

T/Chief Constable
T/Chief Constable Darren Martland
Police Headquarters
Carleton Hall Penrith,
Cumbria
CA10 2AU



2nd September 2025

Dear

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST – FOI 1201/25 Paedophile Hunting Groups

I refer to your request for information which was received by Cumbria Constabulary on 10th August 2025. I note you seek access to the following information:

Please provide the information and data described below for the period 10 August 2020 to 10 August 2025 (inclusive).

Definitions for the purposes of this request:

- *“Paedophile-hunter(s)” or “paedophile hunting groups” means non-police civilian organisations, groups or individuals who pose online or in person to identify, investigate, or arrange the meeting of persons suspected of intending to commit sexual offences against children and who then report those persons to the police (sometimes publicised on social media). If your records use a different term (for example “online vigilante”, “citizen sting”, “community watch”), please include those in the search and state which search terms you used.*
- *“NFA” means “no further action”.*
- *“Release pending investigation” means a reported suspect was released pending further enquiries.*
- *“Outcome” refers to the police/CPS/charging/final court outcome associated with the police investigation prompted by the report.*

Please provide:

1. Annual counts (broken down by calendar year) of reports to your force by paedophile-hunter groups (or equivalent civilians) where the report alleged a sexual-related offence. For each year, include the total number of reported incidents.

2. For those reported incidents, provide the following aggregate breakdowns (tables) by year and ethnicity (as recorded in your records) of the alleged suspect(s):

- *Number of reports per ethnicity per year.*
- *For each ethnicity × year cell, provide counts of outcome categories: NFA, released pending investigation, charged (CPS charged), convicted, acquitted / found not guilty, and other final outcomes. If multiple outcomes occurred (e.g. initially NFA then reopened), list the most recent final outcome and also provide a count of changes of outcome.*

3. For each conviction counted in (2), please also provide the average custodial sentence length in months (mean and median), broken down by year and ethnicity. Where available, provide the individual sentence lengths (anonymised) so that averages can be independently calculated.



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4. For the same set of reported incidents, provide counts by year for whether the initial contact involved a real child at the point of contact (Yes / No / Unknown). For those where “Yes”, provide the outcome categories as in (2) and sentencing length data as in (3) for convictions.

5. Provide counts by year of incidents where it was later found (after police investigation) that a real child was involved (i.e., child victim confirmed after investigation), and the outcomes (NFA, charged, convicted, acquitted, other). Provide sentencing length data as in (3) for convictions.

6. Provide counts and details of occasions where the paedophile-hunting team or individual who made the report was the subject of a police investigation as a result of their conduct (e.g., allegations of criminality, harassment, entrapment, misconduct). For these investigator-on-hunter cases, for each year provide:

- Number of investigations opened into hunting teams/individuals.
- Outcome of those investigations: NFA, charged, convicted, acquitted / found not guilty, internal discipline, or other. If prosecutions occurred, please provide offence codes, final court outcome, and sentencing length data as in (3) for convictions.

7. For all of the above items, where possible, provide the data as anonymised, machine-readable records (CSV or Excel) where each row corresponds to a single reported incident and contains the following columns (leave personal identifiers blank/redacted but keep categorical data):

- Year (YYYY)
- Reporting source type (e.g., named paedophile-hunter group; “unknown civilian group”; “member of public via social media”)
- Suspect age group (e.g., <18, 18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45+) as recorded
- Suspect ethnicity (as recorded)
- Whether initial contact involved an actual child at point of contact (Yes/No/Unknown)
- Whether, after investigation, a child victim was confirmed (Yes/No/Unknown)
- Initial police outcome (NFA / released pending investigation / charged / other)
- Final outcome (NFA / charged / convicted / acquitted / other)
- CPS decision (if applicable)
- Whether the reporting hunting team/individual was investigated by police (Yes/No)
- Outcome of any investigation into the hunting team/individual (NFA / charged / convicted / acquitted / disciplinary / other)
- Offence codes and short description (as recorded)

Custodial sentence length in months (if convicted)

I have estimated the time required to extract the relevant information required will exceed the “appropriate limit” as this would require a manual review of all relevant entries. Within Cumbria Constabulary’s crime recording system there is no filter for “Paedophile-hunter(s)” or “paedophile hunting groups” and the only place this would be recorded is within the investigation notes. Therefore, to answer the questions it would require a manual search of every reported sexual offence in the previous 5 years to see which reports are relevant which would be approximately 9300 reports. If it would take 2 minutes to review each report, then it would equate to 310 hours of work which greatly exceeds the appropriate limit.

The “appropriate limit” is set out in the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004 and the current limit for police forces is set at £450, which equates to 18 hours of work.

Section 12(1) of the Freedom of Information Act does not oblige a public authority to comply with a request for information, if the authority estimates that the cost of complying with the request will exceed the appropriate limit. In view of this, and in accordance with Section 17(5) of the Act, this letter serves as a Refusal Notice for your request.



In accordance with my duty under Section 16 of the Freedom of Information Act, 2000 (Duty to provide advice and assistance), I have tried to think of a way to recommend that your request may be refined to bring it under the limit explained above. However, even limiting the timeframe to the previous year would still equate to approximately 60 hours of work. Therefore, at this time, unfortunately, I have no suggestions, due to the way that the information requested is recorded.

Complaint Rights

If you believe your request has not been properly handled, or you are otherwise dissatisfied with the outcome of your request, you have the right to request an internal review.

In the first instance, please email freedomofinformation@cumbria.police.uk quoting the FOI reference number and explain why you are dissatisfied. Your complaint will be considered and a response will be provided to you after your complaint has been investigated.

If you remain dissatisfied following conclusion of the internal review, you have the right, under section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, to complain directly to the Information Commissioner.

The address for the Information Commissioner can be found below:

The Information Commissioner
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Complaints to the Information Commissioner can also be made online:

[Make a complaint | ICO](#)

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your interest in Cumbria Constabulary.



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