

Chief Constable
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Police Headquarters
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24th December 2024

Dear

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST – FOI 1105/24 3D PRINTED GUNS

I refer to your request for information received by Cumbria Constabulary on 10th December 2024. I note you seek access to the following information:

- *I would like to know how many 3D-printed guns have been recovered by the force in each year (separately) between 2020 and 2024.*

Your request for information has now been considered and I can advise you Cumbria Constabulary can neither confirm nor deny the information you seek is held, as the duty under Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act does not apply by virtue of the following exemptions:

- 23(5) Information supplied by, or relating to, bodies dealing with security matters;
- 24(2) National Security
- 31(3) Law Enforcement

Section 23(5) is an absolute, class-based, exemption which means there is no requirement to describe the harm that would be caused by confirming if the information you seek is held, or to undertake a public interest test.

Both Section 24(2) and 31(3) are qualified, prejudice-based exemptions which means there is a requirement to describe the harm that would be caused by confirming or denying if the information you seek is held. There is also a requirement to consider if the public interest considerations in favour of not confirming or denying if the information is held outweigh the considerations in favour of doing so. I have set out my views on these matters below.

Evidence of Harm for S24(2) and S31(3)

Confirmation or denial that information is held would identify local level activity regarding the use and/or seizure of 3D printed weapons. In turn, this risks identifying the level of police awareness of such weapons in the force area. When the request is made to multiple forces, there is a further risk in that confirmation or denial would reveal information which could be used to build a picture as to where national and local investigations and operations are taking place, and perhaps more pertinently, where they are not, to combat the supply, distribution and use of these weapons. This mapping effect, created by forces either confirming information is held and citing a substantive exemption or, conversely, stating 'no information



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held', would undermine the effective delivery of operational law enforcement by revealing the intelligence picture of the force in respect of 3D printed firearms as well as compromising potentially ongoing investigations, some of which may be covert.

Disclosure of information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 is considered a release to the world at large and not a just a disclosure to an individual applicant. Whilst not questioning an applicant's motives in this case, by making a public disclosure under FOI, it must be considered that as well as members of the public, criminals, including terrorists will be able to access the data released. It is widely known that organised criminal gangs and those involved in terrorist related activity monitor FOI disclosures closely for any information they can use to further their criminal activity.

The threat from terrorism cannot be ignored. It should be recognised that the international security landscape is increasingly complex and unpredictable. The UK faces a sustained threat from violent terrorists and extremists. Since 2006, the UK Government have published the threat level, based upon current intelligence that threat level to the UK currently is 'substantial, meaning an attack is likely.

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

Any information identifying the focus of policing activity that could be used to the advantage of criminal organisations, serious and organised crime groups and terrorists to undermine the operational integrity of policing will adversely affect public safety and have a negative impact on, not only law enforcement at a local level, but policing and operations at a national level the impact of which risks the national security of the UK.

Public Interest Considerations

Section 24(2) National Security

Factors favouring complying with Section 1(1)(a) - Any information that would increase public knowledge in showing how resources are allocated in response to events would favour disclosure. This would also support the fundamental purpose of the Freedom of Information Act, which is to be more open and transparent in the way in which the police perform, making them more accountable for their actions. Releasing any details regarding the seizure of 3D printed firearms would provide reassurance to the public that the police are appropriately resourced in this area and would be in a position to respond to any National Security threats or incidents. Any information which would allow for more accurate public debate would be a positive factor for disclosure.

Factors against complying with Section 1(1)(a) - Whilst there is a public interest in providing reassurance that the police are appropriately and effectively dealing with threats posed by terrorist organisations, there is a strong public interest in safeguarding national security and the welfare and safety of the general public. Any disclosure (including confirming or denying information if it is held) has the potential to undermine ongoing and future operations to protect the Security of the United Kingdom, e.g. counter terrorism activity. The risk of significant harm or even death to the community at large would be increased.

The cumulative effect of terrorists gathering information from various sources would build a picture of potential vulnerabilities at a local level. The more information disclosed over time will provide a more detailed account of the investigative focus of not only a force area but also the country as a whole. Any incident which results from such a disclosure would by default affect National Security.



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Section 31(3) Law Enforcement

Factors favouring complying with Section 1(1)(a) - There is media reporting concerning the increase of these weapons, [3D guns appearing on British Streets](#) which in itself is a factor supporting confirmation or denial.

To confirm or deny that this information is held would make members of the public more aware of the threat of certain offences and the forces ability to deal with them. Improved public awareness may lead to more intelligence being submitted to police about possible further instances of 3D- printed firearms use and any acts of criminality or perceived terrorism as members of the public will be more observant to suspicious activity which in turn may result in a reduction of crime.

Factors against complying with Section 1(1)(a) - To confirm or deny that the requested information is held could compromise law enforcement tactics which would hinder the Police force's ability to prevent and detect crimes. Whilst such information on its own may be perceived as not harmful, any further information that may be already in the public domain or any that may be asked for in the future could be detrimental to forces and can contribute to the mosaic effect. The 'mosaic' effect is attune to the building up of a jigsaw, from public disclosures and other information, gradually filling in the pieces to form a complete picture. For criminals, including serious and organised crime groups and terrorists to gain easy access to such information would not only undermine the police's primary function of law enforcement but also place the public at significant risk of harm.

Balancing Test

To confirm or deny that any such information is held, or not held, would indicate levels of policing activity at force level which could allow individuals to evaluate levels of activity across individual force areas and exploit what may be considered as less active or resourced areas. If this information is disclosed it continually drip feeds in the pool of information publicly available to criminals and terrorists who will use it to complete a full picture on how and where to undertake their criminal pursuits without fear of detection or apprehension.

The security of the country is of paramount importance. The police will not divulge any information that would place the safety of officers or the public at risk or undermine national security. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing, and in this case providing assurance that the police service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat of activity involving weapons, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding both national security and the integrity of police investigations and operations. It is not in the best interests of the security of the country, individual forces, or the public in general to put such information into the public arena where it could be used by those wishing to cause harm.

It is therefore our opinion that for these issues the balancing test for confirming or denying that this information is held, favours maintaining the need to neither confirm nor deny the information you seek is held.

In accordance with the duty under section 17(1) of the Act this letter serves as a Refusal Notice for your request. No inference should be taken from this refusal that the requested information does, or does not, exist.

complaint Rights

Your attention is drawn to the attached sheet, which details your right of complaint.



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