

Freedom of Information Request Reference N°: FOI 003056-18

I write in connection with your request for information received by Suffolk Constabulary on the 17 August 2018 in which you sought access to the following information:

“How many officers do you have in your Neighbourhood Policing Teams (Safer Neighbourhood Policing Team) in the each of the past eight years? For clarity, I am referring to 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Please break the number of officers down by rank in each of the years.

Please also state how many traffic officers are on at any given time. How many were employed in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018?”

Response to your Request

The response provided below is correct as of 14 September 2018

Suffolk Constabulary has considered your request for information and the response is below.

The total number of officers within Suffolk Constabularies Safer Neighbourhood Policing Teams is provided in the table below, by rank. Please note that the information is only available prior to March 2012. The figures are correct as of the 31st March for each respective year.

Suffolk Constabulary remodelled its county policing during April 2016 in order to improve the services given to communities. This encompassed a reduction in SNTs and police bases, which in turn created a flexible workforce and strategically placed SNTs across the county, increasing partnership working and focusing on increased prevention and decreased demand.

Year (Data as at 31.03)	Sergeant		Constable	
	Head count	FTE	Head count	FTE
2018	17	16.3	59	55.6
2017	20	19.2	56	52.7
2016	25	24.7	82	75.6
2015	28	27.6	101	94.6
2014	30	29.1	108	101.4
2013	25	24.4	103	96.4
2012	28	27.3	100	94.2

The total number of traffic officers available on a yearly basis is provided in the table below. This information is correct as at the 31 March for each year. The numbers are subject to change and will fluctuate throughout the year.

Year (Data as at 31.03)	Head count	FTE
2018	76	75.39
2017	75	74.39
2016	72	71.39
2015	74	73.39
2014	71	70.40
2013	74	73.43
2012	94	92.89

The Constabulary will not disclose the number of officers deployed at any one time as a result of exemptions within the Act.

Section 1 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) places two duties on public authorities. Unless exemptions apply, the first duty at s1(1)(a) is to confirm or deny whether the information specified in a request is held. The second duty at s1 (1)(b) is to disclose information that has been confirmed as being held.

The Constabulary can confirm that it does hold the information requested however it has not been disclosed due to exemptions within the Act.

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

- (a) States that fact
- (b) Specifies the exemption(s) in question and
- (c) States (if that would not otherwise be apparent) why the exemption(s) applies.

The information is exempt from disclosure by virtue of the following exemption(s);

Section 31(a)(b)(c) – Law Enforcement

Section 31 is a qualified and prejudice based exemption and I am therefore obliged to articulate the harm in this information being disclosed and assess the public interest in disclosure.



Harm in disclosure

Information concerning the strengths and capability of the Constabulary would not be disclosed if to do so would prejudice policing across the county and impact negatively on resources.

It is considered that provision of officer numbers will allow people to draw conclusions as to the perceived level of police officers required at any given time. This in turn could identify to the criminal fraternity, occasions where the Constabulary will be at its most vulnerable, based on uniformed officer deployment figures alone, allowing for criminals to calculate when it is potentially the best time to commit crime in order to avoid detection.

This would undermine the law enforcement capabilities of the Constabulary and therefore it is confirmed that Section 31 is engaged.

Factors favouring disclosure

Police officer numbers do differ depending on shift, time and operational demand at the time.

Information that relates directly to the operational effectiveness and efficiencies of the Constabulary is a positive factor favouring disclosure. The public have a right to know that they are being protected in an appropriate and diligent manner.

Public knowledge of the Constabulary will ensure informed public debate, retaining the Constabulary's open and honest approach.

Factors favouring non-disclosure

Disclosure of information that can affect the current and future law enforcement capabilities of the Constabulary will always favour non-disclosure. On this occasion, providing the number of the police officers on the front line at any one time will allow for comparisons to be made should additional data be requested. This in turn will allow for the determination as to the strength of front line police officers, invariably providing criminals with advanced knowledge of the Constabulary's capabilities.

Although it can be argued that this is a historical figure and future working patterns will be subject to change depending on operational requirements at the time, provision of data at such a low level will allow individuals to determine projected perceived officer numbers based on analysis of datasets disclosed by the police service. For example, disclosure of this data may in turn encourage individuals to make requests for alternative days / times, allowing for historical mapping of police numbers on the front line in Suffolk force area and providing an estimation to



the mean number of specific officers required to police the county at any one time. This will be subject to change depending on the operational requirement at the time, however it would provide a good basis for an approximate value to be determined.

Suffolk is a small force and provision of data that identifies the strength of traffic officers could lead to individuals identifying when the force is at its most vulnerable. Historical data would therefore not be disclosed if to do so could allow for such conclusions to be drawn.

Although public knowledge of the Constabulary's capabilities is a positive factor, this is not unlimited and there are aspects of policing that must remain confidential.

Balancing test

Public knowledge of how their funds are being spent and assurance that the Police service are doing all they can to ensure public safety is maintained, is always a positive factor in disclosure.

On balance however, disclosure of this nature is more likely to have the opposite affect causing the criminal fraternity to have prior knowledge of Police operational capabilities, compromising the prevention and detection of crime and administration of justice.

The Police service has a duty to ensure public safety is never compromised and disclosures under FOI should always ensure this is maintained.

It is the Constabulary's decision that disclosure lies in non-disclosure and application of the exemption is maintained.

Should you have any further queries concerning this request, please contact Clair Pack, FOI Decision Maker, quoting the reference number shown above.

A full copy of the Freedom of Information Act (2000) can be viewed on the 'Office of Public Sector Information' web-site;
<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/>

Suffolk Constabulary is not responsible for the content, or the reliability, of the website referenced. The Constabulary cannot guarantee that this link will work all of the time, and we have no control over the availability of the linked pages.



Your Right to Request a Review of Decisions Made Under the Terms of the
Freedom of Information Act (2000).

If you are unhappy with how your request has been handled, or if you think the decision is incorrect, you have the right to ask Suffolk Constabulary to review their decision.

Ask Suffolk Constabulary to look at the decision again.

If you are dissatisfied with the decision made by Suffolk Constabulary under the Freedom of Information Act (2000), regarding access to information, you must notify Suffolk Constabulary that you are requesting a review within 20 days of the date of its response to your Freedom of Information request. Requests for a review should be made in writing and addressed to:

*Freedom of Information Decision Maker
Information Management Department
Suffolk Constabulary
Police Headquarters
Martlesham Heath
Ipswich
Suffolk
IP5 3QS
OR
Email: information@suffolk.pnn.police.uk*

In all possible circumstances Suffolk Constabulary will aim to respond to your request for us to look at our decision again within 20 working days of receipt of your request for an internal review.

The Information Commissioner.

After lodging a request for a review with Suffolk Constabulary, if you are still dissatisfied with the decision, you can apply to the Information Commissioner for a decision on whether the request for information has been dealt with in accordance with the requirements of the Act.

For information on how to make application to the Information Commissioner please visit their website at www.ico.org.uk or contact them at the address shown below:

The Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF
Telephone: 01625 545 700