

WILTSHIRE POLICE



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

Date: 10th January 2025

Ref: FOI 2024/1113

Dear,

I write in connection with your request for information dated 19th December 2024 concerning organized crime groups.

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:

I am interested in finding out:

1. Number of organised crime groups in your force area.
2. Where these organised crime groups are distributed in your force area.

For the years:

2023-2024
2022-2023
2021-2022
2020-2021
2019-2020

Our response:

In relation to question 1, this information is exempt under Section 31(1) – Law Enforcement.

Question 2 is also exempt under Section 31(1), as well as Section 24(1) – National Security.

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Please note, that both Section 24 and Section 31 are prejudice-based qualified exemptions and therefore, it requires a public interest test to be conducted establishing the harm, which can be found below:

Evidence of Harm:

To disclose any details about the number and distribution of organised crime gangs (OCGs) would undermine national security and operational law enforcement as well as risk prejudice to current investigations, some of which may be covert. Whilst there is a public interest in transparency to provide assurance that the Police service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat from organised criminal gangs, this should be balanced against the need to protect sensitive police intelligence and ongoing operational activity.

Providing the requested information would reveal specific detail about the real-time police intelligence picture in relation to OCG's operating at low geographical areas across the force area. Release of such information to the public at large would enable those engaged in criminal gang activity, potentially including terrorism, to identify what the Police may and may not know about organised crime gangs. Particularly in the event it was to be revealed that no information was held for a specific area, that would identify to offenders that individuals or criminal activity to which they may have links has gone undetected.

Furthermore, if disclosures were to be made by all forces for this national request, a low-level intelligence picture of organised criminal gang activity would be revealed which would expose the specific focus of policing targets, including terrorists, across the UK. The security of the country is of paramount importance and the police will not disclose any information that would undermine national security or operational policing.

Public Interest Test

Factors favouring disclosure, Section 24:

Disclosure of the information would lead to a better-informed public. The public are entitled to know how public funds are spent especially with regards to safeguarding National Security.

Factors against disclosure, Section 24:

Disclosure of the requested information would allow inferences to be made about the specific nature of national security related activities linked to organised crime gangs which may or may not take place in low-level geographical locations. This would enable criminal groups to take steps to counter intelligence, and as such, disclosure would be damaging to National Security.

Disclosure of the requested breakdown would render national security measures less effective. This would lead to the compromise of ongoing or future operations to protect the security or infrastructure of the UK and increase the risk of harm to the public.

Factors favouring disclosure, Section 31:

Disclosure of the requested would allow the public to see where public funds have been spent and allow the Police service to appear more open and transparent.

Factors against disclosure, Section 31:

Disclosure of the requested information could compromise Police intelligence and subsequently the force's ability to prevent and detect crime. Vulnerable areas could be identified with disclosure leading to an increase in criminal activity occurring in those areas, placing the public in harm's way.

Modern-day policing is intelligence led and the Police share information with other law enforcement agencies as part of their investigation process. Disclosure here could hinder the prevention and detection of crime by undermining this partnership approach to investigations and law enforcement.

Therefore, the public interest against disclosure by far outweighs the argument for disclosure and as a result, the information you've requested is exempt from disclosure.

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 31(1) – Law Enforcement

Section 24(1) – National Security

In accordance with Section 17 of the Act, this letter represents a Refusal Notice for this particular request.

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