

Our ref: 01/FOI/24/013632/L

Please quote our reference
number when responding

Wednesday, 11 December 2024

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REFERENCE NO: 01/FOI/24/013632/L

I write in connection with your request for information dated 13/11/2024, I note you seek access to the following information:

I'm writing to you under the Freedom of Information Act (2000) to ask if you currently, or at any point in the last 5 years, have or hold a contract with the company Palantir Technologies.

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 31(3) - Law enforcement**

Harm in confirming or denying that information is held

Any disclosure under FOI is a release to the public at large. Whilst not questioning the motives of the applicant, confirming or denying if a particular policing tool of this type (in this case Palantir Technologies) is used by Greater Manchester Police as part of an investigative process is different from confirming if, in principle, commercial tools generally are used to assist with searches against information that may be found online.

Any information identifying the focus of policing activity could be used to the advantage of terrorists or criminal organisations. Information that undermines the operational integrity of these activities will adversely affect public safety and have a negative impact on both National Security and Law Enforcement.

Public Interest Test

Factors in favour of disclosure:

Confirming or denying whether the requested information is held would enable the public to have a better understanding of the type of policing tools and tactics employed by Greater Manchester Police in carrying out their law enforcement role. This would give more confidence to the public that we are using (or, as the case may be, not using) policing tools and tactics to help us detect and prevent crime appropriately.

Factors against disclosure:

To confirm or deny whether any other information relating to the use of a particular investigative tool is held would harm the integrity of sensitive policing tactics used to prevent and detect crime and safeguard national security.

It is well established that police forces use publically available data in order to counteract criminal behaviour. It has been previously documented in the media that many terrorist incidents have been thwarted due to intelligence gained by these means. However, given the sensitive areas in which tools of this type may be used and Greater Manchester Police's role in counter-terror investigations, to disclose if any particular tools are used would allow criminals and other adversaries to focus on evaluating the particular capabilities of a particular tool. With this knowledge it would allow criminals and other adversaries to take steps to counteract a specific tool – be it adjusting how they interact and present themselves to take advantage of any weaknesses or gaps in capability they identify. At a simple level, if a policing tool doesn't search 'X' social media site or was unable to identify 'Y' format of images and criminals can establish this, they will exploit this position. Greater Manchester Police's more sophisticated adversaries may be able to go further and take more proactive measures to undermine the tool and/or its provider, and a specific confirmation allows efforts to be focused accordingly.

This detrimental effect is increased if the request is made to several different law enforcement bodies. In addition to the local criminal fraternity now being better informed, those intent on organised crime throughout the UK will be able to 'map' where the use of certain tools are or are not deployed. This can be useful information to those committing crimes. It would have the likelihood of identifying location-specific operations which would ultimately compromise police tactics, operations and future prosecutions as criminals could counteract the measures used against them.

Balancing test

Accordingly, in a position taken in common with other law enforcement agencies, confirming or denying if Greater Manchester Police uses Palantir Technologies would lead to an increase of harm to covert investigations and compromise law enforcement. This outweighs the benefits to disclosure, not least as disclosure would be to the detriment of providing an efficient policing

service and a failure in providing a duty of care to all members of the public. Therefore it is our opinion that for these issues the balance test favours neither confirming nor denying that information is held.

The effective delivery of operational law enforcement is of paramount importance to Greater Manchester Police in their duty to ensure that the prevention and detection of crime is carried out and the effective apprehension or prosecution of offenders is maintained.

Therefore it is our opinion that for these issues the balance test favours neither confirming nor denying that information is held.