

Date: 15/02/2024
Our ref: 01/FOI/24/012113/P

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REFERENCE NO: 01/FOI/24/012113/P

I write in connection with your request for information dated 09/02/2024, received by Greater Manchester Police (GMP) for the following information:

I request a fully up to date spreadsheet on vehicles used by Gmp

1. >> *Including*
2. >> *Vehicle registration numbers*
3. >> *Vehicle make and model*
4. >> *Vehicle use*
5. >> *Roof numbers (if applicable)*

Result of Searches

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

However, I am not obliged to supply all the information requested as exemption applies.

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires GMP, 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 that applies to this request is:

Section 31(1) – Law Enforcement

Section 31 - Law Enforcement is a qualified, and prejudice based exemption. Therefore, the harm should be articulated, and arguments given as to the public interest test.

Evidence of Harm

Disclosure of full information on fleet, such as full Vehicle Registration Numbers (VRN's), could be of intelligence value to a person or persons with criminal or malicious intent. Full disclosure could provide and enable targeted malicious actions, be that some form of attack on an operational unit or avoiding that unit for example where strengths and weakness may be perceived (whether incorrectly or not).

Although VRNs are an overtly displayed marker that can be clearly seen and are intended to be seen, to disclose a ready-collated list of vehicles with complete vehicle registration numbers would be substantially more harmful than the limited availability of related information via the visibility of vehicles whilst on public roads. In practice, all of this information is not realistically accessible to a member of the public and is therefore not in the public domain.

Providing full lists of VRNs for marked vehicles provides opportunities for criminality to benefit, or for risks to be extended to members of the public:

- Marked police vehicles are often exempt toll and congestion charges, facilitated by automatic recognition of VRN; cloned vehicles would avoid these charges.
- Decommissioned police vehicles are sold at public auction and will re-appear in domestic use, usually driven by members of the public. Lists of VRNs accessible by criminals, such as Organised Crime Gangs (even if out of date), may potentially expose unaware members of public to direct challenge and/or risk of harm.
- Detailed VRN listings will potentially enable a criminal gang to understand the force's capability, through the volumes and types of vehicles being operated; for example numbers of ARV & RPU (Armed Response / Traffic), comparative to other models.

Additionally, law enforcement tactics and operational capability would be compromised with the disclosure of VRN details requested such as that relating to unmarked cars, as those who wish to commit criminal acts will be more aware of what vehicles may belong to the force in a covert role, that assist with preventing and detecting crime.

To disclose details of ARV's, covert and unmarked vehicles could cause harm to the Police Service's ability to protect the public it serves and could prejudice its ability to perform core functions such as the prevention and detection of crime. Releasing this data would give individuals with criminal intent the intelligence required to disrupt Police activity and target innocent members of the public. Criminals would be able to identify in which force areas resources are weak and use this knowledge to their advantage in furthering criminal activity around the county and the country as a whole. The disclosure of information which is likely to undermine the Police Service's ability to serve the public in preventing and detecting crime and the apprehension and prosecution of offenders can only be considered as being harmful to the public.

Factors favouring disclosure under Section 31

There is a legitimate public interest in the public being satisfied that the Police force has up to date and well maintained vehicles to deliver services to the public when and where required.

The release of this information would demonstrate the openness of the organisation to make such matters public.

The disclosure of information relating to ARVs, covert and unmarked vehicles would adhere to the general principle of openness and transparency and better inform the public about how public funds are spend, better awareness which may reduce crime or lead to more information from the public.

Factions favouring non-disclosure under Section 31

The Police service has a duty to deliver effective law enforcement ensuring that the prevention and detection of crime, apprehension or prosecution of offenders and administration of justice is carried out appropriately.

Disclosing any information that would allow the identification of all vehicles may reveal what resources are available for a given role and this information could enable police strength to be determined and circumvented by those intent on committing crime. The release of this information could therefore provide a tactical advantage to offenders which would negatively impact on public safety and undermine the policing purpose.

Disclosing the details of covert vehicles would provide sufficient information to those in criminal activity of the capabilities available to the force when carrying out covert activities in certain areas. This could result in them taking steps to evade detection and to destroy evidence if they believe that their movements are being monitored. This could also lead to vehicles and officers being identified which would render their covert capabilities useless.

Any disclosure of information which is likely to undermine the Police Service's ability to serve the public in preventing and detecting crime can only be considered as being harmful to the public.

Balance Test

It is not in the public interest for law enforcement tactics and operational capability to be compromised with the disclosure of all Fleet details, as those who wish to commit criminal acts will be more aware of the vehicles in operation to assist with preventing and detecting crime.

Such disclosure that would allow those with criminal intent the ability to build up a mosaic picture of force capabilities and resources which could be used to undermine law enforcement. This would not be in the public interest.

Disclosure is also not in the public interest as it places the community at increased unnecessary risk of harm and impact police resources. This is especially the case if additional tactics/resources need to be put in place to counter harm caused by an adverse FOIA request regarding police vehicles.

Therefore, at this moment in time, it is our opinion that the balance test favours against the disclosure of the information requested.