

**Force Disclosure Unit**

Wiltshire Police HQ

London Road

Devizes

Wiltshire

SN10 2DN

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Date: 17 March 2022

Our ref: FOI 2022/031

Reply contact name is: Lloyd Tilbury

Dear,

I write in connection with your request for information dated 11<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

I am required by the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to handle all requests in a manner that is blind as to the identity and motives of the requestor. Any information released as a response to a request is regarded as being published and therefore in the public domain without caveat.

Your request for information has now been considered and I am able to respond as follows.

**You wrote**

For the questions below, please take the phrase "involving the Jehovah's Witness organisation" to mean that the accused and / or the victim were a Jehovah's Witness.

The questions are listed in order of priority, please answer as many as possible within the allotted time.

1. How many allegations of child sexual abuse and/or exploitation involving the Jehovah's Witness organisation has your force received over the past 10 years? Please provide an annual total for the number of alleged perpetrators/suspects of this crime notified to your force each year.
2. How many investigations into allegations of CSA/E involving the Jehovah's Witness organisation has your force carried OUT over the past 10 years? Please provide an annual total number of investigations for each year.
3. Please break down the total number of investigations by status. This can be 'live' or 'closed'. If 'closed', please specify the investigation outcome, including but not limited to: no further action (NFA) by police, NFA by the Crown Prosecution Service, caution, acquittal or conviction.
4. For all investigations which were closed following NFA by police, please state the reasons why no further action was taken (such as, suspect deceased; suspect not identified/traced; victim does not support police action; insufficient detail/evidence; and specifically, whether lack of cooperation from the Jehovah's Witness organisation was also a contributing factor.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

5. For all investigations of CSA/E involving the Jehovah's Witness organisation, please can you state whether a report of the alleged abuse was made within the Jehovah's Witness congregation/organisation before it was reported to the police? For example, the JW organisation may have disclosed to you internal documents they had in relation to a report of the alleged abuse.

Please can you carry out the steps outlined below:

A. Please ensure you have searched your crime reporting system in the last 10 years (01/01/2012 – 12/01/2022).

B. You can then choose to either search for all incidents coded as child sexual abuse/exploitation (CSA/E), or for all incidents recorded that have an opening code of 'Rape' or 'Sexual offense', and where the victim/s are recorded as being under 18 years of age. Please choose whichever is easiest within your own crime reporting system.

C. If this is an option, please filter these incidents (identified using steps A and B) to select only those where the (alleged) victim/perpetrator is recorded as having a religion of Jehovah's Witness.

D. Separately, please filter these incidents (identified using steps A and B) using a keyword search in the free text fields within the report (such as the crime summary and MO) for the following words/phrases: "Jehovah", "Jehovah's Witness", "Jehovah Witness" and/or "Kingdom Hall". You may need to re-run these searches in lower case if your search tool is case sensitive. You may then need to review these crimes manually to ensure relevance, but as the number of results produced will be very few, this should not be an issue.

E. At the very least, you could search relevant incidents (identified using steps A and B) using a keyword search "Jehovah" to ascertain whether your force holds any information related to my request, even if you later conclude that it would take too much time to manually review the resulting records. If you choose to refuse under S12 at this stage, please tell me how many records you have identified using this method, and how long you estimate it will take to review one record.

## **Response**

On reviewing your original Freedom of Information request and the response provided to you, I believe Section 12(1) was incorrectly applied. On reviewing your Internal Review request and the additional points provided, I can respond as follows.

Wiltshire Police can neither confirm nor deny that information is held relevant to your request as the duty in Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 does not apply by virtue of the following exemptions:

Section 30(3) – Investigations and Proceedings

Section 31(3) – Law Enforcement

Section 40(5) – Personal Information

## **Overall Harm in complying with Section 1(1)(a) – To confirm or not whether information is held**

Any release under the Freedom of Information Act is a disclosure to the world, not just to the individual making the request. To confirm or not that information is held pertinent to this request would reveal whether or not Wiltshire Police has received allegations of criminal offending by Jehovah's Witnesses.

Irrespective of what information is or is not held, to confirm whether or not Jehovah's Witnesses have been involved in criminality would undermine any ongoing investigations and reveal investigative activity.

In addition, the College of Policing APP Information Management module is a national standard adhered to by all police forces across England and Wales. Police information refers to all information obtained, recorded or processed for a policing purpose and includes information which is processed (known as data, including personal data) and information which has been subject to a process of evaluation (known as intelligence).

Confirmation or denial that information is held relevant to this request would undermine the APP for both Investigations and Information Management.

Finally, to confirm or deny whether information is held in this case has the potential to undermine the flow of information (intelligence) received from members of the public into the Police Service and relating to religions they may suspect of carrying out criminal offences. Consequently, this could lead to police officers having to be removed from their frontline duties in order to increase manpower on an investigation. Individuals may also be identified, or wrongly identified, as using the religion as a front to cover their offending behaviour.

