



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

Date: 9th October 2024

Ref: FOI 2024/837

I write in connection with your request for information dated 17th September 2024 concerning blocked emails.

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 now able to respond as follows.

You wrote:

A record of all emails that were blocked by your email system over the last five years, including the total number of emails blocked and the reasons for each blocked email, such as whether they were identified as spam, contained malware, flagged as malicious, phishing attempts, etc.

I would also like a breakdown of the categories for blocked emails, providing details of the number of emails blocked for each category (spam, malware, phishing, etc.) on a month-by-month basis for the last five years.

Additionally, I request information on any specific procedures or systems in place that identify and block such emails.

I do not require the exact date each email was blocked, but would appreciate monthly statistics over the requested time period.

Our response:

Information is exempt from disclosure by virtue of:
Section 24(1) National Security
Section 31(1)(a)(b) Law Enforcement

Section 24 is a qualified prejudice-based exemption where evidence of harm is required and a public interest test.

Section 31 is a qualified class-based exemption with a requirement to conduct a public interest test.

Evidence of Harm

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A Freedom of Information Act request is not a private transaction. Both the request itself, and any information disclosed, are considered suitable for open publication. This is because, under Freedom of Information, any information disclosed is released into the wider public domain, effectively to the world and not just to one individual.

Whilst Wiltshire Police force confirm information is held regarding blocked emails, to provide the total number and an additional breakdown by type could undermine the safeguarding of national security, and operational law enforcement by allowing those with a criminal intent to gain an operational advantage over Wiltshire Police force.

Groups planning attacks are known to conduct extensive research and will take advantage of the 'mosaic effect' by combining information from different sources. To disclose data on malicious email attempts which have been unsuccessful, could be used in conjunction with other publically available information to provide knowledge of where attacks have actually been successful and thus where possible weaknesses exist.

To further disclose a breakdown of the reason/type of email which has been blocked may also further assist potential attackers by indicating that a specific attack had gone undetected. With this knowledge, attackers may then be able to tailor their methods to increase their chances of success. This harm increases when further requests are made for similar data over time, as if disclosed, multiple data would cumulate to reveal a clearer picture of Wiltshire Police forces' cyber-security strengths and vulnerabilities.

Furthermore, in order to counter criminal and terrorist behaviour it is vital that the police and other agencies have the ability to work together, where necessary covertly, in order to obtain intelligence within current legislative frameworks to ensure the arrest and prosecution of offenders who commit or plan to commit acts of terrorism, whereby their modus operandi may involve cyber-attacks on secure databases. In order to achieve this goal, it is vitally important that information sharing takes place with other police forces and law enforcement bodies within the United Kingdom in order to support counter-terrorism measures in the fight to deprive terrorist networks of their ability to commit crime. To disclose specific details which would identify breaches of information technology and security would be extremely useful to those involved in terrorist activity as it would enable them to map vulnerable information security databases.

Public Interest Considerations Section 24(1) National Security

Factors favouring disclosure

The public are entitled to know how public funds are spent and how resources are distributed within an area of policing. To disclose the requested information would enable the general public to hold Wiltshire Police force to account ensuring all such breaches are recorded and investigated appropriately. In the current financial climate of cuts and with the call for transparency of public spending this would enable improved public debate.

Factors against disclosure

Security measures are put in place to protect the community we serve. As evidenced within the harm to disclose the information requested would highlight to terrorists and individuals intent on carrying out criminal activity vulnerabilities within force systems which could be further exploited.

Taking into account the current security climate within the United Kingdom, no information which may aid a terrorist should be disclosed. 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. The cumulative effect of terrorists gathering information from various sources is that over time a more detailed account of the tactical infrastructure of not only a force area but also the country as a whole will be revealed.

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Any incident that results from such a disclosure would, by default, affect National Security.

Section 31(1) – Law Enforcement

Factors favouring disclosure

Disclosure of information relevant to this request would lead to a better informed public which may encourage individuals to provide intelligence in order to reduce the risk of security breaches.

Factors against disclosure

Disclosure of information relevant to this request would suggest Wiltshire Police force take their responsibility to protect information and information systems from unauthorised access, destruction, etc., dismissively and inappropriately.

Balancing Test

The points above highlight the merits and de-merits of disclosure. The Police Service is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve. As part of that policing purpose, information is gathered which can be highly sensitive relating to high profile investigative activity. Weakening the mechanisms used to monitor any type of criminal activity, and specifically terrorist activity would place the security of the country at an increased level of danger.

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

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
Telephone 101

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