

Date: 23/07/2025
Our ref: 01/FOI/25/015122/B

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REFERENCE NO: 01/FOI/25/015122/B

I write in connection with your request for information dated 16/07/2025, received by Greater Manchester Police (GMP) for the following information:

How many people have been charged through operation Sherwood?

Result of Searches

Greater Manchester Police neither confirms nor denies that it holds information relevant to this request by virtue of the following exemptions:

Section 30(3) – Investigations

Section 31(3) – Law Enforcement

Section 40(5) – Personal Information

Section 30 is a class based qualified exemption and consideration of the public interest must be given as to whether neither confirming nor denying information exists is the appropriate response.

Section 31 is prejudice based and qualified which means that there is a requirement to articulate the harm in confirming or not whether information is held as well as carrying out a public interest test.

Section 40 is a class based absolute exemption and there is no requirement to evidence the harm or consider the public interest.

Greater Manchester Police can neither confirm nor deny that it holds the information you requested as the duty in Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 does not apply, by virtue of the following exemption:

Section 40(5B)(a)(i) - Personal Information – giving information to a member of the public of the confirmation or denial that would have to be given to comply with section 1(1)(a) would (apart from this Act) contravene any of the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

To confirm that any information is held or not, could confirm personal data. In some circumstances confirming or denying whether information is held could itself identify a living individual and would therefore 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.

This use of neither confirm nor deny should not be taken as proof that such information does or does not exist.

Harm for Section 31

Any release under FOIA is a disclosure to the world, not just to the individual making the request. To confirm or deny the number of individuals charged in relation to this operation would undermine the ability of GMP to carry out its core functions by revealing operational tactics, progress or scope. Such disclosure could prejudice ongoing investigations and the apprehension of offenders. The impact of providing information, if held, under FOI, which aids in identifying the number of charged individuals would provide those intent on committing criminal acts with valuable information as to where the police are targeting their investigations.

In addition, to confirm or deny whether information is held in this case has the potential to undermine the flow of information (intelligence) received from members of the public into the Police Service relating to these types of offenders.

Factors favouring confirmation or denial for Section 30 – Confirming or denying whether information exists relevant to this request would lead to a better informed general public by identifying that Greater Manchester Police robustly investigates all lines of enquiries. This fact alone may encourage individuals to provide intelligence in order to assist with investigations and would also promote public trust in providing transparency and demonstrating openness and accountability into where the police are currently focusing their investigations.

The public are also entitled to know how public funds are spent.

Factors against confirmation or denial for Section 30 – To confirm or deny the information does or does not exist, would prejudice investigations that may or may not be ongoing and would likely undermine Greater Manchester Police's ability to prevent and detect future crimes. Greater Manchester Police need to be allowed to carry out investigations effectively away from public scrutiny until such times as the details need to be made public, otherwise it will be difficult for accurate, thorough and objective investigations to be carried out.

Factors favouring confirmation or denial for Section 31 – There is public interest in transparency and accountability where the police service is concerned as public taxes fund the Police and this obviously favors confirmation or denial.

Factors against confirmation or denial for Section 31 – Confirming or denying the number of charges resulting from Operation Sherwood would pose a risk to investigations. Any disclosure could jeopardize evidence gathering and case building.

To confirm or deny any information is held could impact on any future operations. This may reveal patterns and reduce effectiveness of similar future tactics used.

Additionally, premature revelation of charges may unfairly identify individuals, particularly if not yet convicted.

By its very nature, by confirming or denying this information is held would undermine the effective delivery of operational law enforcement. Under FOI there is a requirement to comply with s1(1)(a) and confirm what information is held. In some cases, it is that confirmation, or not, which could disclose facts harmful to members of the public and police officers or other law enforcement agencies.

Balance Test

To neither confirm or deny any further information is held would suggest that Greater Manchester Police take their responsibility to protect confidential information provided to them seriously and appropriately to ensure the smooth delivery of operational law enforcement. The Police Service would never confirm or deny whether information was held if to do so could undermine the prevention or detection of crime and/or the apprehension or prosecution of offenders.

Greater Manchester Police has a duty of care to the community at large and public safety is of paramount importance. The Police Service relies heavily on the public providing information to assist in criminal investigations and has a duty to protect and defend vulnerable individuals. The public has an expectation that any information they provide will be treated with confidence. Anything that places that confidence at risk, no matter how generic, would undermine any trust or confidence individuals have in the Police Service.

Moreover, there is a public interest in transparency of policing operations and providing assurances that forces are appropriately and effectively dealing with crime, if disclosing information (including via a confirmation or denial that certain information was held) would identify sensitive investigative activity and risk prejudice to investigations.

Therefore, it is our opinion that for these issues the balancing test for confirming or denying whether any information is held regarding this matter is not made out.

None of the above can be viewed as an inference that the information you seek does or does not exist.