

Wigan Council use NEXUS property finder service to maximise tax base

Wigan Council is the second biggest borough in Greater Manchester and is responsible for collecting housing rent for around 23,000 properties, council tax for 150,000 properties and business rates for approximately 10,000 properties. Bordering St Helens, Salford and Chorley they have a lot of ground to cover in order to maximise their tax base and keep on top of collections.

Covering more ground to identify missing properties

The COVID-19 pandemic brought its own set of challenges for the Council and the Collections team took the opportunity when recovery was paused for a period of time, to review their overall processes and systems. This included multi-skilling their team and setting up a dedicated team to tackle new liabilities. This had been done historically but not with the same level of focus or dedicated resource to pursue new liabilities. Looking at new tools and identifying how additional visits could be scheduled and more ground covered to assist with New Homes Bonus, NEXUS the missing property locator solution from Destin Solutions was identified as a tool that could assist. This was following attendance by Wigan Council representatives at an online webinar showcasing the key features and benefits of the NEXUS solution.

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Jade Turner,
Assistant Business Partner - Collections,
Wigan Council

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Wigan Council Collections & Revenue Team Members

Getting properties into taxation sooner

Jade Turner, Assistant Business Partner in Collections from Wigan Council comments “Using the NEXUS Managed Service solution, we are now able to more quickly identify properties not currently being taxed, bill them and generate more revenue to help fund much needed vital services. We are effectively able to balance our bands with the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) and have a good practice process in place for audit purposes.”

Finding ‘under the radar’ properties

Jade goes on to say “Our goal is to find as many council tax and NNDR properties as we can and bill them as quickly as we can. We chose NEXUS because operationally it can cover a vast area, we are limited in how many boots we can physically get on the ground, this approach helps us find properties that otherwise may not have appeared on our radar. We've had the system in place for a year now, it is working for us and after a financial viability study we are renewing for another year.”

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Properties being uncovered in the Wigan area are typically a mixture of new build domestic properties and commercial properties built on farmland which to date had not yet been identified and in some cases were not obviously viewed from the road. NEXUS has also been instrumental in finding domestic and non-domestic properties that have been in existence for a number of years and which have never been entered on the rating or banding list and until now were not liable to pay taxes.



Why a Managed Service approach made sense

Wigan Council decided to opt for the NEXUS Managed Service option because the primary focus of the team is on the collections and inspections themselves. Resource is always an issue with under-funded Councils and income collection is the primary goal. The NEXUS Managed Service provides a simple monthly report of properties with enough detailed information such as; google map images, data from online property resources and weblinks to possible businesses, providing the evidence to back up and support initial findings.

Once these reports are received, they are typically internally logged and then passed onto Inspectors to review and verify, in some cases with a physical visit if required. Information is cross referenced by speaking to their planning team and looking on Geographical Information Systems and once verified a Billing Authority Report is generated internally and sent to the VOA. The VOA then typically determine how far that property will be backdated to in terms of billing.

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In terms of council tax this can generally only go back as far as 6 years due to liability orders for the enforcement of debt being fixed to this period.

The NEXUS success rate

NEXUS is all about finding those properties that have remained hidden and Jade goes on to note “We have had good outcomes on the vast majority of properties identified by NEXUS. It has really helped with our workload, feedback internally from Inspectors has been great, they've found it really helpful. The evidence provided to back up and support what NEXUS has uncovered is very good.”

The NEXUS systems has uncovered around 40 properties in Wigan worth investigating so far, 23 of these have been council tax properties and 16 have been non-domestic rates and each month a review of the system uncovers more. Jade concludes “We have had an overall positive experience working with Destin Solutions, the team are quick to respond and the NEXUS solution is more than paying for itself.”