



Your reference:

Our reference: FOI_24_1110

E-mail: FOI

@gloucestershire.police.uk

Direct dial: 01452 754304

Postal Address: As above

Date: 02/01/2025

Dear

Gloucestershire Constabulary Freedom of Information request FOI_24_1110

On 11/12/2024 you sent an email constituting a request under the Freedom of Information Act asking the following:

I would like to know how many 3D-printed guns have been recovered by the force in each year (separately) between 2020 and 2024.

Gloucestershire Constabulary can neither confirm nor deny that information is held relevant to your request as the duty in Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 does not apply 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 a class based absolute exemption and there is no requirement to evidence the harm or articulate public interest considerations to the applicant.

With Sections 24 and 31 being prejudice based qualified exemptions there is a requirement to articulate the harm that would be caused in confirming or not whether information is held as well as considering the public interest.

Harm in Confirming or Denying that Information is held

Confirmation or denial that information is held would identify local level activity regarding the use and/or seizure (or "recovery") of 3D printed weapons. In turn this risks identifying the level of police awareness of such weapons in the force area. When a request is made to multiple forces, there is a further risk in that confirmation or denial would reveal information which could be used to build a picture as to where national and local investigations and operations are taking place, and perhaps more pertinently where they are not, to combat the supply, distribution and use of these weapons. This mapping effect,

created by forces either confirming information is held and citing a substantive exemption or, conversely, stating 'no information held', would undermine the effective delivery of operational law enforcement by revealing the intelligence picture of the force in respect of 3D printed firearms as well as compromising potential ongoing investigations, some of which may be covert.

Disclosure of information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) is considered a release to the world at large and not a private transaction. Whilst not questioning an applicant's motives in this case, by making a public disclosure under FOI, it must be considered that as well as members of the public, criminals, including terrorists will be able to access the data released. It is widely known that organised criminal gangs and those involved in terrorist related activity monitor FOI disclosures closely for any information they can use to further their criminal activity.

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. Since 2006, the UK Government have published the threat level, based upon current intelligence that threat level to the UK currently is 'substantial', meaning an attack is likely.

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

Any information identifying the focus of policing activity that could be used to the advantage of criminal organisations, serious and organised crime groups and terrorists to undermine the operational integrity of policing will adversely affect public safety and have a negative impact on, not only law enforcement at a local level, but policing and operations at a national level the impact of which risks the national security of the UK.

Public Interest Considerations

Section 24 (2) National Security

Factors favouring complying with Section 1(1)(a)

Any information that would increase public knowledge in showing how resources are allocated in response to events would favour disclosure. This would also support the fundamental purpose of the Freedom of Information Act, which is to be more open and transparent in the way in which the police perform, making them more accountable for their actions. Releasing any details regarding the seizure of 3D printed firearms would provide reassurance to the public that the police are appropriately resourced in this area and would be in a position to respond to any National Security threats or incidents. Any information which would allow for more accurate public debate would be a positive factor for disclosure.

Factors against complying with Section 1(1)(a)

Whilst there is a public interest in providing reassurance that the police are appropriately and effectively dealing with threats posed by terrorist organisations, there is a strong public interest in safeguarding national security and the welfare and safety of the general public. Any disclosure (including confirming or denying information is held) has the potential to undermine ongoing and future operations to protect the Security of the United Kingdom, e.g. counter terrorism activity. The risk of significant harm or even death to the community at large would be increased.

The cumulative effect of terrorists gathering information from various sources would build a picture of potential vulnerabilities at a local level. The more information disclosed over time will provide a more detailed account of the investigative focus of not only a force area but also the country as a whole. Any incident which results from such a disclosure would by default affect National Security.

Section 31(3) Law Enforcement

Factors favouring complying with Section 1(1)(a)

There is media reporting concerning the increase of these weapons, 3D guns, appearing on British Streets which in itself is a factor supporting confirmation or denial.

To confirm or deny that this information is held would make members of the public more aware of the threat of certain offences and the forces ability to deal with them. Improved public awareness may lead to more intelligence being submitted to police about possible further instances of the use of 3D- printed firearms and any acts of criminality or perceived terrorism as members of the public will be more observant to suspicious activity which in turn may result in a reduction of crime.

Factors against complying with Section 1(1)(a)

To confirm or deny that the requested information is held could compromise law enforcement tactics which would hinder the Police force's ability to prevent and detect crimes. Whilst such information on its own may be perceived as not harmful, any further information that may be already in the public domain or any that may be asked for in the future could be detrimental to forces and can contribute to the mosaic effect. The 'mosaic' effect is attune to the building up of a jigsaw, from public disclosures and other information, gradually filling in the pieces to form a complete picture. For criminals, including serious and organised crime groups and terrorists to gain easy access to such information would not only undermine the police's primary function of law enforcement but also place the public at significant risk of harm.

Balancing Test

To confirm or deny that any such information is held or not held would indicate levels of policing activity at force level which could allow individuals to evaluate levels of activity across individual force areas and exploit what may be considered as less active or resourced areas. If this information is disclosed it continually drip feeds in the pool of information publically available to criminals and terrorists who will use it to complete a full picture on how and where to undertake their criminal pursuits without fear of detection or apprehension.

The security of the country is of paramount importance. The police will not divulge any information that would place the safety of officers or the public at risk or undermine national security. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing, and in this case providing assurance that the police service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat of activity involving weapons, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding both national security and the integrity of police investigations and operations. It is not in the best interests of the security of the country, individual forces or the public in general to put such information into the public arena where it could be used

by those wishing to cause harm. It is our opinion that for these issues the balancing test for confirming or denying that this information is held, not made out.

No inference can be taken from this refusal that information does 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