



EMPTY PROPERTIES – RATES, SECURITY, REGENERATION

Section 1: Empty Business Rates Relief

1. A list of all properties that are currently in receipt of or have received empty business rates relief in the past six months.

For each property, please include:

- The address of the property (this can be removed if a security concern)
- The type or classification of property (e.g., retail, office, industrial, etc.)
- The name of the owner
- The date the relief started and ended (if applicable)

Please find attached an excel spreadsheet with the address and name of the owner withheld.

Owing to constraints in retrieving historical Business Rates data, this report presents the current position as of 21 November 2025.

The name of the owner has been withheld under section 41 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000

Section 41 applies to information provided in confidence.

This information is exempt under section 41 because we consider that the common law principle of taxpayer confidentiality applies.

Section 41, relates to information provided in confidence and states:

Information is exempt information if-

- a. it was obtained by the public authority from any other person (including another public authority), and
- b. the disclosure of the information to the public (otherwise than under this Act) by the public authority holding it would constitute a breach of confidence actionable by that or any other person.

Section 41(1)(a) requires that the information in question was obtained from any other person. The information in question has been obtained by us from owners, ratepayers and third-party companies/agents, therefore we consider this part of the exemption satisfied.

Section 41(1)(b) requires the disclosure by us to constitute an actionable breach of confidence. So, the information must have the necessary quality of confidence, and in our opinion it does. It is recognised in English law that an important duty of confidentiality is owed to tax and rate payers.

This is what is known as "taxpayer confidentiality". This is a long-established principle of common law, protecting taxpayers' affairs against disclosure to the public. I am satisfied that the requested information is not trivial, nor is it available by any other means and if we were to disclose the requested information business ratepayers/their representatives could issue legal proceedings against us.

The public interest test reasons for disclosure:

Openness and transparency in relation to procedures and decision making of public authorities and collection of taxes and management of finances.

Reasons against disclosure:

Remain compliant with necessary regulations - the common law principle of tax-payer confidentiality applies to this data.

Protect the public purse from legal claims against it, in relation to providing confidential information. The public interest defence (in any future legal proceedings) in providing the list of business rates information you have requested would likely fail thus it is determined, any prospective court action against the council may succeed (opening it up to claims for costs), this is in accordance with "Westminster City Council v ICO and Gavin Chait, EA/2018/0033, 2nd December and Sheffield City Council v ICO and Gavin Chait, EA/2018/0055, 16th December.

Commercial impact on the business rates account holder, release of this data would likely constitute a breach of confidence as it could damage the individual's/organisation's competitive position, or ability to compete, as disclosure would reveal information that would assist competitors and negatively impact on the confider's relationship with the authority, potentially hindering future investment in the borough.

We conclude that for the reasons stated above, the public interest test for withholding this data outweighs the interest for its release therefore this information is being withheld from disclosure.

The address of the empty properties has been withheld as this information is considered exempt under section 31 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

The information you have requested is exempt from disclosure under section 31 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 on the grounds that disclosure of this information would prejudice the prevention and detection of crime.

Disclosure of this information would involve releasing the addresses of empty properties which could make the properties more vulnerable to criminal and anti-social activities. In particular, the Council believes that disclosure of the information could have the following effects:

Disclosure would provide a ready-made list of empty properties which could be used by criminals who could target empty properties to commit property crimes and fraud. Release of information which is not easily available

at present would better enable a fraudster to persuade the council that they were the ratepayer. It would entail significant time and expense for the Council to alter its security system to protect against any potential fraud.

Disclosure of the information would make it easier for criminals to target empty properties in which waste could be dumped.

Release of information could be used to locate potential venues for illegal raves, construction of cannabis farms or other associated crimes such as criminal damage in accessing the property, further drug offences and public order offences.

A list of empty properties could be used by urban explorers to locate new properties to explore and could lead to an increase in crimes associated with urban exploring such as criminal damage to gain entry.

Disclosure of a list of empty properties may lead to an increase in crimes such as criminal damage, arson and anti-social behaviour, which are often associated with squatting.

There is a real and significant risk that fraud would be made easier by the release of this information and that the provision of a ready-made list of empty properties makes it easier for criminals to identify targets for the crimes listed above. Therefore, disclosure would be likely to prejudice the prevention of crime.

