

Our ref: 01/FOI/24/012644/L

Please quote our reference
number when responding

Thursday, 20 June 2024

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REFERENCE NO: 01/FOI/24/012644/L

I write in connection with your request for information dated 16/05/2024, I note you seek access to the following information:

- 1. How many times have firearms, specialist munitions and/or less lethal weapons (as defined in the College of Police authorised professional practice on weapons and equipment) been authorised for public order purposes – specifically, for the policing of protests and demonstrations – since 1 January 2022?*
- 2. For which specific protests and demonstrations have those operational deployments been authorised? Please provide the subject of the protest, the date and the organisation(s) organising the event.*
- 3. Please provide information on the purchase by the Greater Manchester Police of any specialist munitions and/or less lethal weapons since 1 January 2022 to the present, specifically: the date of purchase, what was purchased, and from which supplier.*

Result of Searches

Following receipt of your request searches were conducted within Greater Manchester Police to locate information relevant to your request.

1. No information held for the specified time period
2. No information held for the specified time period
3. The information is held, however the information has been exempt from disclosure by virtue of the following exemptions:

- **Section 24(1) - National Security**
- **Section 31(1) - Law Enforcement**

Section 24 is a qualified exemption. There is a requirement to articulate the harm in disclosing such information as well as carrying out a public interest test.

Section 31 is a prejudice-based and qualified exemption. There is a requirement to articulate the harm in disclosing such information as well as carrying out a public interest test.

Overall Evidence of Harm

A Freedom of Information Act request is not a private transaction. Both the request itself and any information disclosed, are considered suitable for open publication. This is because, under the Act, any information disclosed is released into the wider public domain, effectively to the world, not just to an individual. Whilst not questioning the motives of the applicant, by providing the purchase information of any specialist munitions and/or less lethal weapons could allow those who seek to cause harm to members of the public to gain an understanding of the level of resources employed to mitigate the threat of an attack. This could then allow terrorists/extremists with the time and inclination over a period of years to try to map whether purchases are increasing or decreasing year on year.

The threat from terrorism cannot be ignored. It should be recognised that the international security landscape is increasingly complex and unpredictable. The UK faces a sustained threat from violent terrorists and extremists. The UK Government have published the [threat level](#), which is currently set to 'substantial' meaning "a terrorist attack is likely."

In consideration of the ramifications of this threat level, it would not be wise to release details of the information of specialist munitions and/or less lethal weapons, as to do so could compromise the current or future law enforcement role of the police. Modern-day policing is intelligence-led and information of this nature, needs to be treated with extreme sensitivity as it could have a detrimental effect on the operational effectiveness of the police. There are significant risks associated with the release of such information as this may provide those seeking to commit criminal acts with an advantage over the police, as the information can indeed be viewed as operationally sensitive. Disclosure could have a negative effect on police's ability to provide the necessary service required should the release of information be used and manipulated by those with criminal or terrorist intent to try and attack individuals or establishments.

As stated previously, the UK faces a serious and sustained threat from violent extremists. The police have a duty to promote the safety of all individuals. Therefore, to release information held would allow interested parties to gain an awareness of policing decisions used to safeguard national security. National security encompasses a wide spectrum and it is our duty to protect the people within the UK and abroad. Public safety is of paramount importance to the policing purpose and must be taken into account in deciding whether to disclose

information. Providing details relating to budgetary costs in this specific area, could potentially be misused proving detrimental to national security.

In the current environment of an increased threat of terrorist activity, providing any details that could assist an extremist, terrorist faction or fixated individual who have the relevant time and know-how, would put people's lives at risk.

Public Interest Test

Overall Factors favouring disclosure for S24 and S31

The public are entitled to know how public funds are spent and resources used. Moreover, it would provide the general public with a reassurance that every tactical option is used. Providing this information would make members of the public more aware of the level of police force capability to protect themselves and members of the public against crimes and terrorism activities.

Factors favouring non-disclosure for S24

To provide this information it would render protection measures less effective which would compromise policing crimes and protection of officers within the forces. The risk of harm to the public would be elevated if a person with malintent is aware of the level of protection within the forces in the UK. The National security would be compromised providing them with the knowledge of the forces' protection capability.

Factors favouring non-disclosure for S31

To provide such information at force level, it could compromise law enforcement tactics which would hinder the Police force's ability to protect themselves and member of the public against crimes. The threat of crimes will increase as more crimes are committed as a result of criminals and terrorist gaining knowledge about the capabilities of the forces and therefore the public will be placed at a greater risk. A fear of crime will be realised as criminals and terrorist identify different levels of Greater Manchester Police's capability and this resulting in the public being in fear of more criminal activity occurring.

Balancing Test

The security of the country is of paramount importance and the Police Service will not divulge information if to do so would place the safety of the public at risk, undermine National Security or law enforcement. Whilst there is a public interest in transparency and demonstrating that the police are justified and accountable in the use of funds to conduct the vital work they do and in this case providing assurance that the police service is appropriately and effectively

engaging with the threat posed by terrorist activity, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding both national security and the integrity of police operations in the highly sensitive area of combating terrorism and extremism.

As much as there is a public interest in knowing that policing activity is appropriate and balanced this will only be overridden in exceptional circumstances. Any disclosure of information relating to the police's resources for this specialist area would undermine our ability to combat terrorism, which are sensitive issues of intelligence value to a terrorist.

Therefore, it is our opinion that for these reasons the balancing test favours non-disclosure of the requested information.