

Date: Tue 22 August 2017 **Reference Number:** 20171400 **FOI Category:** Freedom of Information

Title: Channel Programme - Prevent

Request Date: Monday, 7 August, 2017

Response Date: Tuesday, 22 August, 2017

Request Details:

1. A list of referrals made under the Channel programme from Prevent to your force during the 2013/14, 2014/15, 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18 (to date) financial years.

For each referral please indicate:

a) the date on which the referral was received

b) the organisation/authority that made the referral (including any made directly by your force or other forces)

c) the suspected kind of extremism (e.g. Islamist, far-right etc)

Exemptions Applied:

Section 31(1) – Law Enforcement

Section 24(1) – National Security

SYP 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 exemptions apply to the disclosure of the information:

Section 31(1) – Law Enforcement

Section 24(1) – National Security

Both exemptions require me to articulate my Harm and Public Interest considerations

Overall harm for Sections 31 and 24

The publication of specific Channel data would provide information to those who seek to challenge the process, which would not be in the public interest. Allegations of 'spying in the community' and 'targeting Muslims' misrepresent and undermine the intention of Channel and ultimately the Prevent programme, which seeks to support those individuals vulnerable to being drawn into violent extremism. Figures on the ethnicity or age of participants, when compiled may fuel perceived grievances such as the view that young Muslims are being targeted or that the issue of political extremists (e.g. the far-right) are not being tackled. Revealing detailed site specific statistics could lead to the identification of:

- individuals who have been referred;
- those who may have referred individuals to Channel in confidence;
- local organisations who are working with us to protect and safeguard those at risk; and
- ongoing cases which could lead to the withdrawal of individuals from the process and thus threaten the successful conclusion of a case.

This would bring the process into disrepute, destroy trust and damage Prevent at a National Level.

Channel is a multi-agency process, which aims to support those who may be vulnerable to being drawn into violent extremism. It works by providing a mechanism for:

- Identifying individuals who may be at risk of and vulnerable to being drawn into violent extremism
- Accessing the nature and extent of the risk
- Where necessary, referring cases to a multi-agency panel which decides on the most appropriate support package to divert and support the individual at risk.

Channel aims to draw vulnerable individuals away from violent extremism before they become involved in criminal activity. Effective information sharing is crucial in ensuring that delivery partners, such as education, children's services, probation and local public health agencies and local community partners are able to build a comprehensive picture of an individual's vulnerability, and therefore provide the appropriate type and level of support to safeguard the individual at risk. This requires the local community to work in partnership with the police and other local agencies and to share information appropriately and responsibly

The security of the country is of paramount importance and South Yorkshire Police will not divulge any information which would undermine National Security or compromise Law Enforcement. Channel is part of the Prevent strand of CONTEST, the Governments' Counter Terrorism Strategy, and the information held by South Yorkshire Police in regards to Channel directly relates to counter-terrorism policing. In addition, any prejudice to counter-terrorism policing directly impacts on the police support and the delivery of CONTEST.

Any detailed breakdown of the agencies, authorities or partners that made the referrals would lead to these partners disengaging from the referral process, as well as, potentially in some extreme cases, aid the identification of those involved in the referral process itself, or of those referred.

A list of local organisations and agencies who may be involved in Prevent can be found in the Prevent Strategy: An Updated Guide for Local Partners:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919132719/http://security...>

The Channel Factsheet, produced by ACPO (TAM) Prevent Delivery Unit provides additional information about the partners and stakeholders:

<http://www.acpo.police.uk/documents/TAM/2012/201210TAMChannelFactsheet.pdf>

Factors favouring disclosure of information for Section 31

There may be a public interest in the release of this information because it may reassure the public that there are effective processes in place to ensure that people showing signs or indicators that they are intent to use violence or other illegal means are monitored effectively and assessed for the presence of vulnerability. Disclosure of the information would provide reassurance to the public that the Police have in place protocols to deal with these types of incidents and offences. The Home Office regularly publishes national statistical data on Prevent data. It would also reassure the public that the Police have protocols in place to protect children from being drawn into violent extremism.

Factors against disclosure of information for Section 31

Disclosure of the information would mean that law enforcement tactics would be compromised which would hinder the prevention and detection of crime. More crime would be committed because criminals would know which forces are focusing on the Channel program. A fear of crime would be realised because if the terrorists identified more vulnerable areas, they would target and exploit these areas and the public would be in fear of more criminal/terrorist activity occurring. There would be an impact on police resources because if the measure used by forces to detect terrorist activities and safeguard children is disclosed and some areas are deemed to be 'softer' at managing this threat, terrorist cells may move to these areas in order to continue their operations and target vulnerable individuals. There could be local implications with wrongful identification of children and families which in turn could lead to further offences being committed in the community.

Factors favouring disclosure of information for Section 24

The public are entitled to know how public funds are spent and by disclosing this information, the public would be able to see where public money is being spent and know that forces are doing as much as they can to combat terrorism and radicalisation. Revealing this information would enable the public to have some reassurance that the Governments Counter Terrorism strategy is robust. This is an issue high on the public agenda and therefore the release of this information would contribute to an informed public debate.

Factors against disclosure of information for Section 24

Channel only operates in specific locations. Revealing detailed statistics may increase interest in cases that could ultimately lead to the identity of individuals and the organisations we work with, which may assist others intending to counter such work. Identification of those working locally to deliver the aims and objectives of Channel could enable those wishing to counter such work to engage in activity to disrupt and jeopardise the successful delivery of ongoing work. This could threaten the successful delivery of Channel and the government's counter terrorism strategy and lead to the public being at increased risk from terrorism. There is also a potential for such data to be used to increase community tensions in an area which would not be in the public interest

Any information shared between agencies (intelligence) has the potential to cover all aspects of criminal activity, be it threats to National Security, future planned robberies or intelligence relating to terrorist activity. Disclosure of the information would enable those intent on engaging in terrorist activities to determine on a National level which areas within the UK may be a vulnerable area to target.

Balance test

The security of the country is of paramount importance and the Police service will not divulge information if to do so would place the safety of an individual at risk or undermine National Security. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations, information gathering and in this case providing assurance that the police service is appropriately and effectively safeguarding those who are vulnerable to radicalisation and targeting the cells behind the radicalisation, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding both national security and the integrity of police investigations and operations in the highly sensitive area of terrorism.

As much as there is public interest in knowing that policing activity is appropriate and balanced in matters of national security this will only be overridden in exceptional circumstances.

There is also a strong public interest in the transparency of policing programmes and in this case, providing assurance that the police service and other stakeholders are appropriately and effectively engaging with one another, combating the threat posed by individuals with the intent to use violence and other illegal means, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding both national security and the integrity of the stakeholders within the programme.

South Yorkshire Police will not divulge information if it is likely that it will compromise the work of the Police Service or place members of the public at risk. It is known that terrorist cells will try to radicalise people and children so that they believe in their ideology in order to encourage them to commit acts of terror. Disclosure of the requested information would highlight which forces may have individuals who are more susceptible to radicalisation and how each force tackles this within their communities. This will adversely affect SYP's ability to detect this type of crime as it may alter the behaviours of those preying on vulnerable individuals. This in itself could put the individual's life at risk along with that of National Security. It is therefore our belief that the balance test lies in favour of not disclosing the information.