Information Management & Data Directorate (IMDD)
Information Access Unit

Date: 12th October 2026
Our ref: FOI/26/017526/U

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REFERENCE NO: FOI/26/017526/U

I write in connection with your request for information dated 26/08/2026, received by Greater Manchester Police (GMP) for the following information:

1. Please provide the number of crime reports for sexual grooming offences recorded with an online marker attached for the year 2025/26.

2. Please provide the number of individuals who were (i) charged and (ii) summonsed in connection with sexual grooming offences recorded with an online marker during the year 2025/26.

3. Of those cases where charges were brought (Q2), please provide the number which involved a paedophile hunter group or Online Child Sexual Abuse Activist Group (OCAG).

4. Please provide the names of all paedophile hunter groups and Online Child Sexual Abuse Activist Groups related to Q3.

CLARIFICATION
One police force contacted me regarding an identical request with the following meaningful advice and assistance:

"There are many offences that may fall under 'sexual grooming' however these will be hard to capture as there is no flag for 'grooming' specifically. There is a flag for 'child sexual exploitation' that would capture most sexual grooming offences but not all. Would you like data for all offences flagged as 'child sexual exploitation' instead?"

Please replace "sexual grooming" with "child sexual exploitation".

FURTHER CLARIFICATION
"Please can you confirm if you would like us to keep the data based on the offence of grooming (original request) or to change it to where CSE flag is present?"

Keep the data based on the offence of grooming, thank you.

Result of Searches

Following receipt of your request searches were conducted within Greater Manchester Police (GMP) to locate the requested information. I can confirm the information requested is held by GMP. However, I am not obliged to provide all the information requested as exemptions apply.

Caveats:

In July 2019, GMP implemented one of the largest IT infrastructure changes in UK policing. The systems are in continual development and the data provided for this request is what the systems currently hold.

1. The data is all recorded crimes between the 1st April 2025 - 31st March 2026, where the HO Code is either 088/01, 088/02 or 071/17 AND there is an Online Crime Qualifier Flag attached to the crime.
2. Please note that the above data is based on the date the crime was recorded not the date the crime was committed.
3. Duplicates have been removed where possible.
4. Please note the above data is subject to change as crimes are progressed and/or updated.

Question 1

For the period requested there is a total of **291** recorded crimes.

Question 2

The total number with an outcome of 'Charge' is **74**.

Question 3 and 4

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

The exemptions that apply to this request are:

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

Section 40 is an absolute exemption and therefore does not require the application of a prejudice or public interest test where it can be demonstrated that disclosure of the information requested would breach one or more of the principles of the UK General Data Protection Regulation 2018 (UK GDPR) or the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA).

Disclosing the names of the online child sexual abuse activist groups (OCAGs) may indirectly lead to the identification of individuals as the groups vary in the number of members. Linking an individual, even indirectly, to a charge would be in breach of Article 5(1) of UK GDPR which requires personal data to be processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner and would leave the Force liable to litigation.

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

Section 31 – Harm

Disclosure under FOIA are releases to the public at large. Whilst not questioning the motives of the applicant, providing information of the names of the paedophile hunter group or Online Child Sexual Abuse Activist Group (OCAG), that have resulted in charges is deemed to be harmful.

Disclosure would provide official confirmation of the operational effectiveness and involvement of particular vigilante groups in criminal investigations. Such a disclosure would be likely to enhance the profile and perceived legitimacy of these groups, encourage further vigilante activity, and potentially undermine future law enforcement activity where investigations become dependent upon, or complicated by, the actions of groups acting outside policing.

Activity of this nature can interfere with or complicate police investigations. For example, premature confrontation of suspects, the loss or contamination of evidential material, inappropriate disclosure of information, the displacement of offending behaviour, or other actions undertaken outside established investigative procedures may adversely affect the ability of the police to obtain and preserve evidence and progress investigations effectively.

Factors Favouring Disclosure

Releasing information in relation to the names of the paedophile hunter group or Online Child Sexual Abuse Activist Group (OCAG), that have resulted in charges would allow for a greater understanding and insight into the Police. Providing this information would ensure transparency and accountability and encourage information to be passed to the police.

Providing this information could increase public understanding of the extent to which individual groups have been involved in cases resulting in formal criminal justice outcomes and allow greater public scrutiny of the relationship between independently gathered information and subsequent police enforcement activity.

Factors Favouring Non-Disclosure

The disclosure of these particular names of the paedophile hunter group or Online Child Sexual Abuse Activist Group (OCAG), that have resulted in charges, has potential to undermine future law enforcement activity.

Disclosure of this specific information would undermine the prevention or detection of crime. The Police Service would not wish to reveal information that would clearly undermine the law enforcement and investigative process. This would impact on police resources and more crime would be committed, placing individuals at risk.

Greater Manchester Police would not wish to disclose information where doing so would be likely to encourage or inform activity outside established policing processes that could interfere with investigations, affect the preservation or integrity of evidence, prematurely alert suspects, or otherwise complicate the investigative and prosecution process.

There is also a public interest in avoiding official confirmation which could enable particular groups, or other similar organisations, to assess the apparent effectiveness of their activities by reference to particular criminal justice outcomes and subsequently replicate or adapt those activities.

Any resulting interference with investigations may also create additional demands on police resources as officers seek to manage the consequences of independently conducted activity whilst preserving the integrity of the investigation and securing the best available evidence

Balance Test

The police service is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve. The police service will not divulge any information if to do so would compromise law enforcement. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding the integrity of police operations. As much as there is public interest in knowing the specific names of these groups, particularly those that have resulted in charges, it is our opinion that for these issues the balancing test for disclosure is not made out.