

London Borough of Barnet,
2 Bristol Avenue
Colindale, NW9 4EW
21 September 2021
Our ref: 7617548

Thank you for your request received on 23 August 2021, for the following information:

Please send me:

- 1. how many housing benefit claims were made in 2019/2020 and 2021**
- 2. How many overpayments were made in 2019/2020/2021**
- 3. How many under payment were made in 2019/2020 and 2021**
- 4. How many people are in receipt of Housing Benefit**
- 5. How much was lost or is the council chasing in relation to fraudulent claims**

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

Response

I can confirm that the council holds the information you requested. However we are withholding the information because we consider that the following exemption applies to it.

Refusal Notice

S12 - Cost limit (Exceeds Appropriate Limit)

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 Regulation 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 in excess of 1000 hours to comply with your request. Our calculation is as follows:

- how many housing benefit claims were made in 2019/2020 and 2021**

Application records do not distinguish between Housing benefit or Council tax support as the same form is used for both. Manual checking would be needed to identify the number of housing benefit claims received.

It is estimated it would take 2 minutes to check each application received to see if a claim for benefit was made. In August 2021 there were 585 applications received. $585 \times 2 / 60 = 19.5$ hours.

This would need to be repeated for each month requested - $19.5 \times 36 = 702$ hours

- ***How many overpayments were made in 2019/2020/2021***

Our reporting tool does not report the number of overpayments created. Instead it lists individual overpayment adjustments. In most cases an overpayment is made up of several adjustments for different periods and rates.

To determine the number of overpayments, the daily adjustment reports would need to be checked, grouped by claim number and filtered to distinguish between Housing benefit overpayments and Council tax support.

On the 20.09.21 adjustment report there were 410 overpayment adjustments. It took approximately 10 minutes to group by claim and benefit type. Approximately 300 daily adjustment reports are run each year. $300 \times 10 / 60 = 50$ hours.

50×3 years = 150 Hours

- ***How many under payment were made in 2019/2020 and 2021***

Underpayment adjustment reports are produced daily, with the exception of Sundays. These list the total number of adjustments. To determine the number of underpayments (claims affected), adjustments need to be grouped and filtered between housing benefit and council tax support. It has taken me approximately 10 minutes to filter the results. For the 20.09.21 there were 302 underpayment adjustments made across 138 claims. Of these underpayments of housing benefits were made.

There are approximately 300 of these daily adjustment reports produced each year. Therefore it would take approximate 50 hours to collated the information for each financial year - $300 \times 10 / 60 = 50$ hours.

50×3 years = 150 hours

- ***How many people are in receipt of Housing Benefit***

18,728

- ***How much was lost or is the council chasing in relation to fraudulent claims***

The category of overpayment is not itemised on aged debt analysis reports, or the Housing Benefit Debt recovery reports that are returned to the DWP. Therefore the only way to identify total amount of overpayments caused by fraud would be check the daily adjustment reports. On the 20.09.21 adjustment report there were 410 overpayment adjustments. It took approximately 12 minutes to check this report for fraudulent overpayments, therefore it is estimated it will take 60 hours to provide this information for one year. $300 \times 12 / 60 = 60$ hours.

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Advice and Assistance

Instead of the total number of HB claims made, we could provide you with the number of claims assessed. We could also provide the total amount of HB overpayments outstanding for the years requested instead of the actual number of overpayments.

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 Records & Information Management Service, Assurance Group, 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.