Local authorities are refusing to allow the public to access key information on how their money is being spent, according to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism.

The Bureau has been carrying out an investigation into the local government funding crisis, focusing on transparency and accessibility of data concerning local authority finances, over the past 18 months.

The Bureau said its results show that authorities are redacting documents to ‘protect commercial interests’, setting up council-owned companies that are removed from scrutiny and failing to respond to members of the public who try to exercise their right to inspect council finances.

When they initially sought information, Bureau local reporters discovered differences in the data released by councils, and major errors in the data published by the government about their financial sustainability. The reporters used the Freedom of Information Act to fill some of the gaps, but some councils failed to reply or redacted a lot of information from their responses.

In addition to using FOI, the Bureau sought to access information using the Local Audit and Accountability Act, which allows for inspections of local authority accounts and related documents during a set period each year. To test the law, volunteers submitted requests to nearly 50 local authorities asking to inspect documents—such as contracts and invoices—relating to the

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