This is a qualified exemption and requires a public interest test to consider whether the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in the disclosure of the information.

Public interest arguments in favour of disclosing the information:

Openness and transparency in relation to procedures and decision making of public authorities and collection of taxes and management of finances.

Public interest arguments in favour of maintaining the exemption:

The release of this information would make it much easier for a fraudster to pose as an account holder and bypass the Council's security systems.

Disclosure would also facilitate a fraudster posing as the Council to obtain confidential information from a ratepayer.

Fraud is a real and current problem and the consequences to the Council of a loss of a significant sum of public money are serious.

	<p>Urban exploring and illegal raves are a current problem in Greater Manchester and disclosure could contribute to this problem.</p> <p>Disclosure may lead to an increase in other property crimes such as criminal damage, arson and anti-social behaviour.</p> <p>Tackling issues like these would involve significant public expense and it is in the public interest to protect property and to ensure that public resources are used efficiently.</p> <p>There is also a compelling public interest in avoiding personal distress to the direct victims of the crime and to those in the wider neighbourhood who may be affected.</p> <p>On balance, the Council believes that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.</p>
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Section 2: Double Council Tax Charges for Empty Properties

<p>1. A list of all companies or individuals that have been charged a council tax premium (i.e., double council tax or an increased charge) due to the property being empty in the past 12 months.</p> <p>For each case, please include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The name of the liable party • The postcode of the property • The date the premium was applied 	<p>Please find attached a spreadsheet with the name of the liable party and part of the post code withheld from disclosure.</p> <p>Your request for the name of the liable party has been refused as this data is considered exempt from disclosure under section 40 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.</p> <p>The full post code has been withheld as we consider this exempt under section 31 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.</p> <p>The Council maintains that the information requested is exempt from disclosure under Section 31 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, on the grounds that disclosure would be likely to prejudice the prevention and detection of crime. This exemption applies because releasing the full post code of properties attracting a Council Tax Empty Property Premium would significantly increase the risk of criminal and anti-social activities.</p> <p>Providing a list of empty domestic properties would create a ready-made resource for individuals intent on committing crimes. The Council considers that disclosure could have the following effects.</p> <p>Empty homes are prime targets for burglary, theft of fixtures, and vandalism. Disclosure would make it easier for offenders to identify vulnerable properties.</p> <p>Empty domestic properties are often targeted for squatting, which can lead to criminal damage, arson, and anti-social behaviour.</p>
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Empty homes can be used for drug cultivation (e.g., cannabis farms), illegal raves, or other criminal enterprises, often involving forced entry and further offences.

Release of addresses could enable fraudsters to impersonate property owners or tenants, bypassing Council security checks and potentially claiming benefits or refunds unlawfully.

Publicising empty homes could encourage trespass and criminal damage associated with urban exploration.

These risks are real and significant, not speculative. Greater Manchester has experienced issues with illegal raves, squatting, and property-related crime, and disclosure would exacerbate these problems.

Section 31 is a qualified exemption, so the Council has considered whether the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

Public interest arguments in favour of disclosing the information:

Promotes openness and transparency in Council decision-making.

Enables public scrutiny of how the Council manages housing stock and addresses long-term vacancies.

Supports research into housing policy and empty property reuse.

Public interest arguments in favour of maintaining the exemption:

Disclosure would make it substantially easier for criminals to target empty homes, increasing burglary, arson, and anti-social behaviour.

Fraud is a current and serious problem; disclosure would facilitate impersonation of property owners and compromise Council security systems.

Crime prevention and protection of public resources are strong public interest factors.

Victims of crime and neighbouring residents would suffer distress and harm.

Tackling the consequences of increased crime would involve significant public expense.

