



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

Date: 26th July 2024

Ref: FOI 2024/662

Dear,

I write in connection with your request for information dated 15th July 2024 concerning 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 after having consulted our Complex Fraud Team – I am now able to respond as follows.

You wrote:

Original request (dealt with under FOI 2024/606):

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?

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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 previous response to FOI 2024/606:

We're unable to extract this information without looking at every theft and fraud report for the time frame requested in order to see if the report relates to certificates of sponsorship. (Section 12)

Follow-on request:

A few weeks ago I filed an FOI which you responded to (FOI 2024/606).

I did have some follow-up questions.

You say there is no facility to easily access the information requested. What system or facility do you use to record crime reports?

Other forces have been able to perform key-word searches (such as for "sponsorship" or "certificate of sponsorship". Is your system not able to perform such searches?

Am I to understand from your response that you have not identified cases of fraud or theft involving certificates of sponsorship as a theme?

Please can you answer the final question from my previous FOI request: 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:

A few weeks ago I filed an FOI which you responded to (FOI 2024/606).

I did have some follow-up questions.

You say there is no facility to easily access the information requested. What system or facility do you use to record crime reports?

Incidents and offences are logged onto Niche RMS. Incident logs are also recorded on the STORM system where the Police are called to an incident or if a log is created for an operation/event.

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Other forces have been able to perform key-word searches (such as for "sponsorship" or "certificate of sponsorship". Is your system not able to perform such searches?

Yes, we are able to perform keyword or wildcard searches, however, we typically do not advise this method for extracting data due to its unreliability. This is because a wildcard search only searches within the summary of an incident for the particular keyword and no further, therefore, if this keyword was mentioned elsewhere, such as within the crime report, a statement, or call log etc, then this wildcard search would not pick up this information. Also, if the word is spelt slightly differently within the summary of the report, then again, this wildcard search would not pick this up.

If a wildcard search is specifically requested, then we will look to facilitate this along with the above caveats, but otherwise, we will not automatically conduct a wildcard search if not specifically requested due to the above reasons.

Am I to understand from your response that you have not identified cases of fraud or theft involving certificates of sponsorship as a theme?

This part of your request is not valid under the Freedom of Information Act, as it appears to be asking for an opinion as opposed to requesting for recorded information.

Please can you answer the final question from my previous FOI request: Does your force have a strategy in place to systematically handle cases involving certificate of sponsorship fraud? If so, what is this strategy?

No specific strategy regarding systematically handling of cases involving certificate of sponsorship fraud.

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