

28 May 2021
Our ref: 7315392

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

Please can I have access to a list of all homes that have been empty for at least 12 months together with the owner contact details.

My company specialises in taking empty homes and returning them to a condition whereby they can be occupied. A lot of these properties are uninhabitable and/or dated and this is where we can help. Whilst we have an interest in these types of properties we are often unable to trace the owners so that we can negotiate a way ahead in order to get these properties in a habitable state and lived in.

We are aware through reading the Barnet Housing Strategy that you plan to get a 100 empty properties occupied every year and with this information we would hopefully be able to assist in reaching this commendable target. We assume that Barnet Council has a register of the owners of these empty properties as they have to pay Council Tax on them and wonder if there is a way that we could obtain access to this information.

Whilst returning these homes to a habitable condition ultimately lies with the home owners, having access to their details would enable us to contact them directly in order to offer them a solution that benefits all and more importantly will allow them to become occupied again thereby benefiting the community in general.

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 consider that the following exemptions apply to some of the information requested.

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I can confirm that London Borough of Barnet holds the information you requested. However, we are withholding the information regarding **list of empty properties** since we consider that the following exemption applies to it:

Section 31(1) (Law enforcement) subsection 1 applies to the information

Information is exempt if its disclosure would prejudice the prevention and detection of crime. A Freedom of Information Request response is a response available to the whole world. It is therefore not just given to the requester but is available to any other person who may request it. Whilst a requester may have bona fides in requesting information, there are likely to be others who have nefarious intent. Publishing a list of empty properties would be likely to prejudice anti-crime work and lead to an increase in crime. Squatting is a criminal offence and to publish a list of empty properties would be likely to lead to squatting. Additionally, squatting is often associated with other crimes such as criminal damage, or gangs that strip buildings of materials.

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:

- The council's commitment to openness and transparency

Factors in favour of withholding:

The release of this type of information where buildings are situated, would increase the potential for:

- buildings to be targeted by squatters
- buildings to be targeted by criminals or terrorist's intent on hiding or depositing proceeds of crime or terrorist materials
- premises to be identified as short-term hiding places by criminals or terrorists
- premises to be targeted by vandals or street artists."

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.