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Our ref: GSA 1600/23  
Please quote our reference  
number when responding

Thursday, 11 May 2023

[REDACTED]

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REFERENCE NO: GSA 1600/23**

I write in connection with your request for information dated 23/03/2023, I note you seek access to the following information:

*Under the Freedom of Information Request 2000 I request the following information on far-right extremism:*

- i. Number of far-right terrorism investigations and arrests over the last 10 years with data for each year within that period e.g. Jan-Dec 2007, 2008 etc.*
- ii. Data sorted by local policing area*
- iii. The age and gender of those investigated or arrested*

*This information is particularly regarding far-right terrorist groups like the EDL so only information regarding far-right extremism is relevant.*

**Result of Searches**

Greater Manchester Police can neither confirm nor deny whether it holds the information that you requested as the duty in Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act) does not apply by virtue of the following exemptions:

**Section 24(2) - National Security**

**Section 30(3) - Investigations**

**Section 31(3) - Law Enforcement**

**Section 40(5) - Personal Information**

Sections 24 and 31 are prejudice based qualified exemptions and there is a requirement to evidence the prejudice (harm) in disclosure and consider the public interest to ensure neither confirming or denying that information is held is appropriate.

Section 30 is a class based qualified exemption which means consideration must be given as to whether there is a public interest in neither confirming nor denying the information exists.

Section 40 is an absolute exemption; therefore it is not necessary to carry out a public interest test.

### **Harm in Confirming or Denying that Information is held**

Any release under FOIA is a disclosure to the world, not just to the individual making the request. To confirm or not that information is held pertinent to this request would reveal whether or not there has been any police activity including investigations in individual force areas.

Police forces work in conjunction with other agencies and information is freely shared in line with information sharing protocols. Modern day policing is intelligence led and this is particularly pertinent with regard to both law enforcement and national security. The public expect police forces to use all powers and tactics available to them to prevent and detect crime or disorder and maintain public safety.

To provide the requested data for an individual force, would allow comparison between forces across the country and enable terrorists to build a picture of the effectiveness of what resources are in place and where they are deployed. Disclosure would ultimately prejudice the effectiveness of the national counter terrorism effort and would allow inferences to be drawn about force level counter-terrorism activity and identify vulnerability around the country.

If the Greater Manchester Police were to confirm or deny information was held in respect of far right terrorism investigations, this would undermine an individual force's policing capabilities, which consequently would be detrimental to their ability to deal with the on-going terrorist threat we face.

The prevention and detection of crime is the foundation upon which policing is built and the threat from terrorism cannot be ignored. It is generally recognised that the international security landscape is increasingly complex and unpredictable. The current UK threat level from international terrorism, based on intelligence, is assessed as of today's date, as "Substantial" which means that a terrorist attack is likely, see below link:

[Threat Levels | MI5 - The Security Service](#)

In order to counter criminal and terrorist behaviour, it is vital that the police have the ability to work together, where necessary covertly, to obtain intelligence within current legislative frameworks to assist in the investigative process to ensure the successful arrest and prosecution of offenders who commit or plan to commit acts of terrorism.

To achieve this goal, it is vitally important that information sharing takes place between police officers, members of the public, police forces as well as other security law enforcement bodies within the United Kingdom. Such an action would support counter-terrorism measures in the fight to deprive terrorist networks of their ability to commit crime.

The impact of providing information under FOI which aids in identifying whether there have been any arrests related to far-right terrorism investigations would provide crucial information on the police intelligence picture in respect of far right of terrorist activity which would provide criminals including terrorists or those intent on committing criminal or terrorist acts with valuable information as to where the police are targeting their investigations. If there had or hadn't been any arrest of such a nature confirmation or denial would undermine the effective delivery of operational law enforcement by highlighting which areas have or have not received police attention from far right terrorists. Furthermore, intelligence would be weakened thereby undermining national security and leaving the United Kingdom at risk of more terrorist attack.

