



Our Ref: 000700/21

Your Ref:

Address Correspondence to: Information Management

Date 07 April 2021

Freedom of Information Act 2000

I write further to your request for information received 01/03/2021.

I note you seek access to the following information:

In the last three years (Jan 2018 - 2021), how many reports/arrests have there been relating to county lines drug dealers posing as university students. Please provide a month-by-month breakdown.

And where possible, can you provide:

- *The name of the university the arrest/alleged offence took place*
- *Detail of the alleged offence, i.e. dealing Class A drugs in halls of residence to students*
- *Age and gender of suspect*
- *Whether the suspect(s) were charged*
- *Whether or not the arrested person was a registered student at the college*
- *What course they were enrolled on.*

Following receipt of your request, searches were conducted within Leicestershire Police to locate information relevant to your request.

The Leicestershire Police Service can neither confirm nor deny that it holds the information you requested as the duty in s1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 does not apply, by virtue of the following exemptions:

- Section 24(2) National Security;
- Section 30(3) Investigations;
- Section 31(3) Law enforcement;
- Section 40 (5) Personal Information;

This should not be taken as conclusive evidence that any information that would meet your request exists or does not exist.

Section 40 is an absolute exemption which means that the legislators have identified that harm would be caused by release and there is no requirement to consider the public interest test.

Sections 24(2), 30(3), and 31(3) are qualified and require us to carry out a harm and public interest balancing test before they can be relied upon.

Overall harm for the NCND

Although every effort should be made to release information under the Freedom of Information Act, to confirm or deny whether information is or isn't held stating that a nominal involved in county lines operations attends university, together with the name of the university the nominal(s) is currently studying at, their age, gender, and actual course they are enrolled on could not only identify that individual but also undermine ongoing investigations, but the National Security of the United Kingdom.

Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing, providing assurance that the Police Service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat from criminals, this should be countered against the need to protect vulnerable areas, and ongoing Policing operational activity.

The security of the country is of paramount importance and Leicestershire Police will not divulge whether information is or is not held if to do so would undermine national security. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and providing reassurance that the Police Service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat posed by offenders involved in county lines activity, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding both national security and the integrity of police investigations and operations in the highly sensitive areas of which they work.

Confirming or denying whether any information is held would show where policing interest has or has not occurred in any specific university which would enable those engaged in criminal activity to identify the focus of policing targets and identify vulnerable parts of the UK.

In addition, and irrespective of what information may or may not be held, to confirm information is held by citing a substantive exemption, or conversely, stating 'no information held', would undermine the effective delivery of operational law enforcement by compromising potentially ongoing investigations, some of which may be covert.

Factors favouring confirmation or denial for S24

Confirmation or denial that any information exists would lead to a better informed public and would enable the community to hold Leicestershire Police to account in relation to how they gather intelligence when referring to individuals involved in county lines operations.

Factors against confirmation or denial for S24

Other organisations outside the Police Service may, or may not, have an active interest in the subject. By confirming or denying that any information exists relevant to nominals studying at universities, and which actual university they attend, would harm the close relationship that exists between Leicestershire Police and other organisations, i.e. Education Departments, Universities and other local authorities.

To confirm or deny whether the force hold any information would allow inferences to be made about the nature and extent of national security related activities which may or may not take place in a given area. This would enable criminal groups to take steps to counter intelligence, and as such, confirmation or denial would be damaging to National Security.

By confirming or denying any policing arrangements of this nature 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 confirmation or denial for S30

Confirming or denying that information exists would lead to a better informed general public improving their knowledge and understanding as to how Leicestershire Police collate and store intelligence to assist with investigations.

Factors against confirmation or denial for S30

Modern-day policing is intelligence led and Leicestershire Police where appropriate gathers information to assist with the investigatory process. To confirm or not whether information is or isn't held this case could hinder the prevention and detection of crime as well as undermine the partnership approach to investigations and law enforcement.

Factors favouring confirmation or denial for S31

Confirming or denying whether any information is held 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 confirmation or denial for S31

To confirm or deny that Leicestershire Police holds information could compromise law enforcement tactics which would lead to a hindrance on the Police Force's ability to prevent and detect crimes. Vulnerable areas could be identified by force level disclosure leading to more criminal activity placing the public in harm's way. If information is released confirming or denying that nominals are studying at university and which named university they attend may impact police resources as vulnerable forces may need to increase their resources to reassure the public and protect the surrounding community.

Balance test

The points above highlight the merits of confirming, or denying, whether any information pertinent to this request exists. The Police Service is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve and will never divulge information which could pinpoint where an individual involved in county lines operations is studying.

Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and investigations, as well as providing reassurance that the Police Service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat from criminals, there is also a public interest in safeguarding individuals involved in this type of offending which often involves vulnerable individuals. As much as there is a public interest in knowing that policing activity is appropriate and balanced, it will only be overridden in exceptional circumstances.

None of the above can be viewed as an inference that any other information does or does not exist.

Leicestershire Police provides you the right to ask for a re-examination of your request under its review procedure. Letters should be addressed to Information Manager, Corporate Services Department at the above address. If you decide to request such a review and having followed the Force's full process you are still dissatisfied, then you have the right to direct your comments to the Information Commissioner who will give it consideration.

Yours sincerely

Freedom of Information Officer
Leicestershire Police

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