

Date: 30th October 2024
Our ref: FOI/24/013442/H

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REFERENCE NO: FOI/24/013442/H

I write in connection with your request for information dated 14/10/2024, received by Greater Manchester Police (GMP) for the following information:

I would like to request data concerning any criminal cases or police interventions that involved supposed "exorcisms" or spiritual cleansings of people suspected of being possessed by spirits, demons or any other supernatural entity.

Ideally, I would like this information for the calendar years between 2019 and 2023.

Given the personal nature of this questions, I would be happy for cases to be kept anonymous through redaction of unneeded personal information if it would violate GDPR, but it would be useful to know the age, gender, religion and ethnicity of those involved, as well as what they believed the supernatural entity/force in question was.

In addition, how many (if any) criminal cases reported between 2019-2023, within the Greater Manchester area, was the defense of 'demonic possession' or other supernatural belief cited?

Clarification

I guess the key words I'd be interested in exploring would include:

"demon"

"devil"

"Possession" - (though I understand that may get confusing if someone is referring to possessing a weapon/object) "Possessed by" - (possibly the same as above) "demonic possession"

"Jinn"

"djinn"

"Spirit"
"Ghost"
"Poltergeist"
"Exorcism"
"Exorcised"
"Cursed"
"Voodoo"
"ritual"
"witchcraft"

And would it be possible to have descriptions from both incident and criminal records (if any exist)?

Many thanks for your help and for processing what is probably an unusual list of requests.

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. However, I am not obliged to supply you with all the information as an exemption applies.

The Freedom of Information Act is a piece of legislation designed to give the public access to information held by public authorities. It exists to make the decisions of those authorities transparent and to keep the populace better informed regarding matters which affect them.

A Public Authority is able to refuse requests which can divert resources away from more deserving requests and other public business or threaten to undermine the credibility of the freedom of information system. It is recognised that dealing with unreasonable requests can place a strain on resources and get in the way of delivering mainstream services.

When identifying potentially vexatious requests the indicators contained within the Information Commissioner's guidance on Section 14(1) should be considered. In this case we feel the following indicator applies to your request:

Burden on the Authority

Pursuant to the provisions of Section 14(1) of FOIA a request deemed as overly burdensome does not oblige GMP to comply with a request for information.

The ICO confirms within their guidance that they consider there to be a high threshold for refusing a request on such grounds if there is a viable case in line with the below recommendation:

1) The requester has asked for a substantial volume of information which requires sanitising prior to disclosure.

As such your request is being refused due to the amount of time required to review and prepare the information for disclosure, which would impose a grossly oppressive burden on the organisation.

To provide the data requested would involve manual redactions to each incident description and crime MO description as they do contain sensitive and personal information which could identify directly/indirectly a living human therefore Section 40(2) Personal Information will be engaged as this represents information that identifies a living individual, to disclose this information would breach the principles of the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. Personal data is defined by Article 4 of the

GDPR and Part 1 of the Data Protection Act 2018, and means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'). An identified natural person is one who can be identified directly or indirectly from that data. In addition, due to some entries containing a higher level of information regarding the incidents leading to lessons learned, S31(1)(g) by virtue of 2(b) is engaged.

The number of incidents and crimes recorded where one of the keywords has been mentioned within the description is 43,415, therefore at a very conservative estimate of 5 minutes to review and redact each description, it would take approximately 3,617.9 hours to ascertain the data required for this request.

For this reason, any further requests of this nature will be refused under Section 14(1) of the Act, which states that requests that are considered to be vexatious do not have to be complied with.

Please see below for some guidance.

If the Section 14(1) exemption hadn't been engaged, Section 12(1) would have been applied as to provide the information requested would require a manual review of all incidents and crimes to determine the relevance to this request. The Section 16(1) advice and assistance on refining your request would be to remove the keyword '*Possession*' as this returns a large number of records which are not relevant and the removal of "*Would it be possible to have descriptions from both incident and criminal records (if any exist)?*". The resulting response cannot be guaranteed as it will be dependant upon the number of records that fall within the scope of any new request, as they would still need to be manually assessed to determine the relevance.