

Date: 23rd September 2024
Our ref: FOI/24/013138/C

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REFERENCE NO: FOI/24/013138/C

I write in connection with your request for information dated 19/08/2024, received by Greater Manchester Police (GMP) for the following information:

I am writing to you under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and request you provide information on the following:

- 1. Data on the requirement and use of face masks in your Force Control Room during the period March 2020 to January 2022.*
- 2. Provide copies of all risks assessments, including originals and any amendments made during that period in relation to wearing of face coverings in your force control room.*
- 3. Provide information on adjustments made for disabled staff who were unable to wear a face covering and the associated risks assessments for this.*

Clarification

To simplify question one,

During the years 2020 - 2022:

- 1) Was there a face mask mandate within your force control room?*
- 2) If so, what was the appropriate date it come into force*
- 3) If so, what was the appropriate date it was relaxed or withdrawn*

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 all the information requested as exemption applies.

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires Greater Manchester Police, when refusing to provide such information (because this 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 information requested is exempt from disclosure by virtue of the following exemption:

**Section 31(1)(a)(b) – Law Enforcement
Section 40(2) – Personal Information**

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

Section 40 is a class based absolute exemption and there is no requirement to consider the public interest test in this area.

Harm

To disclose the full requested risk assessments into the public domain would be revealing police tactics used by GMP during the pandemic. Covid 19 is still relevant today and by revealing the tactics could reveal weaknesses within the forces control room during these times. It could also increase the risk of danger towards the public GMP who are sworn to protect.

Public Interest Test

Factors Favouring Disclosure

To disclose the requested risk assessments would show accountability of GMP. Disclosure would undoubtedly provide openness, transparency and a better awareness of how GMP operate, especially during a global pandemic.

Factors Against Disclosure

Conversely to the factors in favour of disclosure, to release the requested risk assessments into the public domain would reveal policing tactics and would disclose exact procedures which are implemented during a pandemic.

Disclosure could reveal weaknesses within the force control room and staffing levels, and this could lead to future law enforcement being compromised and encourage more crime to be committed.

Balancing Test

The arguments for and against disclosure of information need to be weighed against each other. In this case the greatest argument for disclosure is the fact that the public would be provided with information regarding how the force police operate.

However, given that the disclosure would reveal policing tactics, as well as putting the public in danger, the balance of disclosure at this time weighs on non-disclosure for the risk assessment requested.

This letter acts as a refusal notice for the risk assessments requested.

Response to the remaining questions

Question 1 – No information held in relation to the dates applied. GMP followed the mandated dates of the Government and Public Health England. As the government relaxed GMP reviewed the processes in line with this.

Question 2 - Risk Assessments exempt, please see above.

All control measures were in line with the national Public Health England guidance which is readily available online. All UK citizens were to follow national guidance.

Question 3

GMP's Force Contact Centre complied with the rules in place as per NHS and Public Health England guidance regarding wearing face masks. In addition, GMP supplied cleaning products and screens. All individuals had personal risk assessments. Those unable to fully comply due to health conditions were granted permission to shield/work from home.

Anyone shielding was not in the workplace. If shielding was not recommended by government for individuals but they had other factors that meant they could not comply with national mandated measures in the workplace then a line manager would individually consider and GMP offered WFH solutions.