

**Force Disclosure Unit**

Wiltshire Police HQ

London Road

Devizes

Wiltshire

SN10 2DN

Tel 101 ext 62005

www.wiltshire.police.ukdisclosure@wiltshire.pnn.police.uk

XXXXXX – by E Mail

Date: 10th August 2023

Your ref: FOI

Our ref: FOI 2023 / 778

Reply contact name is: Nick Penny

Dear XXXXXX,

I write in connection with your request for information dated 4th August 2023 concerning crimes where the word “Church” features in the offence summary.

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 – having consulted our Performance Team - I am not able to provide you a response in full.

You wrote:

Under the FOI Act, please provide me with a list of theft offences recorded which include the word 'church' in the summary for 2022 and 2023 so far.

For each offence, provide the date, location, summary and outcome

Our response:

The majority of your request, specifically the following :-

- The location, date, summary and outcome that is related to specific offences

has been exempted under;-

Section 31(1) – Law Enforcement

Section 31(1) is a prejudice based and qualified exemption, therefore the harm (prejudice) in disclosure should be evidenced and the public interest given.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Overall Harm

Although every effort should be made to release information under the Freedom of Information Act, to disclose specific details around the dates / locations / MO's and Outcomes of specific crimes of this nature would prejudice future law enforcement tactics and our ability to effectively and efficiently prevent and detect crime and bring offenders to justice. Although there is public interest in the transparency of policing, this is countered by the need to protect any future law enforcement conducted by Wiltshire Police.

Furthermore, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding the integrity of police law enforcement and the ability to police effectively. This, in-turn, would reassure the public that the police are highly secure and would not disclose any information to the world, not just the requester, which may jeopardise law enforcement.

Public Interest Considerations

Section 31 – Law Enforcement

Factors Favouring Disclosure

The disclosure of this information would lead to a better-informed public and promote trust by demonstrating openness, transparency and accountability. In addition, the public are entitled to know how public funds are being spent.

Factors Against Disclosure

Any disclosure made under the Freedom of Information process is effectively a disclosure to everyone in the public domain.

Disclosing this specific information about individual crimes of this nature would provide to the world, not just the requester, details of vulnerable locations where it is possible to commit such crimes, the kind of items that may be vulnerable at such locations, clarification as to whether an offence that has occurred has been reported or not (possibly indicating the willingness or otherwise of the victims of these crimes to report future ones) and so on.

This would place our law enforcement into jeopardy and by providing such detailed and specific information it could also lead to an increase in such crimes being committed and criminals being able to target specific locations that are vulnerable and where they are less likely to be caught, in turn, making the victims of crime more vulnerable – undermining public confidence and our ability to enforce the law.

Furthermore, disclosing this information into the public domain would highlight that Wiltshire Police does not take the security and integrity of law enforcement seriously, which would cause a large drop in confidence.

Balance Test

The above points highlight both the merits and issues with disclosing in full the requested information in relation to your Freedom of Information request. Overall the police service is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve. Because of this, Wiltshire Police will not divulge any information if to do so would prejudice our law enforcement capabilities and in turn lead to more victims of crime and offenders not being brought to justice. The public interest is very largely in favour of non-disclosure in full to ensure the capability of law enforcement of Wiltshire Police.

This would only be overridden in exceptional circumstances, which this Freedom of Information request is not.

However under our Section 16 obligation to be as helpful as possible to an applicant, I am willing to provide you with the following generalised and non-specific information - in which an exemption has not been applied – which I hope will provide you with some detail as to the information you are requesting :-

Theft offences with “Church” stated in the summary description of the offence

2022	12
2023 to date	8
TOTAL	20

Locations of these offences for 2022-2023 to date (by CPT Area)

Chippenham	1
Devizes	2
Salisbury	5
Swindon	5
Trowbridge	2
Warminster	4
Westbury	1

Items reported stolen for these offences for 2022-2023 to date

Bibles	2
Bicycles	2
Cash	3
Flowers	1
Grave Ornaments	2
Church ephemera	1
Keys & Tools	2
Lead	3
Lighting / PA Kit	3
Personal Belongings	1

Outcomes recorded for these 20 offences

Outcome 16 - Victim declines/withdraws support - named suspect identified	1
Outcome 18 – Investigation complete no suspect identified	19

Please Note

Unless an applicant specifically asks for one (as you have), Wiltshire Police do not undertake wildcard or key-word searches for information for FOI requests.

This is due to the unreliability of results found using this method. Reasons include but are not limited to the following :-

- a) We are only able to search in the abbreviated summary description of an offence (which is limited to c200 characters or thereabouts). We are not able to undertake these kinds of searches on the whole content of an occurrence log or crime report. Therefore if the word "Church" is not included in the summary description but IS included within the long narrative of the crime report, then it will not feature in any searches undertaken using this methodology.
- b) The wildcard or keyword being searched needs to be spelt grammatically correctly in the summary description of an offence for it to be returned in searches – if the word "Church" is spelt as "Chirch" or "Chuurch" for instance it will not feature in the results returned using this method.
- c) An offence may well have occurred at a Church, but it may have been described by its proper name in the summary description (eg St Johns) in which case, once again, it will not feature in any search results.

For these reasons and limitations, Wiltshire Police do not normally advocate using wildcard or keyword searches for information, let alone place information in the public domain which they know to be incorrect or inaccurate.

Unless an applicant specifically requests a search of this nature as you have – in which case the results provided should be considered alongside the caveats provided above.

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires Wiltshire Police, when refusing to provide 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. In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 this letter acts as a Refusal Notice for those aspects of your request.

Exemption applied:

Section 31(1) – Law Enforcement

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,

Nick Penny
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 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