### **Public Interest Considerations**

#### **Section 24(2) National Security**

##### **Factors favouring confirming or denying that information is held**

The public are entitled to know how public funds are spent and resources distributed within an area of policing, particularly with regard to how the police investigate terrorist acts. To confirm whether any information exists would enable the general public to hold Greater Manchester Police to account in relation to how they respond to far right terrorism.

Furthermore, confirmation or denial may improve public debate and assist the public to take steps to protect themselves.

##### **Factors against confirming or denying information is held**

Taking into account the current security climate within the United Kingdom, no information which may aid a terrorist should be disclosed. To what extent this information may aid a terrorist is unknown, but it is clear that it will have an impact on a force's ability to monitor terrorist activity.

The public entrust the Police Service to make appropriate decisions with regard to their safety and protection. The only way of reducing risk is to be cautious with what is placed into the public domain.

The cumulative effect of terrorists gathering information from various sources would build a picture of vulnerabilities. The more information disclosed over time will provide a more detailed account of the tactical infrastructure of not only a force area but also a country as a whole.

Any incident that results from such a disclosure would by default affect National Security.

### **Section 30(3) Investigations**

#### Factors favouring confirming or denying information is held

There is a public interest in the transparency of policing and to provide assurance that Greater Manchester Police is appropriately and effectively dealing with crime. Confirming or denying that information exists relevant to this request would lead to a better informed public demonstrating that police resources are being utilised correctly to focus on criminal/terrorist activity and protect the public.

#### Factors against confirming or denying information is held

Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and providing assurance that Greater Manchester Police is appropriately and effectively dealing with crime, there is a strong public interest in safeguarding the integrity of police investigations and operations, particularly where they relate to terrorist activity, and in maintaining confidence in the Police Service. As this is a specific area of investigation which relates to far right terrorism, confirmation or denial would identify police focus and attention which could be used by criminals including terrorists to disrupt investigations and evade detection. This risks the integrity of investigations and places the public at severe risk.

### **Section 31(3) Law Enforcement**

#### Factors favouring confirming or denying information is held

There is information within the public domain, such as information right wing terrorism on the MI5 website, see below link, and this in itself favours confirming information is held.

[Counter-Terrorism | MI5 - The Security Service](#)

#### Factors against confirming or denying information is held

Greater Manchester Police has a duty of care to the community at large and public safety is of paramount importance. If an FOI disclosure revealed information to the world (by citing an exemption or stating no information held) that would undermine the security of the national infrastructure, offenders, including terrorist organisations, could use this to their advantage

which would compromise public safety and more worryingly encourage offenders to carry out further crimes.

By its very nature, information relating to far right terrorism investigations undoubtedly undermines National Security. Under FOI there is a requirement to comply with Section 1(1)(a) and confirm what information is held. In some cases it is that confirmation, or not, which could disclose facts harmful to members of the public, police officers, the Government and its employees.

### **Balancing Test**

The points above highlight the merits of confirming, or denying, whether any information pertinent to this request exists. The security of the country is of paramount importance and the Police Service is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve. As part of that policing purpose, various operations with other law enforcement bodies, some of which may or may not be ongoing. The Police Service will never divulge whether or not information is held if to do so would place the safety of individual(s) at risk or undermine national security.

Whilst there is a public interest in appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat from criminals, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding National Security. As much as there is a public interest in knowing that policing activity is appropriate and balanced in matters of National Security, this will only be overridden in exception circumstances.

The public entrust the Police Service to make appropriate decisions with regard to their safety and protection and the only way of reducing risk is to be cautious with any information that is released. Confirming or denying whether information is held would definitely reveal police activity and would assist those intent on causing harm. Any incident that results from confirmation or denial would, by default, affect National Security.

Therefore, at this moment in time, it is our opinion that for these issues the balance test for confirming, nor denying, that information is held is made out.

No inference can be taken from this refusal that information does or does not exist.

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