

NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

21st November 2014

Your Ref:

Our Ref: IM-FOI-2014-2171

request-234930-
xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx



Sir Stephen House QPM
Chief Constable

FOI Central Processing Unit
173 Pitt Street
Glasgow
G2 4JS

xxx@xxxxxxxxxxx.xxxxxx.xx

Dear Mr McCue

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (SCOTLAND) ACT 2002
SUBJECT: Operation Dash and Operation Cotswold

I refer to your email dated 8th October regarding the above which has been handled in accordance with the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA).

QUESTION

"I would like information regarding the 2 large investigations into child sexual exploitation in Scotland - operation Cotswold and operation Dash. I Would like to know-

OPERATION COTSWOLD

1. How many a arrests have resulted from operation Cotswold ?
2. How many of those arrests have led to convictions in operation Cotswold?
3. How many live cases are there regarding operation Cotswold.
4. How many victims are estimated to be involved in operation Cotswold?
5. How many perpetrators are estimated to be involved in operation Cotswold?

scotland.police.uk  @PoliceScotland  PoliceScotland

NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

OPERATION DASH

1. How many a arrests have resulted from operation Dash ?
2. How many of those arrests have led to convictions in operation Dash?
3. How many live cases are there regarding operation Dash?.
4. How many victims are estimated to be involved in operation Dash?
5. How many perpetrators are estimated to be involved in operation Dash?"

RESPONSE

Before answering your questions I wish to provide you with some general information regarding Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), which I hope you will find of assistance. Firstly, there are a number of definitions in existence that describe criminal behaviour associated with CSE. One definition contained within Public Petition Committee's 1st Report 2014 identifies CSE in Scotland as:

'Any involvement of a child or young person below 18 in sexual activity for which remuneration of cash or in kind is given to the young person or a third person or persons. The perpetrator will have power over the child by virtue of one or more of the following - age, emotional maturity, gender, physical strength, intellect and economic and other resources e.g access to drugs.'

CSE is recognised as being a complex form of child abuse and the fundamental priority of Police Scotland in responding to all forms of child abuse is to keep children safe. We do this by working in partnership with a range of statutory and voluntary organisations following the principles of the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2014, published by the Scottish Government.

1. I can confirm that, to date, 5 individuals have been the subject of a Standard Prosecution Report (SPR) to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) for Operation Cotswold while 23 individuals have been similarly reported for Operation Dash.

2. This information will be held by the COPFS and so you should contact them directly for this information. This part of your request is therefore exempt under Section 17(1) of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, information not held.

3-5. Unfortunately I am unable to release the information you have requested. Both Operation Dash and Operation Cotswold are live enquiries and I must therefore exempt your request under Section 34(1) of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, investigations by Scottish public authorities and proceedings arising out of such investigations.

The exemption under Section 34(1) of the act is non-absolute and so a public interest test must be carried out and this has been outlined below.

Factors favouring disclosure

The Police Service is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve. Confirming that information exists could promote public trust in providing transparency and demonstrating openness and accountability into where the police are currently focusing their investigations. It could also provide reassurance to the public that Police Scotland conduct investigations appropriately. Confirmation may allow the public to have a better understanding of the effectiveness of the Police Service.

The issue of child sexual exploitation is a highly emotive subject area often attracting high profile media and public interest connotations. Confirmation or denial that information exists could provide reassurance to the general public.

Factors favouring non-disclosure

Modern-day policing is intelligence led and Police Scotland will not disclose information that would undermine an investigation now and in the future as this could hinder the prevention and detection of crime as well as undermine the partnership approach to investigations and law enforcement.

Should 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 be compromised.

There is also the possibility that releasing the requested information could jeopardise any ongoing court cases in relation to these operations. This would allow those responsible to escape justice and would cause an unacceptable risk to the public.

Balance

Any release under the Freedom of Information Act is a disclosure to the world, not just to the individual making the request. To confirm the details you have requested would be inappropriate as it would reveal actual police activity into these operations.

Confirming the information above could give those involved in such activities further information in relation to these investigations and cause them to destroy evidence or to further avoid detection.

Police Scotland will not release any information through FOI which could undermine investigations and frustrate our efforts to bring offenders to justice. For this reason we believe the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs that in releasing the information.

I trust that the information available is of assistance and should you require any further assistance concerning this matter please contact me on 0131 311 3901 quoting the reference number given.

If you are not satisfied with the way in which your request has been dealt with, you are entitled in the first instance and within 40 working days of receiving this letter to request a review of the decision made by the Force. Should you wish to do so, contact details are; Police Service of Scotland, FOI Central Processing Unit, 173 Pitt Street, Glasgow, G2 4JS. (Or email xxx@xxxxxxxxxxx.xxx.xxx.xxx.xx)

Once informed of the Review decision, if you are still not satisfied, then you are entitled to apply to the Scottish Information Commissioner within six months for a decision. Contact details are; 'Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner, Kinburn Castle, Doubledykes Road, St Andrews, Fife, KY16 9DS', telephone 01334 464610.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Stafford
Information Management
Freedom of Information