



Your reference: N/A

Our reference: FOI_24_1068

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Date: 23/12/2024

Dear

Gloucestershire Constabulary Freedom of Information request FOI_24_1068

On 26/11/2024 you sent an email constituting a request under the Freedom of Information Act asking the following:

REQUEST 1:

What would you like to know?: 1) The budget of your force.

REQUEST 2:

What would you like to know?: 2) If your force has a dedicated team for drone usage.

Drones, as defined by the Civil Aviation Authority, relate to Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for the purpose of the above requests.

REQUEST 3:

What would you like to know?: 3) The number of drones your force possesses.

Drones, as defined by the Civil Aviation Authority, relate to Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for the purpose of the above requests.

REQUEST 4:

What would you like to know?: 4) The brand(s) of these drones.

Drones, as defined by the Civil Aviation Authority, relate to Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for the purpose of the above requests.

REQUEST 5:

What would you like to know?: 5) The number of cases/situations these drones were deployed in from 2022 to 2023.

Drones, as defined by the Civil Aviation Authority, relate to Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for the purpose of the above requests.

REQUEST 6:

What would you like to know?: 6) The types of cases/situations these drones were deployed for.

Drones, as defined by the Civil Aviation Authority, relate to Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for the purpose of the above requests.

REQUEST 7:

What would you like to know?: 7) If drones have been deployed in tandem with each other.

Drones, as defined by the Civil Aviation Authority, relate to Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for the purpose of the above requests.

REQUEST 8:

What would you like to know?: 8) If the usage of a drone swarm is being researched or otherwise investigated for use.

Drones, as defined by the Civil Aviation Authority, relate to Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for the purpose of the above requests.

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 s1, I can confirm that Gloucestershire Constabulary holds some relevant information.

1. Please see the below link for the current budget for Gloucestershire Police [police-and-crime-panel-pcc-budget-covering-report-v0.4](#)

2. Yes

3. 15 Drones in service and operational

4. DJI

5. Drones were deployed to 145 incidents in 2022 and 318 in 2023

6. Gloucestershire Constabulary use Drone technology to provide aerial perspective and thermal capabilities to respond to planned and spontaneous deployments. This can be any situation where aerial perspective is beneficial, such as missing person searches, events, offender searches, scene photography, containment, fires, etc.

7. Yes

8. Gloucestershire Constabulary is not conducted any such research

In addition, in relation to the covert use of 'Drones' or Unmanned Aerial vehicles (UAV's), Gloucestershire Constabulary neither confirms nor denies that it holds any other information relevant to the request by virtue of the following exemptions:

Section 23(5) - Information supplied by, or concerning, certain security bodies

Section 24(2) - National Security

Section 31(3) - Law Enforcement

Section 23 is an absolute class-based exemption and there is no requirement to conduct a harm or public interest test. Sections 24, and 31 are prejudice based qualified exemptions and there is a requirement to articulate the harm that would be caused in confirming or denying that any other information is held as well as carrying out a public interest test.

Harm for the partial NCND

As you may be aware, disclosure under FOIA is a release to the public at large. Whilst not questioning the motives of the applicant, confirming or denying that any other information is held regarding the use of this specialist equipment for covert use, would show criminals what the capacity, tactical abilities and capabilities of the force are, allowing them to target specific areas of the UK to conduct their criminal/terrorist activities. Confirming or denying the specific circumstances in which the police service may or may not deploy UAV's, would lead to an increase of harm to covert investigations and compromise law enforcement. This would be to the detriment of providing an efficient policing service and a failure in providing a duty of care to all members of the public.

The threat from terrorism cannot be ignored. It is generally recognised that the international security landscape is increasingly complex and unpredictable. Since 2006, the UK Government have published the threat level, based upon current intelligence and that threat is currently categorised as 'substantial', see link below:

<https://www.mi5.gov.uk/threat-levels>

The UK continues to face a sustained threat from violent extremists and terrorists.

It is well established that police forces use covert tactics and surveillance to gain intelligence in order to counteract criminal behaviour. It has been previously documented in the media that many terrorist incidents have been thwarted due to intelligence gained by these means.

