

WILTSHIRE POLICE



XXXX – By email

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

Date 1st September 2026

Our Ref FOI 2026-627 Internal Review

Dear XXXX,

I write in connection with your request for an internal review dated 3rd August.

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:

Original request wording:

1. In the following years, please provide figures for:
 - a. the number of child sexual abuse cases your force investigated during 1 Jan – 31 Dec 2020, 1 Jan – 31 Dec 2021, 1 Jan – 31 Dec 2022, 1 Jan – 31 Dec 2023, 1 Jan – 31 Dec 2024, 1 Jan – 31 Dec 2025 and 1 Jan – 30 June 2026.
 - b. Please provide an ethnic and gender breakdown of the suspect for each corresponding year in a table. When it comes to ethnicity, please make clear whether it is self-defined ethnicity or officer ethnicity. If possible, please give both sets of data.
 - c. Please provide an ethnic and gender breakdown of the victims/survivors for each corresponding year in a table. When it comes to ethnicity, please make clear whether it is self-defined ethnicity or officer ethnicity. If possible, please give both sets of data.
 - d. Please provide the ages of the youngest and oldest child sexually abused/exploited for each corresponding year in a table.
 - e. Please provide figures for the number of cases which resulted in the arrests of suspects.
 - f. Please provide the outcomes of the arrests e.g., no further action, charged, sent to crown court or whichever way you record outcomes.
2. Turning to 'group-based child sexual exploitation/abuse', in other words so-called 'grooming gangs'. In the following years, please provide figures for:
 - a. the number of group-based child sexual exploitation/abuse' cases your force investigated during the following years: 1 Jan – 31 Dec 2020, 1 Jan – 31 Dec 2021, 1

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Jan – 31 Dec 2022, 1 Jan – 31 Dec 2023, 1 Jan – 31 Dec 2024, 1 Jan – 31 Dec 2025 and 1 Jan – 30 June 2026.

- b. Please provide an ethnic and gender breakdown of the suspects for each corresponding year in a table. When it comes to ethnicity, please make clear whether it is self-defined ethnicity or officer ethnicity. If possible, please give both sets of data.
- c. Please provide an ethnic and gender breakdown of the victims/survivors for each corresponding year in a table. When it comes to ethnicity, please make clear whether it is self-defined ethnicity or officer ethnicity. If possible, please give both sets of data.
- d. Please provide the ages of the youngest and oldest child sexually abused/exploited for each corresponding year in a table.
- e. Please provide figures for the number of cases which resulted in the arrests of suspects.
- f. Please provide the outcomes of the arrests e.g., no further action, charged, sent to crown court or whichever way you record outcomes.

Internal review request wording:

I write in a professional and non-vexatious capacity to register a formal request for an internal review of your decision to refuse this request under section 12, as well as your failure to satisfy section 16 of the act.

1. Complete refusal of the request and systemic record-keeping failure

Your unit has issued a total refusal across every single question on the grounds that answering question 1 (D) and question 2 exceeds the cost limit.

That outcome is completely unacceptable.

Your reliance on section 12 regarding question 2 rests on the assertion that establishing whether named suspects link to a grooming gang requires a manual review of over 6,900 crime records.

This assertion reveals a profound administrative failure and a direct conflict with national policing standards.

The College of Policing recommended the explicit collection and tracking of group-based child sexual exploitation data as early as 2013, updating that framework in its Authorised Professional Practice (APP) guidance (<https://www.college.police.uk/app/major-investigation-and-public-protection/responding-child-sexual-exploitation/responding-child-sexual-exploitation>).

Furthermore, in October 2022, the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) explicitly directed:

"Police forces and local authorities in England and Wales must collect data on all cases of known or suspected child sexual exploitation and child sexual exploitation by networks. These data should be separated from other data sets, including data on child sexual abuse, and be disaggregated by the sex, ethnicity and disability of both the victim and perpetrator."

For Wiltshire Police to claim in 2026 that your force holds no search facility or data tag to identify networked grooming gangs raises a fundamental question: what has your force been doing for more than a decade, and why has your leadership failed to implement these explicit statutory and national recording requirements?

Your force cites over 6,900 recorded crimes. Such a volume, coupled with an admitted inability to track networked exploitation, demonstrates a systemic, structural, and institutional failure which fails past victims and severely undermines protection for future children.

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Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, a public authority cannot rely on its own systemic failure to implement standard data-indexing guidelines as an absolute shield to withhold high-priority public-interest information under section 12.

2. Flawed reasoning regarding question 1(D)

Regarding question 1(D) (ages of youngest and oldest victims), your unit asserts that because abuse may occur over a period of time, extracting victim age requires reading every single file manually. Standard police crime recording systems automatically log victim date of birth and age at the time of the offence.

Even where abuse spans a date range, simple database parameters isolate the recorded age at the start or end of the reported period.

Claiming that a computer system cannot extract the minimum and maximum values from an existing age or date-of-birth data column without a 6,900-file manual reading exercise represents an unevidenced and illogical calculation under section 12.

3. Inadequate statutory advice and assistance under section 16

Section 16(1) of the act places a positive legal duty on your public authority to provide proactive advice and assistance to refine a request. Your response states that I may resubmit without question 1(D) and question 2, but you add the caveat that "other exemption(s) may be applicable."

Advising an applicant to strip out key questions - while simultaneously warning that the force may simply apply further exemptions to the remainder - does not satisfy your statutory duty.

The Information Commissioner requires your unit to present concrete, viable options that allow the extraction of useful data within the 18-hour limit, rather than issuing blanket rejections and passive warnings.

