

**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: 13th February 2025

Your ref: FOI

Our ref: FOI 2025 / 031

Reply contact name is: Nick Penny

Dear XXXXXX,

I write in connection with your request for information dated 8th January 2025 concerning Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation.

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 would like to request under the Freedom of Information act, information held by you on group-based child sexual exploitation.

1 In particular, I would like to know what definition, if any, you use to identify group-based child sexual exploitation.

2 Have you a dedicated team investigating group-based child sexual exploitation? If so, how many officers, by rank, are involved in this team?

3 If there is no dedicated team, how do you investigate allegations of group-based child sexual exploitation?

4 I would like to know how many investigations into group-based child sexual exploitation you have carried out since 2000. I would like this figure broken down by year, if possible.

5 I would also like to know the number of suspects arrested as part of these investigations and the number subsequently charged. If possible, I would like a breakdown of the age, sex and ethnicity of those arrested and charged.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

6 I would also like to know the number of people convicted, again with a breakdown of the age, sex and ethnicity of those convicted.

Our response:

The information that you are requesting for the majority of your request (namely questions 4 and 5) is not stored in a way which permits easy retrieval.

You have requested information in relation to group-based CSE offences dating back 25 years – our current systems only record crimes from approx. 2007 onwards. Prior to that time, some information is held on old legacy systems (which have limited access and capability) or in old paper files held in one of our various archive facilities around the county.

Wiltshire Police record crime in accordance with current Home Office crime recording codes and crime categories. Group-Based CSE is not currently a specific crime category under which offences of that nature can be recorded in isolation and separately from other Sexual Offences. There will undoubtedly be many records on our systems that might be related to CSE or group-based CSE.

Whilst our crime recording system(s) are fairly sophisticated and we have a number of dedicated fields in which we record various details related to a crime (and which we can then theoretically run searches on) we do not have such a field in which we record whether there was more than one individual suspect involved in a specific case.

In addition, whilst we have a flag against offences in which we can record whether or not CSE is involved or suspected, this field is not mandatory and – as a consequence – there is a very high likelihood that the data contained in it is not reliable, particular given the fact that populating that field would not necessarily be a force priority as investigations are undertaken and the possibility of multiple offenders and/or group-based offending being apparent.

Wiltshire Police would never knowingly place information into the public domain (as this response would be) that they knew was incorrect or not representative.

Our information is set up and searchable for our own policing purposes. To determine how many investigations into group-based child sexual exploitation that Wiltshire Police have carried out since 2000, will require us to manually review, extensively and in detail, all relevant crime records on current systems, more than one legacy system and also in paper files held in our archives.

Since 2007 alone, Wiltshire Police have recorded – on average – something in the region of 1,800 individual sex offences per year. Even allowing a conservative 3 minutes per record to review the cases relevant for just one calendar year it would take 90 hours to complete, which 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.

To provide the number of suspects arrested as part of these investigations and the number subsequently charged and the number of people convicted, with a breakdown of age, sex and ethnicity for both, would further exceed the appropriate limit.

It should also be noted that there is no obligation on an Authority under FOIA to create new data where none currently exists, purely to answer an FOI request.

Please also note that if one part of the request engages a Section 12 response, then ordinarily the whole request should 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.

However, although excess cost removes the forces' obligations under the Freedom of Information Act, as a gesture of goodwill I have supplied information, relative to your request, retrieved or available before it was realised that the fees limit would be exceeded. I trust this is helpful, but it does not affect our legal right to rely on the fees regulations for the remainder of your request. What I am able to provide you are the answers documented below :-

Question 1

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact – it can also occur through the use of technology.

Question 2

Yes - 1x Detective Inspector, 2x Detective Sergeants, 7x constables, 7x Support staff

Question 3

Not applicable by virtue of the answer to Q2.

Question 6

Wiltshire Police do not hold conviction data – No Information Held.

Under our Section 16 obligation to be as helpful as possible to an applicant we would recommend that you submit an FOI directly to the CPS for this information.

Ordinarily under our section 16 duty to provide advice and assistance, we would advise you how to refine your request in respect of questions 4 and 5 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 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.

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