Confirming or denying that any other information is held in relation to the covert use of UAV's would limit operational capabilities as criminals/terrorists would gain a greater understanding of the police's methods and techniques, enabling them to take steps to counter them. It may also suggest the limitations of police capabilities in this area, which may further encourage criminal/terrorist activity by exposing potential vulnerabilities. This detrimental effect is increased if the request is made to several different law enforcement

bodies. In addition to the local criminal fraternity now being better informed, those intent on organised crime throughout the UK will be able to 'map' where the use of certain tactics are or are not deployed. This can be useful information to those committing crimes. It would have the likelihood of identifying location-specific operations which would ultimately compromise police tactics, operations and future prosecutions as criminals could counteract the measures used against them.

Any information identifying the focus of policing activity could be used to the advantage of terrorists or criminal organisations. Information that undermines the operational integrity of these activities will adversely affect public safety and have a negative impact on both national security and law enforcement.

Factors favouring Neither Confirming Nor Denying for Section 24

The information if held simply relates to national security and confirming or denying whether it is held would not actually harm it. The public are entitled to know what public funds are spent on and what security measures are in place, and by confirming or denying whether any other information regarding the covert use of UAV's is held, would lead to a better-informed public.

Factors against Neither Confirming Nor Denying for Section 24

By confirming or denying whether any other information is held would render Security measures less effective. This would lead to the compromise of ongoing or future operations to protect the security or infra-structure of the UK and increase the risk of harm to the public.

Factors favouring Neither Confirming Nor Denying for Section 31

Confirming or denying whether any other information is held regarding the covert use of UAV's would provide an insight into the police service. This would enable the public to have a better understanding of the effectiveness of the police and about how the police gather intelligence. It would greatly assist in the quality and accuracy of public debate, which could otherwise be steeped in rumour and speculation. Where public funds are being spent, there is a public interest in accountability and justifying the use of public money.

Some information is already in the public domain regarding the police use of this type of specialist equipment and confirming or denying whether any other information is held would ensure transparency and accountability and enable the public to see what tactics are deployed by the Police Service to detect crime.

Factors against Neither Confirming Nor Denying for Section 31

Confirming or denying that any other information is held regarding the covert use of UAV's would have the effect of compromising law enforcement tactics and would also hinder any future investigations. In addition, confirming or denying methods used to gather intelligence for an investigation would prejudice that investigation and any possible future proceedings.

It has been recorded that FOIA releases are monitored by criminals and terrorists and so to confirm or deny any other information is held concerning specialist covert tactics would lead to law enforcement being undermined. The Police Service is reliant upon all manner

of techniques during operations and the public release of any *modus operandi* employed, if held, would prejudice the ability of the Police Service to conduct similar investigations.

By confirming or denying whether any other information is held in relation to the covert use of UAV's would hinder the prevention or detection of crime. The Police Service would not wish to reveal what tactics may or may not have been used to gain intelligence as this would clearly undermine the law enforcement and investigative process. This would impact on police resources and more crime and terrorist incidents would be committed, placing individuals at risk. It can be argued that there are significant risks associated with providing information, if held, in relation to any aspect of investigations or of any nation's security arrangements so confirming or denying that any other information is held, may reveal the relative vulnerability of what we may be trying to protect.

Balance test

The security of the country is of paramount importance and the Police service will not divulge whether any other information is or is not held regarding the covert use of UAV's if to do so would place the safety of an individual at risk, undermine National Security or compromise law enforcement.

Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and providing assurance that the police service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat posed by various groups or individuals, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding the integrity of police investigations and operations in the highly sensitive areas such as extremism, crime prevention, public disorder and terrorism prevention.

As much as there is public interest in knowing that policing activity is appropriate and balanced this will only be overridden in exceptional circumstances. The areas of police interest discussed above are sensitive issues that reveal local intelligence and therefore it is our opinion that for these issues the balancing test for confirming or denying whether any other information is held regarding the covert use of UAV's, is not made out.

However, this should not be taken as necessarily indicating that any information that would meet your request exists or does not exist.

If you are not satisfied with this response or any actions taken in dealing with your request, you have the right to ask that we review your case under our internal procedure. Please note that a request for an internal review must be made within 20 working days of the response to your original request.

If you decide to request that such a review is undertaken and following this process you are still unsatisfied, you then have the right to direct your complaint to the Information Commissioner for consideration.

The Information Commissioner can be contacted via the following means:

Website - <https://ico.org.uk/>

Call their helpline - 0303 123 1113

Email - casework@ico.org.uk

Post –

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Yours sincerely,

Disclosure Officer
Gloucestershire Constabulary