

**Information Management Section
IT Services Branch**

25th January 2007

Dear XXXX

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REFERENCE NO: XXXX

I write in connection with your request for information dated 26 December 2006, which was received by Greater Manchester Police on 27 December 2006. I note you seek access to the following information:

- **The total number of sex offenders registered with the force whose current whereabouts are unknown.**
- **Of these,**
 - ♦ **the number who were placed on the sex offenders register for sexual offences against children,**
 - ♦ **The number who were placed on the sex offenders register for offences including the rape of a child,**
 - ♦ **The number who were placed on the sex offenders register for offences including the indecent assault of a child.**
 - ♦ **For the sex offender whose whereabouts have been unknown for the longest period of time – the length of time they have been missing.**
 - ♦ **For the sex offenders whose whereabouts have been unknown for the longest period of time – details of the offence that led to their registration.**

Following receipt of your request searches were conducted within Greater Manchester Police to locate information relevant to your request.

1. In relation to the number of registered sex offenders (RSO's) whose whereabouts are unknown, Greater Manchester Police, had of 8 January 2007, 18 RSO's currently recorded as wanted because their whereabouts are unknown. This total is only valid for the date specified because the information is dynamic and will change as arrests are made or new cases come to light through proactive intelligence led policing or routine visits to registered offenders.
2. This information is exempt under Section 31 – Law Enforcement, Section 38 – Health and Safety, and Section 40 – Personal Information. The information provided in question 1 is a low number, relative to the total number of RSO's in the force area. Even though this request is not geographically based, the release of the information requested will be breaking down information to a level lower than the ACPO policy currently supports.

The small numbers involved, accompanied by the information requested significantly increases the risk of an individual being identified.

Information disclosed in relation to RSO's are like pieces of a jigsaw. Every small piece can constantly be added to other information, not just that officially released, such as police media statements, court reporting and MAPPA reports, but also local knowledge, supposition and rumour, in order to identify an offender. Depending on whether these pieces of information are correctly assembled or not, we then see RSO's and/or innocent persons targeted by those in our society who feel it is appropriate to take vigilante style action. This places those persons at risk of physical and mental harm.

Other likely outcomes of disclosures that contribute to these genuine or misplaced identification of offenders, is that damage is caused to the relationship between the offenders and those that are entrusted with their monitoring.

The relationship between the police and their partner agencies who monitor offenders and the offenders themselves is a critical one, which is dependent upon developing a relationship of mutual trust and understanding. When required to register, offenders are asked to share information about their previous behaviour which allows officers to ascertain if they are currently, or likely to be, offending again. Disclosure of information that has been provided in this environment will have the effect of undermining that trust and will lead to offenders being less candid. This will make supervision more difficult and could lead to a rise in re-offending, causing more crime and placing the public at risk.

Also, the level of detail requested may disrupt or compromise an ongoing investigation. An offender will be able to cross reference the list of offences, time etc, requested with their own conviction data to establish if their unknown whereabouts has been detected. This will enable them to take even more obtuse steps to avoid detection or evade capture.

Public Interest Test

Factors Favouring Disclosure

Public Awareness/Public Debate

Issues regarding registered sex offenders are currently of general concern to the public. This information will enable the public to be better informed with regard to the activities of these offenders. This will contribute to the quality and accuracy of public debate in relation to the monitoring of offenders, which is rife with speculation and rumour fuelled by inaccurate media reporting and gossip.

Accountability

The length of time that these offenders have been missing will be relevant to judging the efficiency and effectiveness of the force.

Factors Favouring Non-Disclosure

Interests of Third Parties

The interests of innocent persons may be jeopardised by misidentification as outlined above. Also the interests of offenders will be jeopardised by the release of this information as it relates to their personal affairs. It could cause a breakdown in the supervision process and the support services available to an offender if they no longer use them due to a lack of confidence.

Public Safety

Public Safety is of paramount importance to the police service and its partner agencies. The potential harm in offenders not being managed properly and committing more crimes or innocent people being targeted after misidentification is of grave concern and whilst wishing

to embrace the ethos of information disclosure, this cannot take precedence over public safety.

Human Rights

Although convicted offenders, the rights of individuals in these cases cannot be underestimated. Their right to not be subject to or fear intimidation, or identification is firmly bedded in the Human Rights Act (HRA). The HRA will also be relevant to non offenders who are either bullied or assaulted because of misidentification as a result of these disclosures.

Efficient and Effective Conduct of the Force

Disclosures which enable an offender to know whether or not their disappearance has been detected will enable them to take steps making it more difficult to detect their whereabouts. This may mean that additional resources have to be diverted in order to locate them. These resources are not finite and this will cause a reduction of capability in other areas of public protection.

Complaint Rights

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

Yours sincerely