



Response Date:12/12/2024

2024/1138 - Firearms

In response to your recent request for information regarding;

The make and model of all firearms owned

- The number of firearms owned

- The number of locations at which firearms are stored

Concerns have been raised in relation to disclosing the information requested.

Therefore, a Public Interest Test has been carried out to weigh up the reasons for and against disclosure of information to ensure the release is in the interest of the public as a whole and not just the applicant.

The Public Interest Test has considered the following exemptions;

Section 24 (1) National Security

Section 31 (1) Law Enforcement

Sections 24 and 31 are prejudice based qualified exemptions, both evidence of harm and public interest considerations need to be articulated.

Any release under FOIA is a disclosure to the world, not just to the individual making the request, once the information is published the force has no control over what use is made of that information.

Releasing the information requested could compromise officer and public safety by revealing our operational weaponry capability.

The current threat level to the UK is 'substantial'.

<https://www.mi5.gov.uk/threat-levels>

In order to counter criminal and terrorist behaviour, it is vital that the police have the ability to work together, where necessary covertly, to obtain intelligence within current legislative frameworks to assist in the investigative process to ensure the successful arrest and prosecution of offenders who commit or plan to commit acts of terrorism. Therefore, disclosure of the information requested could compromise National Security.

To provide the requested data for an individual Force, this would allow comparison between forces across the country and enable terrorists to build a picture of the effectiveness of what resources are in place and where they are deployed. Disclosure would ultimately prejudice the effectiveness of the national counter terrorism effort and would allow inferences to be drawn about force level counter-terrorism activity and identify vulnerability around the country.

S24 Factors favouring disclosure

The public are entitled to know how public funds are spent and to disclose the requested information would allow the public to see where money is being spent and know that forces are doing as much as possible to combat crime.

S24 Factors against disclosure

The disclosure of information that undermines security operations would ultimately increase the risk of harm to the general public. By providing the information requested it would reveal what mitigation can be utilised to defeat our capability.

S31 Factors favouring disclosure

Providing the information requested would allow the public to see where public funds are being spent. Better public awareness may assist to reduce crime or lead to more information from the public.

S31 Factors against disclosure

Providing information that could be used to identify resources used could be harmful to the security of individuals that would lead to law enforcement tactics being compromised which would ultimately hinder the prevention and detection of crime. Security and tactics are re-used and have been monitored by criminal groups, fixated individuals and terrorists. It therefore follows that anything that would negate the use of certain equipment/tactics would place individuals at risk.

To disclose the information requested would reveal tactical capability. If all forces disclosed this information it would enable an offender to geographically map which forces have what equipment/resources available.

Overall Balance Test

The security of the country is of paramount importance and the Police service will not divulge information if it is considered harmful, if to do so would place the safety of any individual at risk or undermine National Security. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and providing assurance that the police service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat posed by a terrorist attack, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding both national security and the integrity of police investigations and operations in the highly sensitive area of policing.

After weighing up the competing interests I have determined that to provide the requested information would not be in the public interest.

Therefore, in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this letter acts as a Refusal Notice under section 17 (1) of the legislation.

THIS INFORMATION HAS BEEN PROVIDED IN RESPONSE TO A REQUEST
UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000, AND IS CORRECT AS AT 11/12/2024