

Local Government Transparency Code 2015¹

Frequently Asked Questions

General questions

Q: Why have you re-issued the Code? And why have you added a new dataset to the mandatory section?

The Government believes that in principle all data held and managed by local authorities should be made available to local people. The Government believes that local people are interested in how their authority manages the social housing assets they hold. The move will give people the information they need to ask questions of how their council is managing stock to ensure this is put to best use, including considering whether higher value, vacant properties could be used to fund the building of new homes and reduce waiting times.

The additional mandatory requirement do not represent an onerous burden for local housing authorities as it builds on the existing statutory duty to account separately for the housing stock they hold under their Housing Revenue Account and to carry a full revaluation of their stock every five years. While councils are not currently required to publish stock valuations, local authority assets, with an up to date valuation, are included in the disclosures required by the Housing Revenue Account (Accounting Practices) Directions 2011.

We have also issued this as one consolidated Code to make it easier for local authorities and other interested parties to see what they should publish, rather than having two overlapping Codes.

Q: What if my authority does not have responsibility for certain functions and, therefore, does not hold the relevant data-sets?

Some authorities will not have responsibility for particular functions and so will not have to publish data for any of those functions specified in the Code. For example, the new requirement on social housing assets value will apply only to stock holding local authorities in relation to the valuation of their social housing stock accounted for within their Housing Revenue Account.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-transparency-code-2015>

Questions related to social housing asset value data

This section covers questions about information to be published on local housing authority' social housing assets (covered by paragraphs 38 to 41 of the Code).

Q: When do local housing authorities have to meet their legal obligations under the Code in relation to the value of their social housing assets?

The first set of annual data must be published no later than 1 September 2015 (based on their most up to date valuation data available at the time of the publication of the information). The next publication should then take place in April 2016 and after than, annually, every April

Q: Under these plans, local housing authorities will be required to publish data on an annual basis. Does this mean that councils will need to carry out valuations every year?

No, this is not intended to change the current timings for councils to undertake a full revaluation of their stock, which is required to be carried out every five years. However, when local housing authorities publish valuation data pursuant to the requirements in the code they should publish the most up to date valuation available at the time of publication.

Q: The Code requires local housing authorities to publish valuations at postal sector level. How is Government planning to manage the risk of data becoming disclosive?

The code includes a protocol to ensure that individual property values are not disclosed.

The code requires that valuation data be published at postal sector level (e.g. PO1 2**), as on average this contains around 2,500 households which should be large enough to prevent identification of personal information. However, in particular areas where the postcode sector gives a household number below 2,500, we will propose the postcode level be set higher, that is at postcode district level (e.g. PO1 ***), to mitigate the possibility of data becoming disclosive.

In addition, authorities should make the following adjustment prior to publishing the valuation information in order to mitigate the possibility of identifying individual properties, i.e.

- Step 1 – for any given postcode sector where the number of occupied social housing properties in any valuation band is less than a threshold of '10': authorities should merge that particular cell with the next lowest valuation band, and so on until the resultant merged cells contain, at least '10' occupied social housing properties. However, if continued repetition of step 1 leads to the number of valuation bands applied to that postcode

sector falling below the proposed minimum threshold of valuation bands as set out in paragraph 24: authorities should then apply step 2.

- Step 2 – authorities should merge the original (non-merged) valuation data for the relevant postcode sector with the valuation data with any adjoining postcode sectors which show the lowest number of socially rented properties. Then apply Step 1.

Q: Are local authorities free to publish address data?

Local Authorities can publish address data as part of their core business where this information is routinely held on asset registers and is only being refreshed or checked against the Postcode Address File (PAF). If the data has been created from a third party data set such as PAF or an Ordnance Survey addressing product then Local Authorities need to check the terms of use with the third party.

Q: Would information on individual property valuations be published?

No, the published valuations should not indicate individual property valuations.

Q: Should local housing authorities publish the value of the land and other assets they hold under their Housing Revenue Account?

Local housing authorities do not have to publish any information regarding the value of their land and other building assets held under their Housing Revenue Accounts. Also excluded from this requirement are other residential tenanted properties that the local authority may hold within their General Fund.