

13th September 2018

Freedom of Information Request – Reference No:20181554

REQUEST

I would like to know:

- The number of organised crime groups being monitored in relation to county lines drugs operations*
- The number of individual lines being monitored*
- Locations where these lines are coming from and going to*

CLARIFICATION

Please could you clarify the following point(s): -

South Yorkshire Police has received a number of similar requests to yours in the past.

<https://www.southyorkshire.police.uk/find-out/accessing-information/request-information-under-the-freedom-of-information-act/county-lines-ref-20181351/>

FROM THE REQUESTER

The FOI you have provided is more complex than the information I have requested and does not match the information I have asked for. Other police forces have been able to provide this information without compromising national security or ongoing operations.

Please answer the following question, which has been refined.

- The number of lines currently being monitored by this force as of the original date of sending - 20/8/18.*

If possible, please indicate the location to which those lines travel.

RESPONSE

South Yorkshire Police can neither confirm nor deny that information is held relevant to your request as the duty in Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 does not apply by virtue of the following exemptions:

- Section 23(5) Information supplied by or concerning, certain Security Bodies**
- Section 24(2) National Security**
- Section 30(3) Investigations**
- Section 31(3) Law Enforcement**

Section 23 is a class based absolute exemption and there is no requirement to consider the public interest.

Overall Harm

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 relating to the

monitoring of county lines at a force level could not only undermine ongoing investigations, but also the National Security.

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 South Yorkshire Police force 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 assurance 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 relevant to the request would show where policing interest has or has not occurred in any specific area which would enable those engaged in criminal activity to identify the focus of policing targets and identify vulnerable parts of the UK.

Public Interest Considerations:

Factors favouring confirmation or denial - Section 24

Confirmation or denial that any information exists relevant to the request 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 confirmation or denial - Section 24

Other organisations outside the Police Service may, or may not, have an active interest in the subject of the question above. By confirming or denying that any information exists relevant to the request would harm the close relationship that exists between South Yorkshire Police force and other organisations. To confirm or deny whether the force hold any information relevant to the request 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 – Section 30

Confirming or denying whether information exists relevant to this request would lead to a better informed general public by identifying that South Yorkshire Police robustly investigate all crimes. The public are also entitled to know how public funds are spent, particularly in the current economic climate.

Factors against confirming or denying – Section 30

Confirming or denying may allow offenders take evasive action to avoid detection, police resources may well be diverted from frontline duties and other areas of policing in order to locate and apprehend these individuals. In addition, the safety of individuals and victims would also be compromised.

Factors favouring confirmation or denial – Section 31

Confirming or denying whether any further 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 favouring neither confirming or denying – Section 31

To confirm or deny that law enforcement holds this 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 requests have been made this 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 the requested information exists. The Police Service is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protection the communities we serve. As part of that policing purpose, information is gathered which can be highly sensitive. Weakening the mechanisms used to monitor any type of criminal activity, could not only undermine ongoing investigations, but also the National Security.

In addition anything that places confidence at risk, no matter how generic, would undermine any trust or confidence individuals have in the Police Service. Therefore, at this moment in time, it is our opinion that for these issues the balance test favours neither confirming nor denying that information is held.