4. Required actions on internal review

To resolve this refusal and remedy your section 16 breach, I require your internal review to execute the following steps:

- Disclose the answers to Questions 1(A), 1(B), 1(C), 1(E), and 1(F), which your force has unjustifiably withheld despite identifying cost issues only in Question 1(D) and Question 2.
- Run an automated query on victim date-of-birth or age fields to extract the youngest and oldest victim ages for question 1(D) without manual file reviews.
- Conduct a targeted search of central intelligence registries, Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) logs, and operational command archives for multi-suspect or networked CSE cases to satisfy question 2.
- Proactively suggest specific, workable refinement options if your force maintains that searching central intelligence registries exceeds 18 hours.

5. Formal internal review and clear escalation strategy

Please treat this letter as a formal demand for an internal review regarding your total refusal under section 12 and your breach of section 16.

If Wiltshire Police upholds this refusal upon internal review, I am fully prepared to take the following formal legal and public steps:

- Information Commissioner's Office (ICO): I will lodge a formal complaint regarding your unlawful reliance on section 12, your failure to comply with IICSA data-recording standards, and your breach of section 16 duties.
- First-tier Tribunal (FTT) and Upper Tribunal (UT): If necessary, I will appeal any adverse ICO decision notice to the FTT and UT to secure a binding judicial ruling on whether police

forces can rely on poor record management to conceal group-based crime statistics from public scrutiny.

Public reporting: I reserve the right to highlight this institutional failure, the breach of IICSA recommendations, and the force's inability to track grooming gangs in a published news story

Our response:

On reviewing the original Freedom of Information request, the response provided and the request for an Internal Review, I uphold the original exemption used for question 2, however I can provide the rest of the data as below.

Regarding question 2, in order to provide a number of "group-based child sexual exploitation / abuse" cases that Wiltshire Police have investigated from 1st January 2020 to 30th June 2026 would require an extensive manual review. There have been at least 180 child sexual abuse related crimes with more than one suspect during this time period. In order to locate and retrieve the data that has been requested, an analyst would need to review each investigation – which would include a manual review of various linked documents and suspect profiles – to analyse and assess whether there are any links to grooming gangs. Unfortunately, there is no way for our systems to automatically filter for this information. Each case would take a minimum of 30 minutes to review. If 180 cases took 30 minutes, this would equate to 90 hours and so would not be possible within the obligatory 18 hours.

I have reviewed the questions that were not included within the previous response, and for these I can provide the following:

- 1.
- a)

Reported year	CSA crimes
Totals	6964
2020	847
2021	874
2022	1187
2023	1113
2024	1097
2025	1307
2026	539

b)

Suspect – Self defined ethnicity	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
White	411	427	593	563	515	663	238
NULL	119	127	190	172	153	188	82
Not Stated	71	101	153	105	99	69	28
Mixed	9	7	7	8	23	15	7
Black or Black British	18	9	15	19	32	23	8
Asian or Asian British	38	9	12	18	17	19	8
Arab or Other Ethnic Group	2	4	1	1	6	3	-

Suspect Gender	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
-	2	1	-	-	2	-	-
F	90	80	100	110	104	134	56
M	576	602	870	775	739	844	313
U	-	1	1	1	1	2	2

c) Please note: The high number of NULL values is largely due to state-based offences, for which the victim is recorded as the state rather than an individual.

Victim – Self defined ethnicity	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
White	349	329	381	445	457	690	325
NULL	369	387	529	479	398	445	139
Not Stated	115	144	256	167	212	161	69
Mixed	10	6	13	19	27	16	9
Black or Black British	4	5	6	11	8	14	5
Asian or Asian British	7	4	3	2	5	11	2

Arab or Other Ethnic Group	3	2	5	1	4	4	2
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Victim Gender	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
-	4	-	-	1	1	2	1
F	539	550	719	720	734	838	387
M	131	125	178	189	192	248	118
NULL	181	202	291	212	180	247	44
U	2	-	5	2	5	6	1

d) Please be aware the data provided may be inaccurate due to the fact that the offence periods could span a number of years. In order to ensure correct and accurate data, we would need to review over 6,900 occurrences; however, what is recorded on our systems has been provided below:

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
youngest	2	3	3	3	3	3	3
oldest	18	18	18	18	18	18	18

e) Please note, the proportionally lower number of arrests recorded in 2026 is due to some cases remaining under investigation, with suspects that have not yet been arrested.

Reported.Year	CSA crimes with Arrest made
2020	202
2021	198
2022	282
2023	301
2024	327
2025	314
2026	98

f) Please note, 'Prosecution Prevented' includes cases where prosecution could not proceed for one or more of the following reasons: the suspect/offender is deceased; prosecution is not in the public interest; formal action is not in the public interest; the suspect is below the age of criminal responsibility; the suspect is physically or mentally unfit to prosecute; the victim or key witness is deceased or too ill; the statutory time limit for prosecution has expired.

Outcome	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Charged/Summoned	63	81	90	151	127	148	79
Evidential Difficulties - suspect identified	77	50	66	78	103	137	60
Evidential Difficulties - victim does not support action	12	17	14	34	35	58	22
Investigated by other Agency	1	-	-	1	3	2	-
Investigation complete - no suspect identified	2	3	-	3	1	-	1
Out of court - formal	1	2	-	1	2	2	-
Out of court - informal	2	1	-	-	3	4	-
Prosecution Prevented	2	14	4	4	13	4	5

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires 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.

Please contact me if you would like to discuss the withheld information.

Yours sincerely,

Force Disclosure Decision Maker