



Date: 22/02/2024
Our ref: 01/FOI/24/011858/T

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REFERENCE NO: 01/FOI/24/011858/T

I write in connection with your request for information dated 02/01/2024, received by Greater Manchester Police (GMP) for the following information:

Recent information indicates a lack of public awareness and transparency about the deployment of FRT in public spaces.

Moreover, there have been reports suggesting potential plans to expand the use of FRT, possibly using national databases such as the UK passport photo database. This raises significant concerns about the erosion of privacy and the creation of a surveillance society.

In light of these concerns, we respectfully request the following information:

- 1. Confirmation on whether FRT is currently being used in Cheetham, and if so, detailed information on how it is being implemented.*
- 2. An overview of the Greater Manchester Police's current or planned use of FRT in public spaces within our area.*

3. Assurance that any deployment of FRT is being conducted within a legal framework that protects the rights of residents.

Your response will not only clarify these important issues for our community but also contribute to a broader understanding of the implications of FRT on our daily lives.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your prompt and detailed response.

I also note your clarification dated 20/02/2024:

If possible, we would like disclosure of all the different types of Facial Recognition Technology (FRT) which you refer to in your list, for the Cheetham area only.

I appreciate there may be exceptions in providing the exact locations of covert devices but would still respectfully request the number of such devices within the Cheetham ward.

Result of Searches

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

1. GMP does not use any form of overt live facial recognition. However, GMP does use overt retrospective facial recognition, but this is not location specific. If a crime occurred in Cheetham and a photo still (CCTV, camera phone etc) was obtained of the suspect, then that still may be suitable for comparison against the image bank contained within the Police National Database system, with a view to identifying the suspect and taking appropriate action.
2. Overt live facial recognition is not used by GMP.
3. Information is defined in section 84 of the Act as 'information recorded in any form'. The Act therefore only extends to requests for recorded information. It does not require public authorities to answer questions generally; only if they already hold the answers in recorded form. The Act does not extend to requests for information about policies or their implementation, or the merits or demerits of any proposal or action - unless, of course, the answer to any such request is already held in recorded form. As such, within the spirit of the Act, only questions 1 and 2 qualify as a request for information held.

With regards to questions 1 and 2, Greater Manchester Police can neither confirm nor deny any further information is held in connection to your request by virtue of the following exemptions: **Section 23(5) – Information Supplied by, or concerning, certain Security Bodies, Section 24(2) – National Security and Section 31(3) – Law Enforcement.**

Section 23 is a class based absolute exemption and there is no requirement to evidence harm or consider the public interest. Sections 24 and 31 are prejudiced based qualified exemptions and there is a requirement to evidence the harm in disclosure and consider the public interest to ensure neither confirming or denying that information is held is appropriate.

Evidence of Harm

Any disclosure under FOI is a release to the public at large. Whilst not questioning the motives of the applicant, confirming or denying that any other information relating to the covert practise of facial recognition would show criminals what the capacity, tactical abilities and capabilities of the force are, allowing them to target specific areas of the UK to conduct their criminal or terrorist activities.

Confirming or denying the specific circumstances in which the Police Service may or may not deploy the use such technologies would lead to an increase of harm to covert investigations and compromise law enforcement. This 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.

The threat from terrorism cannot be ignored. It is generally recognised that the international security landscape is increasingly complex and unpredictable. Since 2006, the UK Government has published the threat level: <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/threat-levels>. The UK continues to face a sustained threat from violent extremists and terrorists and based upon current intelligence the threat level is set at Substantial.

It is well established that police forces use covert tactics and surveillance to gain intelligence 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. Confirming or denying whether any information is or isn't held relating to the covert use of facial recognition technologies would limit operational capabilities as criminals and terrorists would gain a greater understanding of the police's methods and techniques, enabling offenders to take steps to counter them. It may also suggest the limitations of police capabilities in this area, which may further encourage criminal or terrorist activity by exposing potential vulnerabilities.

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 tactics 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. 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: Section 24

Factors favouring confirming or denying that any other information is held:

Confirming or denying that any other information exists relevant to the request would lead to a better-informed public and the public are entitled to know how public funds are spent. The information simply relates to national security and disclosure would not actually harm it.

Section 24 - Factors against confirmation or denying that any other information is held:

To confirm or deny whether Greater Manchester Police hold any additional information would allow inferences to be made about the nature and extent of national security related activities

which may or may not take place. This could enable terrorist groups to take steps to avoid detection, and as such, confirmation or denial would be damaging to national security. By confirming or denying any policing arrangements of this nature would render national security measures less effective. This would lead to the compromise of ongoing or future operations to protect the security or infra-structure on the UK and increase the risk of harm to the public.

Section 31 – Factors favouring confirming or denying that any other information is held:

Confirming or denying whether any further information is held would allow the public to see where public funds have been spent and allow the Police service to appear more open and transparent.

Section 31 - Factors against confirmation or denying that any other information is held:

By confirming or denying whether any further information is held would mean that law enforcement tactics would be compromised which would hinder the prevention and detection of crime. Security arrangements and tactics are re-used and have been monitored by criminal groups, fixated individuals and terrorists. These security arrangements and tactics would need to be reviewed which would require more resources and would add to the cost to the public purse.

Balancing Test

The Police Service is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve. The security of the country is of paramount importance and the Police Service will not divulge whether any other information is or is not held if to do so would place the safety of an individual at risk or undermine National Security. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing, providing assurance that the Police Service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat from criminals, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding both National Security and the integrity of the police in knowing that policing activity is appropriate and balanced in matters of National Security; this will only be overridden in exceptional circumstances.