

Date: 30th October 2024
Our ref: FOI/24/013422/D

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REFERENCE NO: FOI/24/013422/D

I write in connection with your request for information dated 09/10/2024, received by Greater Manchester Police (GMP) for the following information:

I am writing to respectfully request the disclosure of information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Specifically, I am seeking the disclosure of any data or information held by the force that details the organisations and/or individuals recognised by the Chief Constable to install Type A intruder alarm systems within your jurisdiction.

This request pertains to any records, lists, documents, or databases, whether current or historical, that identify those companies or individuals authorised to install and maintain Type A alarm systems which comply with British Standards (such as BS EN 50131 or BS 4737) and are eligible for police response upon alarm activation.

Public Interest and Pre-emptive Counter to Potential Exemptions:

I recognise that the police may choose to refer the public to the National Security Inspectorate (NSI) or the Security Systems and Alarm Inspection Board (SSAIB) to locate qualified installers. However, my request does not seek an endorsement or recommendation but rather the factual data held by your force regarding those entities or individuals recognised by the Chief Constable under this specific capacity.

I anticipate that arguments may be raised regarding the disclosure of this information under exemptions like Section 31 (Law Enforcement) or Section 43 (Commercial Interests). However, I would like to make the following points in advance:

1. Transparency and Accountability: There is a clear public interest in knowing which installers are recognised by the police, especially given the critical nature of security systems. Disclosure would ensure that your force is acting transparently in its recognition of installers, thus maintaining public confidence in security services.

2. Commercial Sensitivity: The names of organisations or individuals recognised to install Type A alarms do not, in themselves, constitute commercially sensitive information. The public, particularly those seeking to ensure their alarms meet the necessary standards for police response, have a right to access this data to make informed decisions.

3. Law Enforcement: Releasing the list of recognised installers is unlikely to prejudice law enforcement activities. On the contrary, providing clarity on which companies are authorised to install Type A alarms may enhance public safety by ensuring installations meet the required standards, reducing the number of false alarms and unnecessary police responses.

I trust that this request will be handled promptly and in accordance with your obligations under the Freedom of Information Act. Should any part of the requested information be exempt from disclosure, I kindly request that you provide an explanation as to why, and supply all other available data.

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 provide 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 which applies to this request is:

Section 31(1)(a)(b) – Law Enforcement

Section 31 is a qualified and prejudice based exemption and as such, subject to a harm and public interest test.

Harm

Freedom of Information is considered to be a release to the world as once the information is published the public authority, in this case Greater Manchester Police, has no control over what use is made of that information.

Providing the names of specific companies accredited to install Type A alarms would expose other companies and the buildings / sites they protect and make them more vulnerable to those persons intent on gaining authorised access to them. This is because it may provide an indication that police response to those areas would potentially be slower. Accordingly, and whilst not questioning the motives of the applicant, providing information that could then be exploited by identifying accredited installers from those who don't install Type A alarm systems could be of use to those who seek to undermine our ability to prevent and detect crime, and more specifically, apprehend those responsible.

Public Interest Test

Factors favoring disclosure

There is a public interest in transparency when any request is made for police information. In this instance there is public interest in knowing which installers are Type A alarm systems accredited, which assists the public in sourcing security systems fit for purpose.

Factors against disclosure

The police only use Type A alarm system installers in accordance with British Standard regulations and as approved by the National Security Inspectorate (NSI) and the Security Systems and Alarm Inspection Board (SSAIB). Disclosing a list of companies used by the police exposes other unaccredited companies and the buildings / sites they are employed to protect, vulnerable, meaning those with the necessary intent could specifically target the areas covered by these companies with the hope of a delayed police response. Any release of information that risks increasing crime and impacting the likelihood of apprehending any person(s) responsible is not in the public interest.

Balance Test

Having considered your request, Greater Manchester Police accepts that there is a public interest in transparency when any request is made for police information. The public interest favouring release must however be balanced against any associated risk and/or prejudice that would be caused through disclosure.

Having carefully considered this, I have found that the public release and publication of the names of these companies would be likely to reveal potential security vulnerabilities through a process of elimination. This means that those with the necessary intent could specifically identify and target the areas covered by unaccredited companies that don't install Type A alarm systems with the hope of a delayed police response. Given this I have found that the release of this information is not in the public interest at this time.