

WILTSHIRE POLICE



XXX
By email



Police Headquarters
London Road
DEVIZES
Wiltshire
SN10 2DN

Date 31/07/25

Our ref **FOI 2025/653**

Reply contact name is: XXX

Dear XXX

I write in connection with your request for information, dated 10/07/25, concerning Digital Forensics documentation.

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.

Following receipt of your request, searches were conducted with Southwest Forensics.

Your request for information has now been considered and it is not possible to meet your requirements in full.

You wrote (and our response)

I have considered your request and I am able to provide a partial response. Some of the information relevant to this request is exempt by virtue of Section 31(1)(a)(b) - Law Enforcement.

Section 31 is a qualified prejudice-based exemption and therefore requires Wiltshire Police to establish the harm in disclosure, along with the public interest favouring and against disclosure.

A blank copy or template of any form(s) currently used by Wiltshire Police for the submission of digital devices or digital exhibits to your Digital Forensics Unit (e.g. mobile phones, computers, tablets).

This may include local versions of the MG21 form, or any other documentation routinely used to request digital forensic examinations.

Keeping Wiltshire Safe

This question is exempt from disclosure. The information requested has been reviewed and as requests are submitted within the system, it is not possible to provide these without including sensitive data. Please see below harm and public interest tests.

If available, I would be grateful to receive:

* Any local guidance or instructional materials provided to officers completing the form.

This question is exempt from disclosure. Please see below harm and public interest tests.

* Confirmation of whether your force uses the national MG21 template, or a locally adapted version.

MG21's are not used for submission of devices to the Data Forensics Unit. Where devices are being outsourced to external providers then MG21s are used for submission to a central 'Forensic Submissions' department. Our Forensic Submissions Department confirmed that they use the national MG21 template.

Evidence of Harm:

Policing is an information-led activity, and information assurance (which includes information security) is fundamental to how the Police Service manages the challenges faced. In order to comply with statutory requirements, the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice for Information Assurance has been put in place to ensure the delivery of core operational policing by providing appropriate and consistent protection for the information assets of member organisations, see below link:

<https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/information-management/>

Commercial Forensic Service Providers and the software they offer are vitally important in the Criminal Justice system - not only do they play a crucial role by supporting UK Policing with backlogs in the Digital Forensics arena, but they provide Defence teams with access to independent forensic experts to support their clients.

Whilst not questioning the motives of the applicant, it must be taken into account when considering potential harm that a disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 is made to the world at large, rather than a private correspondence. Specific details of any digital forensic software used by the force would be extremely useful to those involved in criminality as it would enable them to create a map of tools and, by extension, providers most used by police Forces. Forensic Service Providers can, and have, be targeted by malicious actors. For example in 2019 Eurofins suffered a highly sophisticated ransomware attack which severely disrupted UK Policing and the Criminal Justice system.

Providing details of digital forensics software used would mean that force by force, a criminal or individual with criminal intent could identify the software and/or providers most critical to law enforcement and specifically target those providing the most assistance. This would have a huge impact on the effective delivery of operational law enforcement as it would leave companies open to cyberattacks which could have devastating consequences.

Public Interest Test:

Factors favouring Disclosure - Confirming details of the software used would be of interest to the public, namely give insight into the forensic processes used to solve crimes.

Factors favouring Non-Disclosure - Measures are put in place to protect the community we serve and as evidenced within the harm, to provide details of digital forensic software would allow individuals intent on disrupting law enforcement to target specific companies using the information obtained to maximise the impact.

Taking into account the current security climate and the increasing risk of cyber-attack within the United Kingdom, no information which may aid criminality should be disclosed. It is clear that it would have an impact on a Force's ability to carry out the core duty of enforcing the law and serving the community.

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.

Balance Test:

The Police Service is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve. In order to effectively and robustly carry out those duties, services are utilised which are vital to investigating criminal activity. Weakening the mechanisms used to investigate any type of criminal activity would have a detrimental impact on law enforcement as a whole. To provide details of digital forensic software currently in use by the force increases the known risks of cyber-attacks and would undermine any trust or confidence the public have in the Police Service. Therefore, at this moment in time, it is our opinion that the balance test favours against the disclosure.

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires Wiltshire Police, when refusing to provide 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.

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 this letter acts as a Refusal Notice for those aspects of your request.

Exemption applied:

Section 31(1)(a)(b) – Law Enforcement

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