with the handling of your request or complaint, you will have a right to appeal to the Information Commissioner at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF (telephone: 0303 123 1113; website www.ico.org.uk). There is no charge for making an appeal.