

Request

I am writing to request information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. I am hoping to obtain information about the policy of Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council on supporting vulnerable customers. I would like to request the following information:

What specific procedure does your council operate to identify and prevent vulnerable customers, who may be at risk of homelessness, from being sent to external enforcement agents for Council Tax arrears, which in turn will increase debt and could exacerbate their risk of homelessness?

Response

Although we have a legal duty and responsibility to all residents and businesses of the borough to ensure that Council Tax due is paid promptly, our aim is to ensure money owed is collected adopting a consistent, fair, and asset-based approach to debt collection.

The billing and recovery of Council Tax is largely prescribed by legislation and regulations, however we have introduced a Collections Welfare Framework to run alongside the prescribed requirements as our local approach to maximise support for our residents.

This includes issuing additional non-statutory letters which include initial support letters, non-statutory reminders and pre summons letters. We also utilise other methods of contact including texts and outbound calling.

The aim is to engage with customers who have missed a payment as early as possible before any statutory recovery letters commence. If a customer engages, this allows us to explore an affordable sustainable arrangement to prevent further arrears and recovery action.

We take a holistic approach to offer support, to maximise a customer's income and enable payment. To enable this, we work collaboratively with our Welfare and Assessments teams to ensure customers are in receipt of any benefits, reductions, discounts, or exemptions they may be entitled to, all designed at preventing the need for recovery action.

If a customer does not engage with us, we also have an internal enforcement team who will further attempt engagement to offer support by personal property visit with a view to exploring personal circumstances, identifying any vulnerabilities and agreeing affordable repayment arrangements with customers.

Other options of recovery including deductions and attachments are always the preferential course of action where deemed necessary with the aim of preventing further fees and minimising the need for accounts to be passed to external enforcement agents.