

5th February 2020

Freedom of Information Request – Reference No:20200005

REQUEST

I would like to request the following information, broken down by year, for each of the last two calendar years (2018 and 2019):

1) How many crimes were recorded by the force relating to child grooming charges including the offence of “attempting to meet a child following sexual grooming”

2) What was the outcome of these cases? How many people were charged or summonsed for the offence of “attempting to meet a child following sexual grooming”?

3) How many of the cases in each of Q1 and Q2 involved evidence obtained by online child abuse activist groups (commonly known as paedophile hunters or paedophile vigilantes)?

4) If possible within the time limit, please also tell me how many crimes have been recorded in each of the last two calendar years where the perpetrator is a member of online child abuse activist group who has committed an offence (eg. harassment, privacy or violence offences) during a confrontation with a suspected sex offender?

CLARIFICATION

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/sexual-grooming-ref-20191099/>

<https://www.southyorkshire.police.uk/find-out/accessing-information/request-information-under-the-freedom-of-information-act/paedophile-hunter-groups-ref-20191211/>

<https://www.southyorkshire.police.uk/find-out/accessing-information/request-information-under-the-freedom-of-information-act/paedophile-hunter-groups-ref-20181076/>

<https://www.southyorkshire.police.uk/find-out/accessing-information/request-information-under-the-freedom-of-information-act/paedophile-hunter-groups-ref-20180075/>

FROM THE REQUESTER

I have reviewed the previous disclosures as suggested. The only part of my request they cover is the answer to q.1 and q.2 for 2018 only so my request remains outstanding for the other questions and for all questions for the calendar year 2019.

RESPONSE

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires South Yorkshire Police, when refusing to provide such information (because the information is exempt), to provide you the applicant with a notice which:

a. states that fact,

- b. specifies the exemption in question and
- c. states (if that would not otherwise be apparent) why the exemption applies.

The following exemption applies to the disclosure of the information:

Section 12 – Exemption where cost of compliance exceeds appropriate limit

The Administrator for the Crime Management System advises:

Data relating to online child abuse activists groups is unattainable as each offence would have to be reviewed at record level to potentially identify such circumstances of offence, this is unlikely to be achievable within time constraints.

In essence, we would have to review and manually check the circumstances of every record to identify firstly if information was provided by a group classing themselves as paedophile hunters/activist group or vigilantes to extract the level of detail of the cases that met the criteria of your request; this process would take much longer than 18 hours' work. Further cross referencing would be required to check if the suspect/offender was a member of such a group.

The Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004 provide that the cost limit for non-central government public authorities is £450. This must be calculated at the rate of £25 per hour, providing an effective time limit of 18 hours.

Guidance from the Information Commissioner to public authorities is that where one part of a request is reasonably estimated to exceed the appropriate limit then the authority is not obliged to consider or comply with the remainder of the request up to the point at which the appropriate limit has been reached. Please note point 30 of the below link:-

https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1199/costs_of_compliance_exceeds_appropriate_limit.pdf

Although excess cost removes the force's obligations under the Freedom of Information Act, as a gesture of goodwill, I have supplied information, relative to your request, retrieved or available before it was realised that the fees limit would be exceeded. I trust this is helpful, but it does not affect our legal right to rely on the fees regulations for the remainder of your request neither does it bind South Yorkshire Police to any commitment that it will release information in such a manner in the future .

I approached our Crime Management Data Returns Administrator for assistance with your request. The CMS system and Connect System is used to record complaints or allegations of those matters, which the Home Office specify should be recorded as 'crimes'.

She provided me with the enclosed spreadsheet and the following explanation of her search criteria:

Please find attached and the below explanation.

CONNECT Data-

I have included the count of offences recorded on CONNECT between 01/01/2018 and 31/12/2019, recorded with the Home Office classifications 88/1 (Meeting a female child following sexual grooming etc. (Offender is aged 18 or over and victim is under 16) and 88/2

(Meeting a male child following sexual grooming etc. (Offender is 18 or over and victim is under 16).

Of these offences, I have included a breakdown of outcomes for 88/1 and 88/2, also including the volume of outcome 01 Charged/Summonsed.