

Public Interest Test

Overall Harm for the NCND

Any disclosure under FOI is a release to the public at large. Whilst not questioning the motives of the applicant, confirming or denying that any other information relating to the covert practice of facial recognition would show criminals what the capacity, tactical abilities and capabilities of the force are, allowing them to target specific areas of the UK to conduct their criminal/terrorist activities.

S24 Factors Favouring Confirmation or Denial

It is well established that police forces use covert tactics and surveillance to gain intelligence in order to counteract criminal behaviour. It has been previously documented in the media that many terrorist incidents have been thwarted due to intelligence gained by these means.

S31 Factors Favouring Confirmation or Denial

Confirming or denying the specific circumstances in which the Police Service may or may not deploy the use of facial recognition would lead to an increase of harm to covert investigations and compromise law enforcement. This would be to the detriment of providing an efficient policing service and a failure in providing a duty of care to all members of the public.

S24 Factors against Confirming or Denying

Confirming or denying whether any information is or isn't held relating to the covert use of facial recognition technology would limit operational capabilities as criminals/terrorist would gain a greater understanding of the police's methods and techniques, enabling offenders to take steps to counter them. It may also suggest the limitations of police capabilities in this area, which may further encourage criminal/terrorist activity by exposing potential vulnerabilities. This detrimental effect is increased if the request is made to several different law enforcement bodies. In addition to the local criminal fraternity now being better informed, those intent on organised crime throughout the UK will be able to 'map' where the use of certain tactics are or are not deployed. This can be useful information to those committing crimes. It would have the likelihood of identifying location-specific operations, which would ultimately compromise police tactics, operations and future prosecutions as criminals could counteract the measures used against them.

Any information identifying the focus of policing activity could be used to the advantage of terrorists or criminal organisations. Information that undermines the operational integrity of these activities will adversely affect public safety and have a negative impact on both National Security and Law Enforcement.

S31 Factors against Confirming or Denying

The threat from terrorism cannot be ignored. It is generally recognised that the international security landscape is increasingly complex and unpredictable. Since 2006, the UK Government has published the threat level, based upon current intelligence and that threat has remained at the second highest level 'severe', except for two short periods during August 2006, June and July 2007, and more recently in May and June last year following the Manchester and London terrorist attacks, when it was raised to the highest threat, 'critical'. The UK continues to face a sustained threat from violent extremists and terrorists and the current threat level is set at 'severe'.

Balance Test

The Police Service is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve. The security of the country is of paramount importance and West Midlands Police force will not divulge whether any other information is or is not held if to do so would place the safety of an individual at risk, compromise law enforcement or undermine National Security.

Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and providing assurance that West Midlands Police force is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat from terrorists, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding both national security and the integrity of police investigations and operations in this highly sensitive area.

There is also no requirement to satisfy any public concern over the legality of police operations and the tactics we may or may not use. The force is already held to account by independent bodies such as The Office of the Surveillance Commissioner and The Interception of Communications Commissioners Office. These inspections assess each constabulary's compliance with the legislation and a full report is submitted to the Prime Minister and Scottish Ministers containing statistical information. Our accountability, therefore, is not enhanced by confirming or denying that any other information is held.

It is for these reasons that the Public Interest must favour neither confirming nor denying that any other information is held. However, this should not be taken as necessarily indicating that any other information that would meet your request does or does not exist

No inference can be taken from this refusal that any further information relevant to your request does or does not exist.