

Request

I am writing to request information regarding housing benefit payments in respect of exempt accommodation (also known as supported exempt accommodation) under the Freedom of Information Act.

All information is to be supplied in the format of the Excel spreadsheet in the below Google Drive link. Sheets filled with dummy example data are included in the template to show how I would like the data presented.

Link: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1GLTyeDDqfVg-K4aj6jruHwe3yInGpQyO>

The following information is to be provided on the sheet labelled Exempt accommodation full data.

- Anonymised details for each individual paid housing benefit claim in respect of exempt accommodation by Wigan Metropolitan Borough from January 1, 2017 (or a more recent date if information this far back is unobtainable under FOI cost and time limit rules) to December 31, 2023.
- This information can be provided on a weekly (e.g. Dec 18 – 24 2023) or monthly (e.g. December 2023) basis, whatever is simplest to compile.
- Data should include the following details of the claim:

Unique (anonymised) claimant ID; Local authority; Exempt accommodation provider; Payment period the data entry refers to (weekly or monthly, etc whichever is simplest. E.g. Dec 18 – 24 2023 or December 2023); Total amount paid in Housing Benefit for supported exempt accommodation in the above period (direct to landlord or provider); Total amount paid in Housing Benefit for supported exempt accommodation in period (to claimant); Number of bedrooms in the claim; Type of supported exempt accommodation (if known) (e.g. Mother and baby unit; emergency homeless accommodation).

- Data should include the following details of the property attached to the claim:

*Unique (anonymised) property ID.; Approximate anonymised location (e.g. ward); Property type (e.g. apartment, terrace house, etc.); Number of bedrooms in the property in period (NB: If this could lead to potentially identifiable data, for example if there are only a small number supported exempt accommodations with exactly 10 rooms, then please exclude this information and mark with *).*

If it is not possible to provide information to the above level of detail, please instead provide the following summary information, on the sheet Summary data by provider:

- Data for each exempt accommodation provider on how many claims are paid and how much money over a payment period by Wigan Metropolitan Borough from January 1, 2017 (or a more recent date if information this far back is unobtainable under FOI cost and time limit rules) to December 31, 2023.
- This information can be provided on a weekly (e.g. Dec 18 – 24 2023) or monthly (e.g. December 2023) basis, whatever is simplest to compile.
- Data should include the following details:

Local Authority; Exempt accommodation provider; Payment period (week and year or month and year, whichever is simplest); Number of Housing Benefit claims for supported exempt accommodation; Total amount paid in Housing Benefit for supported exempt accommodation in period (direct to landlord or provider); Total amount paid in Housing Benefit for supported exempt accommodation in period (to claimant).

Response

We do hold the information requested, but we are unable to provide the level of detail requested due to the limitations in our reporting tool. Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA) relieves a public authority from the obligation to comply with a request for information where the estimated time required to locate, review and extract the information exceeds a certain threshold set out in Regulations.

The Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004 (SI 2004/3244) set out the rules in relation to the cost limit (otherwise called the "appropriate limit"). These Regulations are published by the Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI) and are viewable on their web site from this link: http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2004/uksi_20043244_en.pdf

The Regulations set out the cost limit for Government departments and for other public authorities. For local government, Regulation 3 states that the cost limit is £450 and Regulation 4(4) states that the prescribed hourly rate is £25. Regulation 4(4) further provides that where the local authority estimates the time taken to gather the information would exceed this limit (which based on the prescribed hourly rate, equates to 18 officer hours), it may refuse the request under section 12 of FoIA.

I am satisfied the cost limit applies to your request and will explain why this is the case.

The level of detail required would mean manually interrogating each claim (1638) which would take in excess of 18 hours. Even if we only took 5 minutes to interrogate each claim, that would take over 136 hours.

We have provided below a summary of our exempt accommodation caseload including volumes and weekly entitlement amounts. This does not include provider details as this would also require interrogation of all the claims. As this summary does not fit your Excel template, we are including it in the body of this response.

Total number of supported exempt accommodation HB claims	1638 current caseload
Weekly current payment on live claims	£521,820.57
Average current weekly live claims payment	£318.57 per claim