

Date: 07/02/2025
Our ref: 01/FOI/25/014039/Z

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REFERENCE NO: 01/FOI/25/014039/Z

I write in connection with your request for information dated 23/01/2025, received by Greater Manchester Police (GMP) for the following information:

Please will you provide the following information for your firearms licensing department.

- 1. The annual budget for the department for April 2024 to March 2025***
- 2. The number of full-time equivalent staff present at end of 2024, broken down into: -***
 - Decision makers***
 - FEOs***
 - Administration staff***
 - I appreciate that you may have different names for the functions, but any information on staff breakdown/function would be useful.***

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 for this request as exemption applies.

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires Greater Manchester Police, 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

This request has been exempt from disclosure by virtue of the following exemption:

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

Disclosure of the number of Police Officers and/or staff in specific areas of policing reveals tactical capability and vulnerabilities from force to force and would compromise the efficient and effective conduct of Greater Manchester Police. To disclose operational strength and budgets available within this unit would hinder Greater Manchester Police in law enforcement capabilities.

The safety of the public is of a paramount importance to Greater Manchester Police and to release the number of specially trained officers/staff that are specifically dedicated to GMP's firearms licencing unit would compromise the safety of the public that Greater Manchester Police serve to protect.

Furthermore, this would impact on the law enforcement capabilities of Greater Manchester Police in the prevention and detection of crime and the apprehension or prosecution of offenders. This would also give an advantage to that are intent on committing crimes and avoid detection.

Factors in favour of disclosure

To disclose how many specialist roles there are within this area of policing would show accountability of Greater Manchester Police in performing a key policing function. Disclosure would encourage public awareness and debate and may reduce crime or lead to more information being provided to Greater Manchester Police from the public for the prevention and detection of crime. Disclosure could be seen how Greater Manchester Police are using its resources to prevent crime and ensure firearms licenses are being issued correctly.

Furthermore, there is always a need to disclose information which relates to the spending of public money. Disclosing this units budgets is in the public's interest to see how resources are balanced across Greater Manchester Police.

Factors against disclosure

To disclose details of specially trained police officers and staff that are specifically dedicated to the firearms licensing team would compromise the efficient and effective conduct of the force, especially the force's future law enforcement tactics being compromised. The safety of the public is of paramount importance to Greater Manchester Police and to release the requested information would compromise the safety of the community that Greater Manchester Police serve to protect and place individuals at risk.

Disclosure would lead to a greater impact on police resources, in that this could hinder the prevention and detection of crime and more crime being committed. It would give advantage to those individuals intent on criminal activity as it may assist potential criminals in evading the police as more vulnerable areas of lower policing levels would become evident. A fear of crime will be realised as criminals identify vulnerable areas and target and exploit these areas resulting in the public being in fear of more criminal activity occurring.

Whilst not questioning the motives of the applicant, providing any further information relating to specific departments and functions including specific budgets for certain units within Greater Manchester Police would reveal our operational capability, which would be of intelligence value to criminals.

Balancing Test

When balancing the public interest Greater Manchester Police has to consider whether the information should be released into the public domain. Arguments need to be weighed against each other. The most persuasive reason for disclosing the information would be Greater Manchester Police's accountability. This needs to be weighed against the strongest reason for non-disclosure which is the police service is charged with enforcing the law; preventing and detecting crime and protecting the people/communities we serve.

In this case, it is the fact that individuals may be placed at risk and the affect it may have on the prevention and detection of crime. In this case, I believe the case for disclosure is not made out.

The police will not divulge any information that would place the safety of an individual at risk or undermine law enforcement. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing, and in this case providing assurance that the police service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat posed by criminal activity, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding the tactical resource capability which could highlight which forces are focussing more on this type of investigation than other force areas.

In accordance with the Act, this letter represents a Refusal Notice for this request.