



Keeping our communities safe and reassured



Chris Jones
Statewatch
(Monitoring the state and civil liberties in
Europe)

Contact: Mrs. Julie Ferrie
Direct Line: 01785 232411
Fax: 01785 232369
Our Ref: FOI 4141
Your Ref:
Date: 15th August, 2013
28/02/2014

Dear Mr. Jones,

Re: Request for information under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, first notified to Staffordshire Police on the 22nd July, 2013

I refer to the above correspondence in which you request information described in the following terms.

1. A report in The Guardian ('Revealed: who can fly drones in UK airspace', 25 January 2013), says that Staffordshire police force has obtained authorisation from the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to fly unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Please could you clarify:

- a. Has the force received a blanket authorisation from the CAA? If so, could you please provide either a copy of the authorisation or further details, including the duration and geographical limitations on the authorisation;*
- b. Has the force received one or more one-off authorisations from the CAA? If so, could you please provide either copies of the authorisations or further details, including the duration and geographical limitations on the authorisations.*

2. Has the force deployed a UAV under the authorisation(s) provided by the CAA? If so, could you please provide:

- a. The dates, times and locations of the deployments;*

- b. The purposes for which they were carried out;*
- c. The model and manufacturer of the UAV used.*

3. In the period 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2013, have any force representatives held discussions with representatives of UAV manufacturers or manufacturers' industry bodies on the issue of the introduction of UAVs? If so, please can you provide:

- a. Dates, times and agendas of the meetings;*
- b. Minutes of the meetings.*

4. In the period 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2013, have any force representatives held discussions with representatives of other police forces in relation to the use of UAVs? If so, please you can you provide:

- a. Date, times and agendas of the meetings;*
- b. Minutes of the meetings.*

5. Has your force received from central or local government or the Association of Chief Police Officers any instructions, advice, recommendations, guidance or information relating to police use of UAVs?

- a. If so, please provide a copy of the documents provided.*

6. Has your force designated a single point of contact (SPOC) for unmanned aerial systems?

A public authority which, in relation to any request for information, is to any extent relying on a claim that any provision in part II relating to the duty to confirm or deny is relevant to the request or on a claim that information is exempt information must, within the time for complying with section 1(1), give the applicant a notice which-

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

I can confirm that Staffordshire Police hold the requested data, as follows.

1. A report in The Guardian ('Revealed: who can fly drones in UK airspace', 25 January 2013), says that Staffordshire police force has obtained authorisation from the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to fly unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Please could you clarify:

- a. Has the force received a blanket authorisation from the CAA? If so, could you please provide either a copy of the authorisation or further*

details, including the duration and geographical limitations on the authorisation;

Staffordshire Police have not received a blanket authorisation from the CAA. Restrictions have been placed upon its operational use. However, divulging the details of those restrictions may compromise the tactical options and use of the UAV.

Section 31 exemption applied (see below for explanation)

b. Has the force received one or more one-off authorisations from the CAA? If so, could you please provide either copies of the authorisations or further details, including the duration and geographical limitations on the authorisations.

Staffordshire Police have been granted a ‘Permission to Fly’ subject to a number of conditions. This Permission is reviewed and renewed annually by the CAA. However, divulging the details of those restrictions may compromise the tactical options and use of the UAV.

Section 31 exemption applied (see below for explanation)

2. Has the force deployed a UAV under the authorisation(s) provided by the CAA? If so, could you please provide:

- a. The dates, times and locations of the deployments;*
- b. The purposes for which they were carried out;*
- c. The model and manufacturer of the UAV used.*

Section 31 exemption applied (see below for explanation)

3. In the period 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2013, have any force representatives held discussions with representatives of UAV manufacturers or manufacturers' industry bodies on the issue of the introduction of UAVs? If so, please can you provide:

- a. Dates, times and agendas of the meetings;*
- b. Minutes of the meetings.*

Staffordshire Police have not held discussions with UAV manufacturers or representatives regarding the introduction of UAVs between the dates specified.

4. In the period 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2013, have any force representatives held discussions with representatives of other police forces in relation to the use of UAVs? If so, please you can you provide:

a. Date, times and agendas of the meetings;

b. Minutes of the meetings.

Between the dates specified Staffordshire Police have been approached by other police forces in respect of the use of UAV as a policing function. These were informal approaches and as such details and minutes are not held.

5. Has your force received from central or local government or the Association of Chief Police Officers any instructions, advice, recommendations, guidance or information relating to police use of UAVs?

a. If so, please provide a copy of the documents provided.

No, a representative from Staffordshire Police is a member of the ACPO UAV Steering Group.

6. Has your force designated a single point of contact (SPOC) for unmanned aerial systems?

Yes. The Tactical Planning Unit, Staffordshire Police

SECTION 31 (Law Enforcement)

Overall harm for Section 31

Drones or UAS (Unmanned Aerial Systems as they are technically called) are overt pieces of tactical equipment used by some organisations such as the Fire Service.

The use of UAS is a rapidly developing technique which is used by the police in a variety of ways to combat crime. Any disclosure under FOIA is a disclosure to the world at large, and by disclosing some of the information with regards to the use of this specialist equipment, would show the criminals what the capacity, tactical abilities and capabilities of the police force are, allowing them to target specific areas of the UK to conduct their terrorist activities. Disclosure of the information would enable those engaged in criminal or terrorist activity to identify the focus of policing activity across the UK. This 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 law enforcement.

Factors favouring disclosure of the information for S31 - By disclosing all the information would enable the public to see where public funds are being spent.

Better public awareness may reduce crime or lead to more information from the public.

Factors against disclosure of the information for S31 - By disclosing all the information held, law enforcement tactics would be compromised which would hinder the prevention and detection of crime. More crime would be committed and individuals would be placed at risk.

Balance test - The prevention and detection of crime are at the cornerstone of policing and the police service will not divulge whether information is or is not held if to do so would compromise these important functions. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and in this case providing assurance that the police service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat posed by the criminal fraternity, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding the integrity of police investigations and operations in this area.

As much as there is public interest in knowing that policing activity is appropriate and balanced, this will only be overridden in exceptional circumstances. The use of UAS is a police tactic that helps in the prevention and detection of crime. Therefore it is our opinion that for these issues the balancing test for disclosing all the information is not made out.

Additionally, Staffordshire Police can neither confirm nor deny that they hold any other information relevant to this request, by virtue of the following exemptions:

Section 23 (5) – Information supplied by, or concerning, certain security bodies

Section 23 is an absolute class-based exemption and therefore there is no requirement to conduct a harm or public interest test

I thank you for your interest in Staffordshire Police and hope that you are satisfied with this answer. However, should you be dissatisfied with the outcome of your request, you do have the right of complaint under section 17(7) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. If you wish to appeal this decision, please inform me in writing at the below address. If you do appeal, your application and the decision will be reviewed by a Senior Decision Maker who was not involved in the original decision. Should this not resolve the matter to your satisfaction, you would then have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner, who regulates compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

If you require an internal review you should notify me in writing. I can be contacted by post:

Julie Ferrie
Freedom of Information
Corporate Communications
Staffordshire Police
PO Box 3167
Stafford

ST16 9JZ

By fax by way of the above number and by email:
foi@staffordshire.pnn.police.uk

Yours sincerely,

Julie Ferrie
(Freedom of Information Local Decision Maker)