



Response Date: 15/01/2025

2024/1161 - Organised Crime Groups

In response to your recent request for information regarding;

Number of organised crime groups in your force area.

We only hold the current number of OCGs - 23

- Where these organised crime groups are distributed in your force area.

Concerns have been raised in relation to disclosing OCG levels beyond Force level.

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

Section 24 (1) National Security

Section 31 (1) (a) (b) Law Enforcement

These exemptions are prejudice based qualified exemptions, therefore there is a requirement to articulate the harm that would be caused disclosing the information held to a lower level as well as carrying out a public interest test.

Harm

To disclose any details about the distribution of (number of) organised crime gangs (OCGs) below a force level total would undermine national security and operational law enforcement as well as risk prejudice to current investigations, some of which may be covert. Whilst there is a public interest in transparency to provide assurance that the Police Service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat from organised criminal gangs, this should be balanced against the need to protect sensitive police intelligence and ongoing operational activity.

Providing the requested information would reveal specific detail about the real-time police intelligence picture in relation to OCG's operating at low geographical areas across the force area. Release of such information to the public at large would enable those engaged in criminal gang activity, potentially including terrorism, to identify what the police may and may not know about organised crime gangs. Particularly in the event it was to be revealed that no information was held for a specific area, that would identify to offenders that individuals or criminal activity to which they may have links has gone undetected.

Furthermore, if disclosures were to be made by all forces for this national request, a low-level intelligence picture of organised criminal gang activity would be revealed which would expose the specific focus of policing targets, including terrorists, across the UK. The security of the country is of paramount importance and the police will not disclose any information that would undermine national security or operational policing.

Public Interest Test

Factors favouring disclosure, Section 24:

Disclosure of the information would lead to a better-informed public. The public are entitled to know how public funds are spent especially with regards to safeguarding National Security.

Factors against disclosure, Section 24:

Disclosure of the requested information would allow inferences to be made about the specific nature of national security related activities linked to organised crime gangs which may or may not take place in low level geographical locations. This would enable criminal groups to take steps to counter intelligence, and as such, disclosure would be damaging to National Security.

Disclosure of the requested breakdown would render national security measures less effective. This would lead to the compromise of ongoing or future operations to protect the security or infrastructure of the UK and increase the risk of harm to the public.

Factors favouring disclosure, Section 31:

Disclosure of the requested would allow the public to see where public funds have been spent and allow the Police service to appear more open and transparent.

Factors against disclosure, Section 31:

Disclosure of the requested information could compromise police intelligence and subsequently the force's ability to prevent and detect crime. Vulnerable areas could be identified with disclosure leading to an increase in criminal activity occurring in those areas, placing the public in harm's way.

Modern-day policing is intelligence led and the police share information with other law enforcement agencies as part of their investigation process. Disclosure here could hinder the prevention and detection of crime by undermining this partnership approach to investigations and law enforcement.

Balancing Test

The issues of accountability and transparency are noted. However, we cannot release information that would compromise law enforcement role of the force or national security.

It is recognised that transparency is the fundamental objective of the Freedom of information Act and this leads itself to a presumption of disclosure. However, this has to be balanced against the harm that would be caused to law enforcement and national security. In this case the decision is for non-disclosure.

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

- Number of arrests for drug supply offences (both OCG and non-OCG).

2023-2024 – 362 (19 OCG)
2022-2023 – 409 (36 OCG)
2021-2022 – 455 (29 OCG)
2020-2021 – 505 (76 OCG)
2019-2020- 381 (27 OCG)

In addition to and irrespective of what may or may not be held, North Wales Police neither confirm nor deny any other information is held by virtue of the following exemptions:

s23(5) Information Supplied by, or concerning, certain Security Bodies
s30(3) Investigations and Proceedings Conducted by Public Authorities
s31(3) Law Enforcement

Section 23(5) is an absolute exemption and as such no public interest test is required.

