



Your reference:

Our reference: FOI_24_1109

E-mail: FOI

@gloucestershire.police.uk

Direct dial: 01452 754304

Postal Address: As above

Date: 08/01/2025

Dear

Gloucestershire Constabulary Freedom of Information request FOI_24_1109

On 09/12/2024 you sent an email constituting a request under the Freedom of Information Act asking the following:

Under the Freedom of information act I am requesting the following information:

- The make and model of all firearms owned
- The number of firearms owned
- The number of locations at which firearms are stored

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

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires Gloucestershire Constabulary, when refusing to provide information (because the information is exempt) to provide you the applicant with a notice which: (a) states the fact, (b) specifies the exemption in question and (c) states (if not otherwise apparent) why the exemption applies.

With regard to the above requested information, the following exemptions apply:

Section 24(1) National Security
Section 31(1) Law enforcement;

Section 24 is a qualified exemption. There is a requirement to articulate the harm in disclosing such information as well as carrying out a public interest test.

Section 31 is a prejudice-based and qualified exemption. There is a requirement to articulate the harm in disclosing such information as well as carrying out a public interest test.

Harm Test

A Freedom of Information Act request is not a private transaction. Both the request itself and any information disclosed, are considered suitable for open publication. This is because, under the Act, any information disclosed is released into the wider public domain, effectively to the world, not just to an individual. Whilst not questioning the motives of the applicant, by providing the information of firearms used by authorised firearms officers could allow those who seek to cause harm to members of the public to gain an understanding of the level of resources employed to mitigate the threat of an attack. This could then allow terrorists/extremists with the time and inclination over a period of years to try to map whether purchases are increasing or decreasing year on year.

The threat from terrorism cannot be ignored. It should be recognised that the international security landscape is increasingly complex and unpredictable. The UK faces a sustained threat from violent terrorists and extremists. The UK Government have published the threat level, which is currently set to 'substantial' meaning "a terrorist attack is likely".

In consideration of the ramifications of this threat level, it would not be wise to release details of the firearms used by authorised firearms officers, as to do so could compromise the current or future law enforcement role of the police. Modern-day policing is intelligence-led and information of this nature needs to be treated with extreme sensitivity as it could have a detrimental effect on the operational effectiveness of the police. There are significant risks associated with the release of such information as this may provide those seeking to commit criminal acts with an advantage over the police as the information can indeed be viewed as operationally sensitive. Disclosure could have a negative effect on police's ability to provide the necessary service required should the release of information be used and manipulated by those with criminal or terrorist intent to try and attack individuals or establishments.

As stated previously, the UK faces a serious and sustained threat from violent extremists. The police have a duty to promote the safety of all individuals. Therefore, to release information held would allow interested parties to gain an awareness of policing decisions used to safeguard national security. National security encompasses a wide spectrum and it is our duty to protect the people within the UK and abroad. Public safety is of paramount importance to the policing purpose and must be taken into account in deciding whether to disclose information. Providing details relating to our capabilities in this specific area, could potentially be misused proving detrimental to national security.

In the current environment of an increased threat of terrorist activity, providing any details that could assist an extremist, terrorist faction or fixated individual who have the relevant time and know-how, would put people's lives at risk.

Public Interest Test

Overall Factors favouring disclosure for S24 and S31

The public are entitled to know how public funds are spent and resources used. Moreover, it would provide the general public with a reassurance that every tactical option is used. There is a legitimate public interest in the public being satisfied that the police are equipped to deliver services to the public when and where required, and therefore knowing the location of armed units would satisfy the public that resources are available within a

timely manner throughout the force area and also shows transparency of police operations.

Providing this information would make members of the public more aware of the level of police force capability to protect themselves and members of the public against crimes and terrorism activities.

Factors favouring non-disclosure for S24

To provide this information it would render protection measures less effective which would compromise policing crimes and protection of officers within the forces. The risk of harm to the public would be elevated if a person with malintent is aware of the level of protection within the forces in the UK. The National security would be compromised by providing knowledge of the forces' protection capability.

Factors favouring non-disclosure for S31

To provide such information at force level could compromise law enforcement tactics which would hinder the Police force's ability to protect themselves and members of the public against crimes. The threat of crimes will increase as more crimes are committed as a result of criminals and terrorist gaining knowledge about the capabilities of the force, and therefore the public will be placed at a greater risk. A fear of crime will be realised as criminals and terrorist identify different levels of Gloucestershire Constabulary's policing capability, resulting in the public being in fear of more criminal activity occurring.

Additionally disclosing information regarding locations of specific police assets may reveal what resources are available, and enable police strength to be determined and circumvented by those intent on committing crime. The release of this information could therefore provide a tactical advantage to offenders which would negatively impact on public safety and undermine the policing purpose.

Balance Test

The security of the country is of paramount importance and the Police Service will not divulge information if to do so would place the safety of the public at risk, undermine national security or law enforcement. Whilst there is a public interest in transparency of policing, demonstrating that the police are justified and accountable in the use of funds to conduct the vital work they do and, in this case, providing assurance that the police service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat posed by terrorist activity, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding both national security and the integrity of police operations in the highly sensitive area of combating terrorism and extremism.

It is not in the public interest for law enforcement tactics and operational capabilities to be compromised with the disclosure of the locations of specific units. Such a disclosure would allow those with criminal intent the ability to build up a mosaic picture of force capabilities and resources which could be used to undermine law enforcement. This would not be in the public interest

As much as there is a public interest in knowing that policing activity is appropriate and balanced, this will only be overridden in exceptional circumstances. Any disclosure of information relating to the police's resources for this specialist area, which are sensitive issues of intelligence value to a terrorist, would undermine our ability to combat terrorism. This is especially the case if additional resources need to be put in place to counter harm caused by an adverse FOIA request.

Therefore, it is our opinion that for these reasons the balancing test favours non-disclosure of the requested information

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