



Force Disclosure Unit
Police Headquarters
London Road
DEVIZES
Wiltshire
SN10 2DN

Date: 2nd July 2024

Ref: FOI 2024/606

Dear,

I write in connection with your request for information dated 25th June 2024 concerning reports of fraud and/or theft involving certificates of sponsorship.

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:

As you may know, many migrant workers coming to the UK rely on something called a "certificate of sponsorship", issued by their employer, which allows them to apply for a visa. However some employers and individuals are abusing this system, and are charging huge amounts of money to people in developing countries for these certificates.

In many cases I have come across, people in developing countries pay these huge sums, and yet the certificate of sponsorship is never given. This practice has been dubbed "certificate of sponsorship fraud". Often the money is paid to someone in the UK, or through someone in the UK.

I am currently looking in to cases of fraud or theft involving certificates of sponsorship.

I would like to know:

1. Has your force received any reports of fraud/theft involving certificates of sponsorship since the beginning of this year? If so, how many?
2. If so, have they been referred on to Action Fraud?
3. How many of these cases have been referred back to you by Action Fraud since the beginning of the year for further investigation? How many have you decided to take on for further investigation?

4. In cases where your force has decided not to undertake further investigation, what was the reasoning behind this?
5. Is your force actively investigating any cases of fraud/theft involving certificates of sponsorship? If so, how many?
6. What stage are those investigations at?
7. Has your force concluded any investigations in cases of fraud/theft involving certificates of sponsorship? If so, how many, and did they result in any arrests or charges brought?
8. In cases where charges have been brought, what stage are these cases now at? Have any yet proceeded to court?
9. Can you share the names of any people who have been charged?
10. Does your force have a strategy in place to systematically handle cases involving certificate of sponsorship fraud? If so, what is this strategy?

Our response:

The information that you are requesting for the majority of your request is not stored in a way which permits easy retrieval. This is because there is no quick and reliable way in which we can ascertain the number of fraud and/or theft reports there have been since the start of this year that might involve a certificate of sponsorship. Whilst we can retrieve the number of reports of fraud and thefts there have been, in order to obtain what item(s) may have been reported to us as stolen as well as what an allegation of fraud specifically involves, we would have to physically peruse through every theft and/or fraud report that has been made since the beginning of this year to see if we hold this information. If we did hold this information, then again the reports themselves would have to be further manually interrogated in order to attempt to gather the additional detail you require.

Under the circumstances I am absolutely confident that to locate, retrieve and extract the information you seek would by far exceed the time obligations upon this authority to comply, and in so doing would exceed the fees limits. This is set at £450 calculated at a flat rate of £25 per hour for those work activities comprising of confirming the information is held, locating it, retrieving it and extracting it.

Please note, that if one part of the request engages a Section 12 response, the whole request will engage a Section 12 response. The reason being is due to the fact that locating, retrieving and extracting any further information would only add to the already exceeded time obligations.

Ordinarily under our Section 16 duty to provide advice and assistance, we would advise you how to refine your request to a more manageable level. However, due to the difficulties outlined above, I cannot see how this can be achieved in this particular case.

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 12(2) – Exemption where cost of compliance exceeds appropriate limit

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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,

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

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 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.

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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