

FOI 2022-837

I write in connection with your request for information dated 17<sup>th</sup> October 2022 concerning Weapons Seized in Schools.

I am required by the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to handle all requests in a manner that is blind as to the identity and motives of the requestor. Any information released as a response to a request is regarded as being published and therefore in the public domain without caveat.

**You wrote:**

Could you please supply me with the following information concerning the numbers of weapons seized from pupils in schools and the nature of these weapons, as outlined below:

Q1. How many weapons were seized from schools in the area covered by your constabulary in the years 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021?

Q2. What category of weapon were these and how many of each were there? Eg. 2 knives, 3 guns, 1 sword etc

Q3. How old were the pupils who the weapons were seized from?

Q4. How many of these incidents resulted in pupils being excluded from school?

Q5. How many of these incidents resulted in criminal prosecution for the pupils?

I would like the above information to be provided to me electronically if possible, in either a PDF, Word Doc or Excel document.

**Response:**

The information that you are requesting is not stored in a way which permits easy retrieval.

Whilst our crime recording systems are sophisticated, the number of specific fields in which specific key information relevant to crimes is recorded is limited. For instance, we do not have a flag to indicate when a weapon is seized or what that weapon is.

Although we have a school 'flag' in our systems which we can search on, the population of this flag is not mandatory and therefore the results it is able to provide cannot be relied upon, certainly not to publish statistics of this nature in the public domain. There are likely to be occasions whereby an offence of this nature has occurred in a school however the school flag has not been ticked when the crime occurrence has been recorded on our system, and therefore a search on this flag will leave out a number of these occurrences. Another issue with searching on this flag is that it records incidents within the given postcode area that the school is in and therefore a search is likely to bring up incidents where offences of this nature happened near a school in addition to those actually on the school premises, which would compromise the integrity of the results even further.

To find out the information you require Wiltshire Police would need to manually search through the occurrence logs of all the relevant crime types involved where such an offence could have been recorded (Possession of Weapons, Public Order, Violence Against the Person etc) on our system(s) during this period to determine whether it met the criteria that you are asking for and to create a record of the information you require.

Looking simply at the calendar year of 2021 in isolation, the total number of crimes we have recorded under these categories has yielded in excess of 21,000 results.

Under the circumstances, I am absolutely confident that to locate, retrieve and extract the information you seek would by far exceed the time obligations upon this authority to comply, and in so doing would exceed the fees limits. This is set at £450 calculated at a flat rate of £25 per hour for those work activities comprising of confirming the information is held, locating it, retrieving it and extracting it. Therefore, the whole of the request falls under the exemption of section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

#### Please note

- It also needs to be noted that there is no obligation on an Authority to create information where none exists today, simply to answer an FOI request.
- Wiltshire Police would not hold the information you are asking in Q4 anyway
- Wiltshire Police do not hold information in relation to Convictions or Prosecutions (we only hold information on charges or summonses) – to obtain this you would have needed to submit a similar request to CPS directly.

Ordinarily under our section 16 duty to provide advice and assistance, we would advise you how to refine your request to a more manageable level. However, due to the difficulties outlined above, I cannot see how this can be achieved in this particular case.

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires the Wiltshire 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 exemption applicable to the information requested is:

Section 12: Exemption where cost of compliance exceeds appropriate limit

- (1) Section 1(1) does not oblige a public authority to comply with a request for information if the authority estimates that the cost of complying with the request would exceed the appropriate limit.

In accordance with section 17 of the Act, this letter represents a Refusal Notice for this particular request.