CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
C O U N C I L

Response to Request for Information

Reference   FOI 000988
Date   21 March 2017

Estates of Dead People

Request:
I am writing to you to request the following information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000:

1.   How much money is owed to the council in the estates of people who have died before they can pay back their debts?
    - 506 council tax accounts where the debtor has deceased. The total debt outstanding in respect of these accounts stands at £498,288.19.
    - 2 business rates accounts where the debtor has deceased. The total debt outstanding on these accounts is £8,226.30
    - 517 sundry debt accounts where the debtor has deceased. The total debt outstanding on these accounts is £2,671,164.60

2.   How does the council go about collecting debts from the estates of dead people - i.e do you use private contractors?
    We issue demands and communicate with the personal representatives of the deceased's estate, when known, to arrange settlement and/or solicitors dealing with the estate, actively pursuing repayment of the amounts due using all legislative provisions available.

3.   How much money has the council collected from the estates of dead people over the last five years, broken down into individual years?
    Your request for information has now been considered. Unfortunately City of Wolverhampton Council cannot supply the information you requested for the reasons set out below. Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires City of Wolverhampton Council, when refusing to provide such information (because the information is exempt) to provide you, the applicant with a notice which:
    (a)   states the fact,
    (b)   specifies the exemption in question and
    (c)   states (if that would not otherwise be apparent) why the exemption applies:

    In relation to your particular request, the following exemption applies:

    Section 12 - Exemption where cost of compliance exceeds appropriate limit

We can confirm that the Council holds information falling within the description specified in your request. However, Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 allows a public authority to refuse a request if the cost of providing the information to the applicant would exceed the 'appropriate limit' as defined by the Freedom of Information.

The Regulations provide that the appropriate limit to be applied to requests received by local authorities is £450 (equivalent to 18 hours of work). In estimating the cost of complying with a request for information, an authority can only take into account any reasonable costs incurred in:

(a)   Determining whether it holds the information,
(b)   Locating the information, or a document which may contain the information,
(c)   Retrieving the information, or a document which may contain the information,
and
(d)   Extracting the information from a document containing it.

For the purposes of the estimate the costs of performing these activities should
be estimated at a rate of £25 per hour.

The information appertaining to amount of money the Council has collected from the estates of dead people over the last five years, broken down into individual years is not easily accessible and as such this information is not held as a distinct set able to be retrieved or reported on. We do not hold a date of death in our records and so cannot determine the value of payments received after a debtor dies.

To get the information would require a full scale check into each of the above accounts. This would be a manual exercise and as such we believe that the aggregated time it would take to collate the information would be in excess of 18 hours (equivalent to a notional cost of £450) as we estimate this would take 3-4 minutes per account to determine, retrieve and extract the requested information.

4.   What are the main types of debt that are left unpaid?
The main types of debt are in respect of residential and domiciliary care.

Please note: the above is in respect of amounts that are held within the sundry debtor, council tax and business rate systems, where it is known that the customer has died: