



Police Headquarters
London Road
DEVIZES
Wiltshire
SN10 2DN
disclosure@wiltshire.police.uk

Date 11th January 2023

Our ref **FOI 2022/972**

Dear ***,

I write in connection with your request for information dated 7th December 2022 concerning the number of referrals to PREVENT.

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:

Under the Freedom of Information Act I seek the following information:

1. The number of individuals referred to prevent for the following calendar years: 2020/2021/2022

Please breakdown by area of concern, eg far-right extremism, Islamic extremism, or other forms of extremism

2. The number of individuals referred to prevent for involvement or suspected involvement with environmental extremism/terrorism/activism, animal rights or welfare activism for the following years: 2020/2021/2022.

3. In relation to the question above, how many referrals resulted in intervention by a Channel and Prevent Multi-Agency Panel for the following years: 2020/2021/2022.

3. Have any individuals been referred to Prevent for their involvement or suspected involvement in any of the following groups:

a) Animal Rebellion

b) Extinction Rebellion

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c) Insulate Britain

d) Just Stop Oil

If this is the case please provide the number for each group and breakdown by year.

Response:

In relation to questions 1, 2 and 3 the information in which you are requesting is exempt by virtue of the following exemptions under the FOIA.

Section 24 (1) National Security

Section 31 (1)(a)(b) Law Enforcement

Sections 24 and 31 are prejudice based qualified exemptions and there is a requirement to evidence the harm in disclosure and consider the public interest to ensure neither confirming or denying that information is held is appropriate.

Overall Harm

Publication of specific Prevent data would provide information to those who seek to challenge the process, which would not be in the public interest. Allegations of 'spying in the community' and 'targeting Muslims' misrepresent and undermine the intention of Prevent programme, which seeks to support those individuals vulnerable to being drawn into violent extremism. Figures on the ethnicity or age of participants may fuel perceived grievances such as the view that young Muslims are being targeted, or that the issue of political extremists (i.e. the far right) are not being tackled. Revealing detailed site-specific statistics could lead to the identification of:

- Individuals referred
- Those who may have referred individuals in confidence
- Local organisations working with the force to protect and safeguard those at risk and
- Ongoing cases which could lead to the withdrawal of individuals from the process and thus threaten the successful conclusion of a case.

This would bring the process into disrepute, destroy trust and damage Prevent at a national level.

Prevent is a multi-agency process which aims to support those who may be vulnerable to being drawn into violent extremism. It works by providing a mechanism for:

- Identifying individuals who may be at risk of and vulnerable to being drawn into violent extremism
- Accessing the nature and extent of the risk
- Where necessary, referring cases to a multi-agency panel which decides on the most appropriate support package to divert and support the individual at risk.

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Prevent aims to draw vulnerable individuals away from violent extremism before they become involved in criminal activity. Effective information sharing is crucial in ensuring that delivery partners, such as education, children's services, probation and local public health agencies and local community partners are able to build a comprehensive picture of an individual's vulnerability, and therefore provide the appropriate type and level of support to safeguard the individual at risk. This requires the local community to work in partnership with the police and other agencies and to share information appropriately and responsibly.

The security of the county is of paramount importance and Wiltshire Police will not divulge any information which would undermine national security or compromise law enforcement. 'Prevent' is part of the wider strand of CONTEST, the Government's counter terrorism strategy, and the information held by Wiltshire Police in regard to Prevent directly relates to counter-terrorism policing. In addition, any prejudice to counter-terrorism policing directly impacts on the police support and the delivery of CONTEST.

Any detailed breakdown of the agencies, authorities, or partners that made the referrals would lead to these partners disengaging from the referral process, as well as, potentially in some extreme cases, aid the identification of those involved in the referral process itself, or of those referred.

A list of the local organisations and agencies who may be involved in Prevent can be found in the Prevent Strategy: An Updated Guide for Local Partners:

[Delivering the Prevent Strategy: An Updated Guide for Local Partners - update \(moray.gov.uk\)](https://www.moray.gov.uk/Prevent-Strategy-An-Updated-Guide-for-Local-Partners-2019-2022)

This contains further links which may be useful.

