

WILTSHIRE POLICE



Police Headquarters

London Road
DEVIZES
Wiltshire
SN10 2DN

Date: August 28, 2025

Our ref: FOI 2025/783

Reply contact name is:

Dear,

I write in connection with your request for information, dated 10th August 2025 concerning paedophile-hunters.

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, research was conducted by the Team Performance and Intelligence Departments of Wiltshire Police.

Your request for information has now been considered and I am not obliged to supply the information you have requested.

You Wrote:

Please provide the information and data described below for the period 10 August 2020 to 10 August 2025 (inclusive).

Definitions for the purposes of this request:

- “Paedophile-hunter(s)” or “paedophile hunting groups” means non-police civilian organisations, groups or individuals who pose online or in person to identify, investigate, or arrange the meeting of persons suspected of intending to commit sexual offences against children and who then report those persons to the police (sometimes publicised on social media). If your records use a different term (for example “online vigilante”, “citizen sting”, “community watch”), please include those in the search and state which search terms you used.
- “NFA” means “no further action”.
- “Release pending investigation” means a reported suspect was released pending further enquiries.
- “Outcome” refers to the police/CPS/charging/final court outcome associated with the police investigation prompted by the report.

Please provide:

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1. Annual counts (broken down by calendar year) of reports to your force by paedophile-hunter groups (or equivalent civilians) where the report alleged a sexual-related offence. For each year, include the total number of reported incidents.

2. For those reported incidents, provide the following aggregate breakdowns (tables) by year and ethnicity (as recorded in your records) of the alleged suspect(s):

Number of reports per ethnicity per year.

For each ethnicity × year cell, provide counts of outcome categories: NFA, released pending investigation, charged (CPS charged), convicted, acquitted / found not guilty, and other final outcomes. If multiple outcomes occurred (e.g. initially NFA then reopened), list the most recent final outcome and also provide a count of changes of outcome.

3. For each conviction counted in (2), please also provide the average custodial sentence length in months (mean and median), broken down by year and ethnicity. Where available, provide the individual sentence lengths (anonymised) so that averages can be independently calculated.

4. For the same set of reported incidents, provide counts by year for whether the initial contact involved a real child at the point of contact (Yes / No / Unknown). For those where "Yes", provide the outcome categories as in (2) and sentencing length data as in (3) for convictions.

5. Provide counts by year of incidents where it was later found (after police investigation) that a real child was involved (i.e., child victim confirmed after investigation), and the outcomes (NFA, charged, convicted, acquitted, other). Provide sentencing length data as in (3) for convictions.

6. Provide counts and details of occasions where the paedophile-hunting team or individual who made the report was the subject of a police investigation as a result of their conduct (e.g., allegations of criminality, harassment, entrapment, misconduct). For these investigator-on-hunter cases, for each year provide:

Number of investigations opened into hunting teams/individuals.

Outcome of those investigations: NFA, charged, convicted, acquitted / found not guilty, internal discipline, or other. If prosecutions occurred, please provide offence codes, final court outcome, and sentencing length data as in (3) for convictions.

7. For all of the above items, where possible, provide the data as anonymised, machine-readable records (CSV or Excel) where each row corresponds to a single reported incident and contains the following columns (leave personal identifiers blank/redacted but keep categorical data):

Year (YYYY)

Reporting source type (e.g., named paedophile-hunter group; "unknown civilian group"; "member of public via social media")

Suspect age group (e.g., <18, 18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45+) as recorded

Suspect ethnicity (as recorded)

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Whether initial contact involved an actual child at point of contact (Yes/No/Unknown)

Whether, after investigation, a child victim was confirmed (Yes/No/Unknown)

Initial police outcome (NFA / released pending investigation / charged / other)

Final outcome (NFA / charged / convicted / acquitted / other)

CPS decision (if applicable)

Whether the reporting hunting team/individual was investigated by police (Yes/No)

Outcome of any investigation into the hunting team/individual (NFA / charged / convicted / acquitted / disciplinary / other)

Offence codes and short description (as recorded)

Custodial sentence length in months (if convicted)

Any public-interest redactions applied (and the legal basis for withholding, if data is withheld)

If you consider any part of this request ambiguous, please provide the records you do hold that are closest to the request and explain briefly how you interpreted the ambiguous terms. If searching for "paedophile hunters" requires particular search terms or manual review, please supply the search terms used and an estimate of records that might require manual handling (and confirm if you will charge fees for that part).

Please supply the summary tables requested in (1)–(6) as CSV or Excel and the anonymised incident rows as a separate CSV/Excel attachment.

Response:

The information that you are requesting is not stored in a way which allows for easy retrieval and Wiltshire Police does not have the search facility to automatically gather this data. To clarify, our Team Performance and Intelligence departments have stated that to ascertain this information for the requested time periods would require:

- Manually search and read each and every Occurrence individually (as there is no flag on our system)
- Manually search and read each and every Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSAE) crime individually

This would exceed the 18 hour work limit to locate, retrieve and extract the information and therefore Section 12 applies.

Ordinarily under our Section 16 obligation to provide advice and assistance, I would advise you of a way in which to refine your request. However, due to the difficulties as outlined above, I cannot think of a way in which this can be achieved.

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

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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
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,



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.

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

Please note that the ICO's offices will be closed for the foreseeable future and are therefore unable to receive correspondence via post.

If you should wish you contact them, please visit <https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/>