On balance, the Council concludes that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

	<p>While full post codes cannot be provided, the Council can consider releasing aggregated data, such as:</p> <p>Number of long-term empty domestic properties by ward or postcode sector.</p> <p>Trends in empty property numbers over time.</p> <p>This approach supports transparency without compromising crime prevention.</p>
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Section 3: Property Guardian Companies & Vacant Property Management

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Selection Process: What is the process and criteria used by your organisation to select Site security or property guardian companies for managing vacant properties? 2. Current Providers: Which security companies are currently contracted or engaged by your organisation to protect your vacant property? 3. Tendering Schedule: When is the next tendering or procurement process scheduled for property guardian or other vacant property security services? 4. Decision Makers: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Who is responsible for selecting property guardian companies (please provide role/department name and email address)? b. Who oversees the management and security of vacant properties (role/department name and email address)? 	<p>Procurement and contract.</p> <p>VPS via security screens and alarms.</p> <p>Wigan Council has a dedicated Void/Vacant Property Security Contract (2023-2028)</p> <p>4a & b) Aidan Thatcher – Director Place Aidan.thatcher@wigan.gov.uk</p>
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Section 4: Vacant or Empty Sites (All Property Types)

<p>1. Current and Predicted Vacant Sites:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">How many vacant or empty sites does your organisation currently own or manage?How many sites are predicted to remain vacant or empty for one month or longer?How many operational sites are scheduled to close in the next year, what are their addresses and to which team will they be given to manage? <p>2. Costs Associated with Vacant Sites:</p> <p>Please provide annual spend on the management of vacant/empty sites, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Business ratesUtilities (electricity, water, gas)Security (CCTV, patrols, fencing, etc.)Maintenance and repairsAny other associated costs <p>3. Policy on Vacant Properties:</p> <p>Please provide a copy of your organisation's policy or guidelines regarding the management, use, or disposal of vacant/void properties.</p>	<p>Private Sector Team</p> <p>Q1a) We currently manage two empty properties (through our Ethical Lettings Agency)</p> <p>b) Zero, as we expect these properties to be occupied within a month.</p> <p>Void Team – Housing Services</p> <p>1a) at the end of q2 we had 370 void properties</p> <p>1b) current turnaround time on average is 32 days. We currently have 171 void properties with 21 of those scheduled to be completed within 1 month turnaround.</p> <p>1c) N/A</p> <p>2) Relating to Housing Services – Void properties.</p> <p>Utilities (electricity, water, gas)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Electricity is credited via an agreement with British Gas with a 90-day void period of standing charge applied. Contractors use battery operated devices where possible.Gas – zero as it is capped during the void process. <p>Security – Screens £34,973.96</p> <p>Maintenance and repairs – void repair costs differ between each address subject to the work required.</p> <p>Average void spend based on current voids are: Average cost per void: £10,801.60</p> <p>Minimum: £590.08</p> <p>Maximum: £30,629.19</p> <p><i>Costs reflect works required to meet lettable standards; figures exclude variations or unexpected works.</i></p> <p>3)</p> <p>Void Property Management</p> <p>Wigan Council operates a Void Lettable Standard, ensuring that all council homes are safe, functional, and clean before re-letting.</p> <p><u>Housing standards for tenants</u></p> <p>2. Use of Void Properties</p> <p>Some voids may be temporarily used for:</p> <p>Decanting tenants during major works.</p> <p>Temporary accommodation for homeless applicants.</p> <p>3. Disposal or Long-Term Empty Homes</p> <p>Wigan Council has an Empty Homes Strategy to bring long-term vacant properties back into use:</p> <p>Options for owners: Occupy, rent via the Council's Ethical Lettings Agency, or sell.</p> <p>Financial support: Empty Home Investment Scheme offers up to £25,000 for renovation, with council leasing for affordable housing.</p>
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	<p>Enforcement powers: Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO), enforced sale, and Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO) for properties causing issues.</p> <p>Empty Homes Strategy - Graphic Design AM edits</p>
<h3>Section 5: Regeneration</h3>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The name, job title, and contact details (email and/or phone number) of the director or lead officer responsible for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regeneration • Property • Housing 2. A list of housing estates or properties within your organisation that are planned for regeneration or redevelopment within the next ten years. <p>For each estate or property, please include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The name and location of the estate or property • The estimated timeline for regeneration or redevelopment • The current stage of planning or consultation (e.g., pre-consultation, planning application submitted, etc.) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aidan Thatcher, Director of Place Aidan.Thatcher@wigan.gov.uk has lead responsibility over regeneration, property and housing. 2. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name: 48-50 King Street (Royal Court Theatre), Wigan • Timeline: 3-5 years • Stage: feasibility and concept stage (pre-planning)