

15 November 2024

Our Ref: FOI 546

Request

We received your request on 09 October 2024 for the following information:

I am writing to request information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 regarding NIHE's expenditure on hotel accommodation for homelessness and refugee support over the last 12 months.

Please provide the following details:

- Total expenditure on hotel accommodation for homelessness and refugee-related purposes during the specified period.*
- Number of hotel nights booked for individuals experiencing homelessness and/or refugees.*
- A list of hotels where bookings were made, along with the respective amounts spent at each hotel.*

I would appreciate it if the information could be provided in a spreadsheet format, with the breakdown by month if available. Should any part of my request be unclear or require further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I understand that you are required to respond to this request within 20 working days, as per the provisions of the FOI Act.

Your request has been handled under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

Our response

Total expenditure on hotel accommodation for homelessness and refugee-related purposes during the specified period.

The Housing Executive records expenditure on hotels within a wider Non-Standard Temporary Accommodation category which includes other types of non-standard accommodation. Expenditure on hotel costs are not specifically recorded.

The estimated total spend on non-standard temporary accommodation for November 2023 to October 2024 is £15,289,966. The Housing Executive does not record expenditure specifically for refugee-related purposes.

Number of hotel nights booked for individuals experiencing homelessness and/or refugees.

The Housing Executive does not record the number of non-standard temporary accommodation beds occupied and instead provides data on the number of placements provided.

The Housing Executive is unable to provide any information on placements beyond 30th June 2024 as this is part of the housing and homelessness information which will be published by the Department for Communities in due course. Based on a live database extracted on 14th November 2024, and therefore not consistent with published data, there was a total of 11,730 placements 5,093 placements in non-standard temporary accommodation with 676 of these placements for households where the established reason for homelessness was linked to refugee status.

A list of hotels where bookings were made, along with the respective amounts spent at each hotel.

We are unable to provide a list of hotels where bookings were made. Although the Housing Executive does hold this information, this is considered to be exempt under FOIA Section 38 which states that:

Information is exempt information if its disclosure under this Act would, or would be likely to (a) endanger the physical or mental health of any individual, or (b) endanger the safety of any individual.

It is important to bear in mind that, information released under the FOI Act is considered to be disclosure to the world at large. There is a need to avoid the risk of endangerment which would be likely to occur if this information were to be placed into the public domain.

Indeed, the ICO recognises this risk in its guidance, which specifically mentions an example of this exemption being applicable, in relation to information “relating to the accommodation of individuals, or groups of individuals, where disclosure could lead to them being threatened or harassed.”

Such incidents have been well publicised by the media during recent times.

As this is a qualified exemption, we have considered the public interest test.

Public interest factors in favour of disclosure include:

- Promoting openness and transparency.

Public interest factors in favour of maintaining the exemption include:

- Damage that would likely be caused to community relations;
- Avoiding any increase to tension in the community which would adversely affect public safety; and
- Strong public interest in protecting individuals, or groups of individuals from being threatened or harassed.

Outcome of the public interest test:

In all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information, due to the strong public interest in protecting individuals, or groups of individuals from being threatened or harassed.

This concludes our response.