



London Borough of Barnet,
2 Bristol Avenue, Colindale,
London NW9 4EW
20 April 2021
Our ref: 7231280

Thank you for your request received on 15 April 2021, for the following information:

I am writing to your district under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to request the following information:

- 1. Has your local authority been targeted by ransomware, a type of malware (malicious software) that cybercriminals use to hold people and organisations to ransom?**
- 2. If your local authority has been hit by ransomware what were the demands of the cybercriminals and were you forced to pay monies?**
- 3. Has or will your local authority take preventative measures to counter ransomware attacks, and if so, what?**

Please could you provide the responses to the questions as soon as possible?

If it is not possible to provide the information requested due to the information exceeding the cost of compliance limits identified in Section 12, please provide advice and assistance, under the Section 16 obligations of the Act, as to how I can refine my request.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to your response.

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

Response

I can confirm that London Borough of Barnet holds the information you requested.

However, we believe that the exemptions detailed below apply to all the information you requested and so we are withholding that information. Please see the Refusal Notice below.

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2. If your local authority has been hit by ransomware what were the demands of the cybercriminals and were you forced to pay monies?

3. Has or will your local authority take preventative measures to counter ransomware attacks, and if so, what?

Please could you provide the responses to the questions as soon as possible?

Section 31(3) removes the public authority's duty to confirm or deny whether information is held if to do so would or would be likely to prejudice law enforcement.

It is the council's view that the confirmation or denial of the possession of information relating to the council's cyber resilience, would be likely to compromise the council's information security strategies by giving cyber criminals insight into vulnerabilities which may, or may not, exist.

Although the bona fides of the requester may be genuine FOI responses are public information and are made to the world.

We consider that the qualified exemption set out in Section 31 (Law enforcement) subsection 3 applies to the information requested. Therefore, we have decided to withhold the information.

Section 31(3) is a qualified exemption, as such we have gone on to perform a public interest test in order to assess the public interest arguments for and against declaring whether or not the requested information is held. In applying this exemption, we have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the interest in favour of disclosure.

Factors in favour of disclosure

- Confirmation of possession would demonstrate a commitment to transparency with regard to the council's undertakings, and could provide assurance that the council have robust IT infrastructure in place.

Factors in favour of withholding

- Maintaining the integrity and security of the council's systems
- Preventing cyber-attacks and similar against the council systems
- Revealing whether or not the information requested is held or applicable to the London Borough of Barnet would be likely to offer cyber criminals insight into not only the strengths of the council's cyber security, but also any potential weaknesses that may exist. This could ultimately result in a future cyber attack. One of the reasons that cyber security measures are in place is to protect the integrity of personal and sensitive personal information.
- It is clear to see how the occurrence of a future cyber-attack would prejudice the council's legal duty to safeguard personal information from loss, theft, inappropriate access or destruction, which is why Section 31 has been employed in this case.
- A cyber attack could have catastrophic consequences for council services for residents exacerbated by the dependence on these services at a time of a national emergency from Covid-19.

In all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

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.