## **Public Interest Test**

### **Section 30(3) – Investigations**

#### **Factors favouring complying with Section 1(1)(a)**

Confirming or denying whether information exists relevant to this request would lead to a better-informed general public by identifying that Wiltshire Police robustly investigate allegations made against religions. This fact alone may encourage individuals to provide intelligence in order to assist with investigations and would also promote public trust in providing transparency and demonstrating openness and accountability into police investigations.

#### **Factors against complying with Section 1(1)(a)**

Modern-day policing is intelligence led and Wiltshire Police at times shares information with other organisations and law enforcement agencies as part of their investigation process. To confirm or not whether an individual has been the subject of a criminal investigation could hinder the prevention and detection of crime as well as undermine the partnership approach to investigations and law enforcement.

### **Section 31 – Law Enforcement**

#### **Factors favouring complying with Section 1(1)(a)**

The public are entitled to know how public funds are spent and resources distributed within an area of policing, such as in this case, whether investigations into a named religion are undertaken.

Transparency would highlight how the police effectively monitor and deliver operational law enforcement in relation to criminal activity.

#### **Factors against complying with Section 1(1)(a)**

Confirming whether or not Wiltshire Police has investigated Jehovah's Witnesses for criminal offences would suggest that Wiltshire Police do not take their responsibility to protect confidential information provided to them by members of the public seriously and appropriately, ensuring the effective delivery of operational law enforcement.

In addition, Wiltshire Police has a duty of care to the community at large and public safety is of paramount importance. If a Freedom of Information disclosure revealed information, by citing an exemption, or stating no information held, which confirms a religion has been subject of a criminal investigation, it could lead to community unrest within the Jehovah's Witness community as well as the general public, if individuals identify or wrongly identify individuals they suspect are involved in criminality and using the religion as a front. Such actions may compromise public safety.

### **Balance Test**

The points above highlight the merits of confirming or denying that information pertinent to this request exists. The Police Service relies heavily on the public providing information to assist in criminal investigations and has a duty to protect and defend vulnerable individuals. The public has an expectation that any information they provide will be treated with confidence and in-line with the APPs mentioned within the Overall Harm. Anything which places that confidence at risk, no matter how generic, would undermine any trust or confidence individuals have in the Police Service.

In addition, the effective delivery of operational law enforcement takes priority and is at the forefront of Wiltshire Police to ensure the prevention and detection of crime is carried out and the effective apprehension and prosecution of offenders is maintained. This includes ensuring our relationships with other law enforcement agencies runs smoothly in the joint approach to any multi-agency investigations that may or may not take place.

Therefore, at this moment in time, it is our opinion that for these issues the balance test for confirming nor denying that information is held is not made out.

No inference can be taken from this refusal that information does or does not exist.

I am satisfied that all the relevant information has been passed to me and been considered in the light of your request within the time constraints applicable under the legislation.

Wiltshire Police would like to thank you for the interest that you have shown in the Force.

Yours sincerely,

**Lloyd Tilbury**  
**Principal Decision Maker**

Wiltshire Police offers a re-examination of your case under its review procedure.



## **Force Disclosure Unit**

Wiltshire Police HQ, London Road, Devizes, Wiltshire SN10 2DN  
Telephone 101 ext 62005

### **Freedom of Information Request Appeals Procedure**

#### **1. Who Can Ask for a Review**

Any person who has requested information from Wiltshire Police, which has been dealt with under the Freedom of Information Act, is entitled to complain and request an internal review, if they are dissatisfied with the response they received.

#### **2. How to Request a Review**

Requests for review of a Freedom of Information request must be made in writing to the:  
Force Disclosure Unit  
Wiltshire Police Headquarters,  
London Road, Devizes,  
Wiltshire,  
SN10 2DN

Email at [disclosure@wiltshire.police.uk](mailto:disclosure@wiltshire.police.uk).

The reference number, date of the request and details of why the review is being requested must be included. Requests for review should be brought to the attention of the Force Disclosure Unit within 20 working days of the Force's response to the original FoI request.

#### **3. Review Procedure**

Receipt of a request for review will be acknowledged in writing to include confirmation of the reasons for the review. The review will be conducted by another Decision Maker, who is independent from the original Decision Maker. The Force Disclosure Unit will set a target date for a response. The response will be made as soon as is practicable with the intention to complete the review within twenty working days. In more complex cases the review may take up to 40 working days.

The Independent Decision Maker will conduct a review of the handling of the request for information and of decisions taken, including decisions taken about where the public interest lies in respect of exempt information where applicable. The review enables a re-evaluation of the case, taking into account the matters raised by the complaint.

#### **4. Conclusion of the Appeal**

On completion of the review the Independent Decision Maker will reply to the complainant with the result of the review. If the complainant is still dissatisfied following the review they should

contact the Information Commissioner to make an appeal. The Information Commissioner can be contacted via the following details:

Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
SK9 5AF  
Tel: 01625 545 700  
Fax: 01625 524 510  
Email: [mail@ico.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:mail@ico.gsi.gov.uk)

**Please note that the ICO's offices will be closed for the foreseeable future and are therefore unable to receive correspondence via post.**

**If you should wish you contact them, please visit <https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/>**