Factors favouring disclosure of information for S31:

There may be a public interest in the release of this information because it may reassure the public that there are effective processes in place to ensure that people showing signs that they intend to use violence or other illegal means are monitored proactively and assessed for the presence of vulnerability. Disclosure of the information would provide reassurance to the public that the Police have in place protocols to deal with these types of incidents and offences. The Home Office regularly publishes national statistics on PREVENT data. It would also reassure the public that the police have protocols in place to protect children from being drawn into violent extremism.

Factors against disclosure of information for S31:

Disclosure of information would mean that law enforcement tactics would be compromised which would hinder the prevention and detection of crime. More crime would be committed because criminals would know which forces are focusing on the Prevent programme. A fear of crime would be realised because if the terrorists identified more vulnerable areas, they could target and exploit these areas and the public would be in fear of more criminal / terrorist activity occurring. There would be an impact on police resources because if the measure used by forces to detect terrorist activities and safeguard children is disclosed, and some areas are deemed to be 'softer' at managing this threat, terrorist cells may target these areas in order to continue their operations and target vulnerable individuals. There could be local implications with wrongful identification of children and families which in turn could lead to further offences being committed in the community.

Factors favouring disclosure of information for Section 24

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The public are entitled to know how public funds are spent and by disclosing this information the public would be able to see where public money is being spent and know that forces are doing as much as they can to combat terrorism and radicalisation. Revealing this information would enable the public to have some reassurance that the Government's Counter Terrorism strategy is robust. This is an issue high on the public agenda and therefore the release of this information would contribute to an informed public debate.

Factors against disclosure of information for Section 24

PREVENT only operates in specific locations. Revealing detailed statistics may increase interest in cases which could ultimately lead to the identity of individuals and the organisations we work with, which may assist others intending to counter such work. Identification of those working locally to deliver the aims and objectives of PREVENT could enable those wishing to counter such work to engage in activity to disrupt and jeopardise the successful delivery of ongoing work. This could threaten the successful delivery of PREVENT and the government's counter terrorism strategy and lead to the public being at increased risk from terrorism. There is also a potential for such data to be used to increase community tensions in an area, which would not be in the public interest.

Any information shared between agencies (intelligence) has the potential to cover all aspects of criminal activity, be it threats to National Security, future planned robberies or intelligence relating to terrorist activity. Disclosure of the information would enable those intent on engaging in terrorist activities to determine on a national level which areas within the UK may be a vulnerable area to target.

Balance test

The security of the country is of paramount importance and the Police service will not divulge information if to do so would place the safety of an individual at risk or undermine National Security. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations, information gathering and, in this case, providing assurance that the police service is appropriately and effectively safeguarding those who are vulnerable to radicalisation and targeting the cells behind the radicalisation, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding both national security and the integrity of police investigations and operations in the highly sensitive area of terrorism.

As much as there is public interest in knowing that policing activity is appropriate and balanced in matters of national security this will only be overridden in exceptional circumstances. Whilst there is a strong public interest in the transparency of policing programmes and in this case, providing assurance that the police service and other stakeholders are appropriately and effectively engaging with one another, combating the threat posed by individuals with the intent to use violence and other illegal means, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding both national security and the integrity of the stakeholders within the programme.

Wiltshire Police will not divulge information if it is likely that it will compromise the work of the Police Service or place members of the public at risk. It is known that terrorist cells will try to radicalise people and children, to indoctrinate them with their ideology in order to encourage them to commit acts of terror. Disclosure of the requested information would highlight which forces may have individuals who are more susceptible to radicalisation and how each force tackles this within their communities. This will adversely affect Wiltshire Police's ability to detect this type of crime as it may alter the behaviours of those preying on vulnerable individuals. This in itself could put the individual's life at risk along with that of

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National Security. It is therefore our belief that the balance test lies in favour of not disclosing the information.

With regards to question 4, Wiltshire Police neither confirm or deny any information held in relation to the above questions by virtue of Sections 24 and 31 of the FOIA.

Sections 24 and 31 are prejudice based qualified exemptions and there is a requirement to evidence the harm in disclosure and consider the public interest to ensure neither confirming or denying that information is held is appropriate.

Harm in confirming or Denying that Information is held

Any release under FOIA is a disclosure to the world, not just to the individual making the request. Prevent is a government-led, multi-agency programme which aims to stop individuals becoming terrorists. To confirm or not that information is held pertinent to this request would reveal whether or not a person referred to the Prevent programme was an individual involved or suspected involvement in Animal Rebellion, Extinction Rebellion, Insulate Britain or Just Stop Oil, which would undermine counter terrorism strategy and aims.

The prevention and detection of crime is the foundation upon which policing is built and the threat from terrorism cannot be ignored. It is generally recognised that the international security landscape is increasingly complex and unpredictable.

In order to counter criminal and terrorist behaviour, it is vital that there are programmes such as Prevent, responding to the ideological challenge faced from terrorism, aspects of extremism, and the threat we face from those who promote these views. To achieve this Prevent depends on a successful integration strategy. Communities and local authorities have a key part to play in this strategy. The impact of providing information under FOI which aids in identifying whether Prevent is successful as a counter strategy would risk undermining public confidence in its purpose, and could dissuade others from engaging with it. The net effect of this would be where the public fail to raise concerns, which for whatever reason could result in a potentially dangerous situation that could well be turned around through awareness and intervention.

Confirmation or denial would undermine the effective delivery of operational law enforcement by highlighting which strategies may or may not have failed in countering terrorism and criminality. Furthermore, intelligence would be weakened thereby undermining national security and leaving the United Kingdom at risk of more terrorist attacks.

Public Interest Considerations

Section 24(2) National Security

Factors favouring complying with Section 1(1)(a) confirming that information is held

Confirming that information is or is not held that simply relates to national security and disclosure would not actually harm it. The public are entitled to know how successful counter terrorism strategies are at achieving their aims.

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

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To confirm or deny whether any information is held risks prejudicing national security. The disclosure as to whether this information is or is not held would render counter strategies less effective, thus effecting security measures. The result of this would compromise ongoing or future operations which protect the security or infrastructure of the UK by undermining the need to use the NCND approach to such requests consistently.

Confirming or denying whether any information is held would dramatically weaken the police's ability to safeguard national security in the fight against terrorism or criminal behaviour on a local and national scale.

Irrespective of what information is or is not held, the public entrust the Police Service to make appropriate decisions with regard to their safety and protection and the only way of reducing risk is to be cautious with what is placed into the public domain. It therefore remains the case that there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding our ability to enforce the law and by extension maintain national security.

Other organisations outside the Police Service are also widely engaged in strategies to counter and prevent terrorism. Therefore, by confirming or denying that information exists relevant to this request would harm the close relationship that exists with such organisations, where trust and confidence has been built up.

Section 31(3) Law Enforcement

Factors favouring complying with Section 1(1)(a) confirming information is held

There is speculation and comment within the public domain that, and this in itself favours confirming information is held.

Factors against complying with Section 1(1)(a) neither confirming nor denying that information is held

Wiltshire Police has a duty of care to the community at large and public safety is of paramount importance. If an FOI disclosure revealed information to the world (by citing an exemption or stating no information held) that would undermine the security of the national infrastructure; offenders, including terrorist organisations, could use this to their advantage which would compromise public safety and more worryingly encourage offenders to carry out further crimes.

Balancing Test

Whilst there is a public interest in keeping everyone informed about security strategies and measures, there is also a duty to ensure public safety. To confirm or deny whether any information is held in relation to Prevent and if individuals are involved or suspected involvement in Animal Rebellion, Extinction Rebellion, Insulate Britain or Just Stop Oil could be detrimental to the very purpose the strategy seeks to achieve. The overall effect of this could render security measures less effective. Therefore, after weighing up the competing interests I have determined that the balancing test favors' neither confirmation or denial.

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

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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 exemption applicable to the information requested is:

Section 24 (1) National Security

Section 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 apologise for the delay in answering your request. Wiltshire Police would like to thank you for the interest that you have shown in the Force.

Yours sincerely

Force 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

Freedom of Information Request Appeals Procedure

1. Who Can Ask for a Review

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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.

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 Fol 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

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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/>