

**Information Governance Unit
Information Management Branch**

27th October 2008

Dear XXXX

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REFERENCE NO: XXXX

I write in connection with your request for information dated 18/09/2008, which was received by Greater Manchester Police on 19/09/2008. I note you seek access to the following information:

1. How many gangs with juveniles among their members are known to operate in the police forces' area?

2. For each of these known gangs what is:

(a) their name,

(b) size,

(c) areas of operation,

(d) age range of members,

(e) types of crimes they are thought to be involved in

3. To what extent has the number of known gangs increased or decreased in the past three years?

4. To what extent has the size of known gangs increased or decreased in the past three years?

5. Have any known gangs ceased to exist in the past three years and if so how many and what is thought to be the reason for their demise?

Following receipt of your request searches were conducted within Greater Manchester Police to locate information relevant to your request. I can confirm that the information you have requested is held, in part, by Greater Manchester Police.

Responses

Question 2 (c) – Whilst information is not held regarding the 'areas of operation' as requested, GMP can advise that alleged gangs are believed to be **based** in the Metropolitan and Trafford Divisions of the GMP geographical area.

Question 2 (e) - It is believed that alleged gang activity would include the following crime types – criminal damage, street robberies, burglaries, low level drug dealing, public order offences, assault offences and discharging of firearms.

In relation to **all** other questions - Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires Greater Manchester 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 is Qualified stating; **Section 31 Law Enforcement – exempt if disclosure under this Act would, or would likely to, prejudice – (a) the prevention or detection of crime, (b) the apprehension or prosecution of offenders and (c) the administration of justice.**

Harm

The disclosure of specific details of 'police knowledge' relating to alleged gangs and their activities, could potentially impact and undermine tactical and strategic techniques planned in order to target any criminal activity carried out by alleged gangs.

Providing an awareness to individuals involved in alleged gang culture would enable gang members to take evasive action in order to cover their tracks and avoid apprehension – for example, if an individual aged 13 is currently a member of a gang engaging in criminal violence in Greater Manchester, knowing that the police are aware of this fact, could potentially enable the juvenile to relinquish his activity in order to avoid apprehension. There is also the fact that an individual of this age is mixing with unsavoury characters who, if other gang members are made aware that the police have knowledge of a 13 year old, could retaliate with violent behaviour towards the juvenile, thereby jeopardising their personal safety.

Public Interest Test

Considerations Favouring Disclosure Public Awareness & Debate

Where disclosure can assist individuals by raising awareness of issues that may be of relevance to them. This could empower them to make more effective decisions about their own activities or contribute to more public debate. An example would include being able to avoid a particular area where there is a crime issue. Disclosure of the requested information, in full, would assist the public in this way.

Public Safety

There may be occasions when it is appropriate to disclose information that would have an impact on public safety. It could certainly be argued that the release of the information would impact the safety of the public of Greater Manchester.

Considerations Favouring Non-disclosure Efficient and Effective Conduct of the Force

Where the current of future law enforcement role of the force may be compromised by the release of information. As evidenced above the disclosure of this type of data could impact the law enforcement capabilities of GMP by giving those individuals involved in gang criminal activity an advantage.

Public Safety

There may be occasions where the release of information may not be in the public interest. Public safety is of paramount importance to the policing purpose and must be considered in respect of every release. As discussed above the release of the requested data could potentially compromise the very safety of individuals that GMP serves to protect.

Balancing Test

As previously evidenced, to disclose information relating to alleged gangs – i.e. size, names, areas of operation etc – could compromise the current and future law enforcement role of the police force. Potentially giving those individuals engaged in gang related criminal activity an advantage over the force. It could also compromise the health and safety of the public of the Greater Manchester, and national, area.

Complaint Rights

Your attention is drawn to the attached sheet, which details your right of complaint.

Should you have any further inquiries concerning this matter, please write or contact me on telephone number 0161 856 2529 quoting the reference number above.

Yours sincerely

Information Access Officer