

Our ref: 01/FOI/24/013766/Y

Please quote our reference
number when responding

Monday, 06 January 2025

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REFERENCE NO: 01/FOI/24/013766/Y

I write in connection with your request for information dated 03/12/2024, I note you seek access to the following information:

Please can you tell me if you make use of AI or any similar tools that involve the collection and sharing of data on 'gang association'.

If so, please can you tell me the name of the programme and how long it has been in use for.

Result of Searches

Greater Manchester Police can neither confirm nor deny any information is held in connection to your request by virtue of the following exemptions:

- **Section 24(2) – National Security**
- **Section 31(3) – Law Enforcement**

Sections 24 and 31 are prejudiced based qualified exemptions and there is a requirement to evidence the prejudice (harm) in disclosure and consider the public interest to ensure neither confirming or denying that information is held is appropriate.

Evidence of Harm:

Any disclosure under FOI is a release to the public at large. Whilst not questioning the motives of the applicant, confirming or denying that any information relating to the AI or any similar tool practise would show criminals what the capacity, tactical abilities and capabilities of the force are, allowing them to target specific areas of the UK to conduct their criminal/terrorist activities. Confirming or denying the specific circumstances in which the Police Service may or may not deploy the use of the technologies would lead to an increase of harm to investigations and

compromise law enforcement. This would be to the detriment of providing an efficient policing service and a failure in providing a duty of care to all members of the public.

The threat from terrorism cannot be ignored. It is generally recognised that the international security landscape is increasingly complex and unpredictable. Since 2006, the UK Government has published the threat level: <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/threat-levels>. The UK continues to face a sustained threat from violent extremists and terrorists and based upon current intelligence the threat level is set at Substantial. It is well established that police forces use technology tactics and surveillance to gain intelligence in order to counteract criminal behaviour. It has been previously documented in the media that many terrorist incidents have been thwarted due to intelligence gained by these means. Confirming or denying whether any information is or isn't held relating to the use of these technologies would limit operational capabilities as criminals/terrorist would gain a greater understanding of the police's methods and techniques, enabling offenders to take steps to counter them. It may also suggest the limitations of police capabilities in this area, which may further encourage criminal/terrorist activity by exposing potential vulnerabilities. This detrimental effect is increased if the request is made to several different law enforcement bodies.

Public Interest Test:

Section 24 - Factors favouring confirming or denying that any other information is held:

Confirming or denying that any information exists relevant to the request would lead to a better informed public and the public are entitled to know how public funds are spent. The information simply relates to national security and disclosure would not actually harm it.

Section 24 - Factors against confirmation or denying that any other information is held:

To confirm or deny whether Greater Manchester Police hold any information would allow inferences to be made about the nature and extent of national security related activities which may or may not take place. This could enable terrorist groups to take steps to avoid detection, and as such, confirmation or denial would be damaging to national security.

By confirming or denying any policing arrangements of this nature would render national security measures less effective. This would lead to the compromise of ongoing or future operations to protect the security or infrastructure on the UK and increase the risk of harm to the public.

Section 31 – Factors favouring confirming or denying that any other information is held:

Confirming or denying whether any information is held would allow the public to see where public funds have been spent and allow the Police service to appear more open and transparent.

Section 31 - Factors against confirmation or denying that any other information is held:

By confirming or denying whether any information is held would mean that law enforcement tactics would be compromised which would hinder the prevention and detection of crime. Security arrangements and tactics are reused and have been monitored by criminal groups, fixated individuals and terrorists. These security arrangements and tactics would need to be reviewed which would require more resources and would add to the cost to the public funds.

Balancing Test

The Police Service is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve. The security of the country is of paramount importance and the Police Service will not divulge whether any information is or is not held if to do so would place the safety of an individual at risk or undermine National Security. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing, providing assurance that the Police Service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat from criminals, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding both National Security and the integrity of the police in knowing that policing activity is appropriate and balanced in matters of National Security; this will only be overridden in exceptional circumstances.

Therefore, at this moment in time, it is our opinion that for these issues the balance test for confirming, nor denying that information is held is appropriate.

No inference can be taken from this refusal that information does or does not exist.