Section s31(3) is a qualified, class based exemption and as such there is a requirement to evidence harm and complete a test of the public interest in confirmation or denial.

s30(3) is a qualified, class based exemption and as such there is no requirement to evidence harm however a test of public interest is required.

Evidence of Harm

The confirmation or denial that any information is held relating to Fentanyl, Fentanyl Derivatives (such as Carfentanyl) and/or Nitazene's and Nitazine analogues would identify whether or not North Wales Police has seen local level activity regarding its use and by association, it's distribution.

The effects of these drugs as recreational drugs are highly publicised and they are all extremely potent and very dangerous. To confirm or deny that North Wales Police has had seizures of, or arrests related to, any of these drugs would reveal information which could be used to build a picture as to where national and local investigations and operations are taking place in relation to distribution of these drugs.

To confirm or deny that any other information is held would enable a mosaic picture to form which would identify areas where these substances had been detected and where they had not. This national picture would highlight to criminals where there is a perceived greater or lesser investigative focus on this activity which in turn assist those involved in the criminal supply and/or distribution of the drug, including organised criminal gangs, to identify policing areas where criminal activity could be adjusted or relocated to better evade detection.

The distribution of drugs is not usually completed in isolation and more often than not, forms part of a wider organised crime network, which usually involve other serious crimes. Confirming or denying that any other information is held by North Wales Police would undermine any local level operations or national operations which may be taking place to target the serious organised distribution and use of these drugs.

Factors favouring confirming or denying that information is held S30

To confirm or deny that any other information is held would enable the local community to understand whether any investigations have or are taking place surrounding these particular drugs. This would lead to an increase in understanding. It would also enable the public to understand whether resources are being allocated to combating the distribution of the drug locally.

Factors against confirming or denying that information is held S30

To confirm or deny that information is held would identify which force areas have located synthetic opioids and those which have not. These are highly potent drugs and being able to map where they can be found, and by extension distributed across the country would undermine the police services ability to appropriately investigate crimes associated with its use and distribution. The confirmation or denial that any other information is held would undermine local and national level operations which may be taking place and would mean that those distributing the drug will avoid prosecution which would have a negative impact on local communities.

Factors favouring confirming or denying that information is held S31

The confirmation or denial that any other information is held would lead to a greater informed public both nationally and locally. It would allow people can take steps to safeguard themselves from exposure to this drug, if they know that it has been located locally.

Factors against confirming or denying that information is held S31

To confirm or deny any other information is held, would undermine any local or national level operations that may be or will be taking place in the future to combat this crime. These are highly potent drugs and it is of paramount importance that the police service can investigate and disrupt the distribution of it throughout the country so that its severe impacts are not felt within our communities. To confirm or deny whether North Wales Police holds any other information in relation to synthetic opioids would not only affect local level policing decisions but could also have an impact nationally. This would mean that information is provided to those involved in its distribution and ultimately could mean that organised crime groups may adapt and change tact that would mean that the police service is placed at a disadvantage.

Balance Test

There is a public interest in knowing whether North Wales Police has or has not made arrests relating to these drugs so that communities are more aware and take steps to protect themselves. However, North Wales Police would not want to undermine any local or national operations which may be taking place to combat the distribution of these drugs. To confirm or deny any other information is held would not only provide information that would undermine local operations, but also any national ones which may take place. The information would directly relate to very specific intelligence and being able to map this across the country would be of use to criminal groups distributing this drug as it would give a picture as to which forces are aware whether it has synthetic opioids being distributed in its area.

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

- Quantity and type of drug commodity seized (both OCG and non-OCG).

Drug seizure data is held on the Home Office website. We are unable to break this down by OCG activity.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/seizures-of-drugs-in-england-and-wales>

For the years:

2023-2024

2022-2023

2021-2022

2020-2021

2019-2020

THIS INFORMATION HAS BEEN PROVIDED IN RESPONSE TO A REQUEST
UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000, AND IS CORRECT AS AT 14/01/2025