

Date: 23/07/2024
Our ref: 01/FOI/24/012880/V

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REFERENCE NO: 01/FOI/24/012880/V

I write in connection with your request for information dated 02/07/2024, received by Greater Manchester Police (GMP) for the following information:

- 1. *Has the force ever viewed information provided by Facewatch, either directly from the company or by third-parties such as retailers?***
- 2. *Has the force ever tested or trialled information provided by Facewatch, either directly from the company or by third-parties such as retailers?***
- 3. *Has the force ever used information provided by Facewatch, either directly from the company or by third-parties such as retailers?***

If possible without exceeding the cost or time limit, please provide a breakdown of when each of the above took place and whether the Facewatch information was provided by the company/third-party

- In addition, if possible without exceeding the cost or time limit, please provide all correspondence containing the term "Facewatch"

Please limit the above searches to the period 10th June 2020 to the present day.

There is a clear legitimate public interest in this disclosure due to privacy and civil liberty concerns.

Result of Searches

Greater Manchester Police neither confirms nor denies that it holds information relevant to this request by virtue of the following exemptions:

Section 24(2) – National security
Section 31(3) – Law enforcement

Any disclosure under FOI is a release to the public at large. Under the Act, we cannot, and do not request the motives of any application for information. We have no doubt that the vast majority of requests made under the Act are legitimate and the applicants do not have any ulterior motives. Whilst not questioning the motives behind this specific request, confirming or denying that information is held regarding business with Facewatch, or any other likeminded third-party provider, would cause operational harm and affect our ability to fulfil our core function of law enforcement in the future.

Confirming or denying if a particular policing tool of this type is used or has been trialled by GMP is different from confirming if, in principle, commercial tools generally are used within the scope of facial recognition technology.

It is well established that police forces use publicly available data in order to counteract criminal or terrorist 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 may be used, including within the sphere of counter-terrorism investigations, to disclose if any particular products or tools are trialled, or subsequently used would allow criminals and other adversaries to focus on evaluating the particular capabilities of such. With this knowledge it would allow criminals and other adversaries to take steps to counteract them – be it simply 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 do something, such as search 'X' social media site or was unable to identify 'Y' format of images, and criminals can establish this, they will exploit this position. 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 disrupting policing functions throughout the UK will be able to 'map' where the use of certain tools, ergo tactics, may or may not be deployed. This can be useful information to those committing (or those intent on committing or planning) crime.

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 favouring Confirming or Denying for Section 24 - The information, if held, only relates to national security and confirming or denying whether it is held would not actually harm it. The public are entitled to know what public funds are spent on and what measures are in place. By confirming or denying if business is conducted with Facewatch, or any other likeminded third-party provider, would lead to a better informed public.

Factors favouring Neither Confirming or Denying for Section 31 - Confirming or denying whether business has been, or is conducted with Facewatch, or any other likeminded third-party provider, would provide an insight into the Police Service. This would enable the public to have a better understanding of the effectiveness of the police and about how the police operate. It would greatly assist in the quality and accuracy of public debate, which could otherwise be steeped in rumour and speculation. Where public funds are being spent, there is a public interest in accountability and justifying the use of public money.

Factors against Confirming or Denying for Section 31 - Confirming or denying that any information is held regarding business with Facewatch, or any other likeminded third-party provider, would have the effect of compromising law enforcement tactics. It has been recorded that FOIA releases are monitored by criminals and terrorists and so to confirm or deny information is held concerning the use

or trial of specific products or tools would lead to law enforcement being undermined. The Police Service is reliant upon all manner of techniques during operations and the public release of any modus operandi employed, if held, would prejudice the ability of the Police Service to perform the functions it exists to provide.

By confirming or denying that a business interest exists (in this case with Facewatch) would hinder the prevention or detection of crime. The Police Service would not wish to reveal what products or tools, i.e. tactics, may or may not have been used as this would clearly undermine the law enforcement and investigative process. This would impact on police resources and more crime and terrorist incidents would be committed, placing individuals at risk. It can be argued that there are significant risks associated with providing information, if held, in relation to any aspect of investigations or of any nation's security arrangements so confirming or denying that information is held, may reveal the relative vulnerability of what we may be trying to protect

As much as there is public interest in knowing that policing activity is appropriate and balanced this will only be overridden in exceptional circumstances. The use of technology can be a sensitive issue that would reveal police tactics and therefore it is our opinion that for these issues the balancing test for confirming or denying whether any information is held regarding the police, Facewatch, or any other likeminded third-party provider, is not made out.

However, this should not be taken as necessarily indicating that any information that would meet your request exists or does not exist.