

**Force Disclosure Unit**

Wiltshire Police HQ

London Road

Devizes

Wiltshire

SN10 2DN

Tel 101 ext 62005

www.wiltshire.police.ukdisclosure@wiltshire.pnn.police.ukDate: 23rd May 2022

Your ref: FOI

Our ref: FOI 2022 / 350

Dear ***,

I write in connection with your request for information dated 19th April 2022 concerning the number of officers assigned to gang's units, specialist, or regional counter terror networks.

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 not obliged to supply the information you have requested.

You wrote:

To be clear, I am not asking for any officers' identities or identifying information in this request.

For the week beginning March 28, 2022, please could you provide the following -

The number of officers assigned to:

1. the force's gangs (OCG) units or drug squads
2. specialist counter-terror unit or regional counter-terror network

Where gangs and drug units are separate, please could you provide separate figures.

3. For the officers in these units could you provide the number of officers or a percentage of the overall team who worked part of the week (beginning March 28) - either a day or part-day - from home or remotely out of the office.

For the previous point please understand remote working or working from home to mean using a home computer/laptop to work out of the office for a part/half-day or full day.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Our response:

The information in which you are requesting namely for questions 1 and 2 is exempt by virtue of the following exemptions:

24(1) National Security

31(1)(a)(b) Law enforcement

Sections 24 and 31 are qualified exemptions and as such there is a requirement to articulate the harm and conduct a test of the public interest in confirmation or denial.

Overall harm

Although every effort should be made to release information under the Freedom of Information Act, to disclose the number of staff members at one particular period that cover gangs (OCG) units or drug squads and specialist counter-terror units or regional counter-terror network would undermine national security and operational law enforcement.

Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing, providing assurance that the Police Service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat from criminals, this should be countered against the need to protect vulnerable areas, and ongoing Policing operational activity.

The security of the country is of paramount importance and Wiltshire Police will not disclose information if to do so would undermine national security. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and providing assurance that the Police Service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat posed by offenders involved in county lines activity and terrorism offences, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding both national security and the integrity of the Police service in the highly sensitive areas of which they work.

Disclosure of information relevant to the request would highlight to criminals the resources signposted to certain teams at one particular time which would enable those engaged in criminal activity to identify the focus of policing targets and identify any potential vulnerable parts of the UK.

Public Interest Test

Section 24 National Security - Factors Favouring Disclosure

Disclosure of information relevant to the request would lead to a better-informed public. The public are entitled to know how public funds are spent especially with regards resources for safeguarding National Security.

Section 24 National Security - Factors Against Disclosure

Other organisations outside the Police Service may, or may not, have an active interest in the subject of the question above. By disclosing the numbers of staff working under the units relevant to the request would harm the close relationship that exists between Wiltshire Police and other organisations. This would enable criminal groups to take steps to counterintelligence, and as such, disclosure would be damaging to National Security.

To what extent the disclosure of this information may aid a terrorist is unknown, but it is clear that it will have an impact on a force's ability to monitor terrorist activity. The impact of providing information under FOI which aids terrorist offending would provide those intending on committing criminal or terrorist acts with valuable information as to where the police are targeting their investigations, thereby undermining National Security, and leaving the United Kingdom at risk of terrorist attacks.

Section 31 Law Enforcement - Factors Favouring Disclosure

If Wiltshire Police were to disclose this information, this would allow the public to see where funds have been spent and what resources the Police have allowing the Police service to appear more open and transparent.

Section 31 Law Enforcement - Factors Against Disclosure

Disclosure of this information would compromise law enforcement tactics which would lead to a hindrance on the Police Force's ability to prevent and detect crimes. Disclosing the number of staff in these particular units could lead to vulnerable areas being identified by force level disclosure leading to more criminal activity placing the public in harm's way. If all forces disclosed this information, it would enable an offender to geographically map which forces have more officers assigned to these departments and which forces have fewer. Such as awareness highlights those forces where this type of criminality has a lesser chance of being caught.

Balance Test

The points above highlight the merits of disclosure and non-disclosure of the requested information. The security of the country is of paramount importance and the Police Service is charged with enforcing the law, preventing, and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve.

The Police Service will not disclose information if to do so would place the safety of individuals at risk or undermine national security. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and investigations, providing assurance that the Police Service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat from criminals, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding both national security and the integrity of police operations when delivering effective operational law enforcement to ensure the prevention and detection of crime is carried out and the effective apprehension or prosecution of offenders is maintained.

As much as there is public interest in knowing that policing resources are adequate and balanced in matters of national security, this will only be overridden in exceptional circumstances.

In addition to this, any disclosure by Wiltshire Police that places the security of the country at risk, no matter how generic, would undermine any trust or confidence individuals have in us. Therefore, at this moment in time, it is our opinion that for these issues the balance test favours non-disclosure.

Question 3: For the officers in these units could you provide the number of officers or a percentage of the overall team who worked part of the week (beginning March 28) - either a day or part-day - from home or remotely out of the office.

No Information Held - That level of detail is not notified or recorded on our systems.

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires the Wiltshire Police, when refusing to provide such information (because the information is exempt) to provide you the applicant with a notice which: (a) states that fact, (b) specifies the exemption in question and (c) states (if that would not otherwise be apparent) why the exemption applies.

The exemptions applicable to the information requested are as follows:

24 (1) National Security
31 (1)(a)(b) Law enforcement

In accordance with section 17 of the Act, this letter represents a Refusal Notice for this particular request.

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,

Disclosure 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.pnn.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