

**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 email

Date: 31st December 2024

Your ref: FOI

Our ref: FOI 2024 / 1135

Reply contact name is: Nick Penny

Dear XXXXXX,

I write in connection with your request for information dated 30th December 2024 concerning Crimes at Churches within the last 3 years.

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:

1 How many crimes have been recorded by your force involving theft from/at churches or from/at church property from January 1st 2022 - December 30th 2024?

- a) If possible, please could you clarify how many of the thefts recorded relate to lead being taken from the church roof?

2 How many crimes have been recorded by your force involving assault (physical/violent) at churches or on church property from January 1st 2022 - December 30th 2024?

3 How many crimes have been recorded of vandalism by your force on churches or on church property from January 1st 2022 - December 30th 2024?

Our response:

The information that you are requesting for each of your questions is not stored in a way which permits easy retrieval.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Wiltshire Police record crimes in accordance with current Home Office Crime Recording guidelines and Crimes Code Recording Codes.

There are no specific designated HO Crime Codes or Categories for any of the following :-

- a) Thefts from a Church or religious premises
- b) Criminal Damage at a Church or religious premises
- c) Assault at a Church or religious premises

As a consequence, it is necessary to try and utilise other means by which to locate the information you require.

Whilst our crime recording systems are fairly sophisticated and we use a number of different fields to record specific information about a crime or incident – such as Victim Age, Suspect Gender, Address, Witness Name and so on – which we could then theoretically run searches on, we do not have a specific field in which we record whether a crime has occurred specifically at a church or other religious premises.

We do have a field called “Building Type” however the use of this field is not mandatory and – in reality – is very seldom used. As a consequence if we were to search for crimes using that field with an option for “church” it would return very few / if any results. We would never put information into the public domain (as this response would be) any information that we knew to be knowingly inaccurate or incorrect.

Whilst in theory we could use a wildcard or “free-text” search for the word “Church” in the address of a crime, this would not return all possible results as in many cases, the address may be recorded as – for instance – “St Peter’s”, “All Saint’s”, “Holy Trinity” and so on, eg the address recorded in our systems does not physically feature the keyword of “church”.

Due to the unreliability of this method of locating the information you require and – again – because we would never knowingly provide information known to be inaccurate, we do not consider this to be a practical method by which to locate the information either.

The only way to ensure that the data provided was accurate would be to locate and review each recorded Theft, Assault and Criminal Damage crime for the time period you require and determine whether or not it met your criteria or not (ie it happened at a church or on church property).

For the 3-year time period you are interested in, Wiltshire Police have recorded the following volumes of crime (by type) :-

Thefts (general, not vehicle-related or shoplifting)	9,776
Assaults	51,406
Criminal Damage	14,025
Total	75,207

Even allowing a very conservative 1 minute per record, 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.

Ordinarily under our section 16 duty to provide advice and assistance, we would advise you how to refine your request in respect 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: Exemption where cost of compliance exceeds appropriate limit

- (1) Section 1(1) does not oblige a public authority to comply with a request for information if the authority estimates that the cost of complying with the request would exceed the appropriate limit.

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,

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