

Archived: 18 February 2025 09:46:58

From: [FOI Responses](#)

Importance: Normal

Sensitivity: None

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request dated 2nd December 2024 for information about business rates credits. Please find below City of Doncaster Council's responses to the questions you have raised.

Request:

"Please can you email me a list of December or Q3 (most current) business rates credits you currently hold for businesses"

Response:

This information is exempt from disclosure under Section 31(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 31 exempts information from the right of access under the Freedom of Information Act if disclosure would prejudice the prevention or detection of crime.

We consider that the disclosure of the information would be likely to prejudice the prevention of crime as it is believed potential fraudsters to use the information to identify business entities which were entitled to claim credits on their accounts. Once such a business had been identified, there would be a number of avenues open to the fraudsters to seek to obtain funds.

As Section 31 is a qualified exemption, the Council is obliged to consider whether disclosure of the information would be in the public interest before refusing to supply the information. Therefore the Council has taken the following factors into account:

Factors for disclosing information:

Withholding the information could be perceived as the council attempting to retain monies that belong to the public

- It is in the public interest to be open and transparent about our use of public funds
- It is also in the public interest to provide some transparency regarding the records we hold in respect of the administration of business rates. This could be of interest to the minority of people who are due a refund, but have somehow failed to receive the notifications that money is due to them.

Factors in favour of withholding:

- There is a public interest in ensuring that monies from the public purse, such as rebates on business accounts, are not fraudulently claimed and also a public interest in not making it easier for fraud to be committed
- Our current verification procedure for refund claims is simple and cost effective. Disclosure of the requested information would result in additional verification processes needing to be implemented, at additional cost to the public which appeared disproportionate to the benefits that would accrue from disclosure. The additional verification procedures would also be likely to slow the verification process, resulting in detriment to the genuine ratepayer which would be contrary to the public interest
- In relation to any new verification processes that might be needed, these would be likely to require the production of additional documents by those claiming a refund which would place a new administrative burden on the majority of those legitimate claimants that did not currently exist. This would be compounded by the fact that the level of scrutiny of those documents would be higher than at present, given the increased suspicion that some of the claims (and associated documents) might well be fraudulent. The result would be that a new verification process would be likely to slow the rate at which credit balance claims could be considered and refunded, causing delay in all refunds and the

likelihood of complaints, which would further burden our limited resources

- Disclosure of the requested information would result in the need to implement disproportionate steps and additional expense to the public purse to counter an increased fraud risk that does not exist at present
- The cost consequences of a successful fraudulent claim would:
 - have incurred the cost of paying out to the fraudster;
 - remain liable to the legitimate rate payer for an equivalent amount, raising the prospect of paying out twice; and
 - be faced with the cost (legal and incurrance of internal management time) of seeking to recover the funds wrongly paid to the fraudster.

It would not be in the public interest to expose it to such potential costs and expenses, given that they would be funded from the public purse.

I hope that this information is useful to you.

The City of Doncaster Council estimates that it has cost £49.00 to respond to this request for information.

Reviewing any decisions made:

If you are not happy with this reply you can ask us to review our response. To do this write to us within 40 working days of receiving your response at the address below or email FOIAppeals@doncaster.gov.uk

If you do not agree with the review decision you can apply to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) for a decision about our compliance or otherwise with the Freedom of Information legislation. Contact details for the ICO are: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. www.ico.org.uk Telephone 0303 123 1113.

Yours sincerely,

Sophie Ormshaw

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Sent: Monday, December 2, 2024 6:58 PM

Subject: December BUSINESS RATES CREDITS

Caution! This message was sent from outside your organization.

[Allow sender](#)

Dear FOI Team,

Please can you email me a list of December or Q3 (most current) business rates credits you currently hold for businesses including:

- " The company name for whom the credit exists
- " The start date of the business rates account
- " If the account is still live or the date it ended
- " The full property address of the property with the credit on
- " The date / year of when the credit was created
- " The full amount of credit you hold for the business
- " The reason for the credit e.g., retail relief, overpayment

If you publish credits online, but the information has not been updated on time, please advise when this information will be updated.

Thanks in advance!

