



Your reference:

Our reference: FOI_25_0804

E-mail: FOI

@gloucestershire.police.uk

Direct dial: 01452 754304

Postal Address: As above

Date: 28/10/2025

Dear

Gloucestershire Constabulary Freedom of Information request FOI_25_0804

On 11/08/2025 you sent an email constituting a request under the Freedom of Information Act asking the following:

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:

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)

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)

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

Unfortunately, there is no central register for this information.

When an Individual contacts the police and it's deemed to be a police matter, an incident will be created on the Incident Recording System.

Whilst it may be recorded that the caller identifies themselves as working in connection with a "paedophile hunter" group, there is no way to electronically retrieve this information. The only way to do so is to manually review all relevant incident records, which for a period of 5 years would run into thousands of records, which will clearly take far longer than the 18 hours as prescribed by the Freedom of Information Act.

Section 17(5) 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.

In relation to your request Section 12 applies.

Section 12(1)– Fee Regulations states:

Section 1(1) of the Act 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. (As detailed in the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Fees Regulations of 2004)

The appropriate limit at the moment is £450 calculated at an hourly rate of £25 per hour for all staff time incurred in:

- i. Determining whether information is held
- ii. Locating it
- iii. Retrieving it
- iv. Extracting the information to be disclosed from the other information.

In accordance with the Act, this letter represents a Refusal Notice for your request.

Section 16 of the Freedom of Information Act, provides the opportunity to assist the applicant with any suggestions or variation that may allow a search to be undertaken within the cost constraints of Section 12 of the Act.

We can conduct a search of the Crime Recording System for substantiated crimes where specific terms may appear in the MO freetext. The results of this would greatly depend on how the information is recorded within the MO as there is no exact terminology or names used to identify such groups.

If this search would be of use to you, please provide the terms you wish for us to search for, along with confirmation of the offences that are pertinent. A link to the Home Office Crime Recording Rules has been provided below. Please note that there may still be a need to manually review the results for relevance to your request, and depending on the number of crimes retrieved from such a search, the request could still engage Section 12 of the Act.

[Home Office Crime Recording Rules for frontline officers and staff - GOV.UK](#)

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