| Police Scotland logo | Freedom of Information ResponseOur reference: FOI 24-2716Responded to: 18 November 2024 |
| --- | --- |

Your recent request for information is replicated below, together with our response.

**1. How much to date has been spent by Police Scotland on Operation Branchform.**

**2. How many Police Scotland workers have been tasked with full time work on Operation Branch Form.**I can advise that Police Scotland does not hold all the above requested information.

In terms of Section 17 of the Act, this letter represents a formal notice that information is not held.

By way of explanation, the total costs relating to any investigation, both relating to the investigation itself and the number of hours involved, are difficult to quantify as the nature of policing means that officers are deployed to wherever their services are most required.

Furthermore, the number of officers required throughout an investigation will fluctuate and officers involved in a particular investigation, or multiple investigations, can be redeployed to other duties at any time, dependant on their skillsets.

Police Scotland may keep limited records for investigations, which record overtime costs and non-pay costs. These costs do not provide an accurate reflection of the total number of hours spent on an investigation nor do they provide, for the reasons stated above, an accurate cost for an investigation. The costs do not include, for example, officer hours where that officer would have been on duty anyway and as such are not recorded as a specific expense to a particular investigation.

However, to be of assistance, I can confirm the recorded costs held by Police Scotland to 30 September 2024 in relation to the investigation into the funding and finances of the Scottish National Party are as follows:

Police Overtime – £95,425

I can also provide an estimated salary costing which is based on the top point of each ranks pay scale. The estimated costs salary costs are £1,774,004 to 30 September 2024. This does not include pension contributions.

Finally, I can advise that currently a total of 11 police officers are allocated to this investigation.

## 3. The number of many people who are currently deemed suspects of Operation Branchform by Police Scotland.

I can advise that Police Scotland submitted a standard prosecution report to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service on the 23 May 2024. A link to the statement released in relation to this is provided below:

[Operation Branchform - report submitted to Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service - Police Scotland](https://www.scotland.police.uk/what-s-happening/news/2024/may/operation-branchform-report-submitted-to-crown-office-and-procurator-fiscal-service/)

In relation to any additional information held, this is considered to be exempt in terms of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (the Act).

Section 16 of the Act requires Police Scotland to provide you with a notice which: (a) states that it holds the information, (b) states that it is claiming an exemption, (c) specifies the exemption in question and (d) states, if that would not be otherwise apparent, why the exemption applies. Where information is considered to be exempt, this letter serves as a Refusal Notice that information is held and an explanation of the appropriate exemption is provided. The exemptions that I consider to be applicable to the information requested are as follows:

**Section 34(1) (a) (i) & (b) – Investigations by a Scottish public authority and proceedings arising out of such investigations**

Information is considered exempt information if it has, at any time, been held by a Scottish public authority for the purposes of an investigation which may lead to a decision to report the circumstances to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service to enable a determination on whether criminal proceedings should be instigated and to determine whether a person should be prosecuted for an offence.

This is a non-absolute exemption and requires the application of the public interest test.

**Section 38(1) (b) - personal information.**

Personal data is defined in Article 4 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) as:

*‘Information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person (“data subject”); an identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person’*

Section 38(2A) of the Act provides that personal data is exempt from disclosure where disclosure would contravene any of the data protection principles set out at Article 5(1) of the GDPR which states that:

*‘Personal data shall be processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner in relation to the data subject’*

Article 6 of the GDPR goes on to state that processing shall be lawful only if certain conditions are met. The only potentially applicable condition is Article 6(1) (f) which states:

*‘Processing is necessary for the purposes of the legitimate interests pursued by the controller or by a third party, except where such interests are overridden by the interests or fundamental rights and freedoms of the data subject which require protection of personal data.*

Whilst I accept that you may have a legitimate interest with regards the disclosure of this information and that disclosure may well be necessary for that purpose, I am nonetheless of the view that those interests are overridden by the interests or fundamental rights and freedoms of the data subject.

**Public Interest Test**

I appreciate there is an interest in the release of such information, however, this must be tempered against what is of interest to the public and what is in the public interest.

The Act does not define the public interest, however, it has been described as “something that is “in the interest of the public”, not merely “of interest to the public.” In other words, it serves the interests of the public.

It is in the public interest that an understanding exists as to the processes involved in police investigations and in their relative success. This is particularly true in investigations, therefore, accountability and transparency relating to the actions of Police Scotland and its officers would favour disclosure of the information.

That said, a decision for non-disclosure follows consideration of ongoing or likely criminal investigations and the efficient and effective conduct of Police Scotland in relation to such investigations.

It is essential that information pertaining to investigations is disclosed at the correct time, where appropriate, to ensure that neither the investigation nor the potential for proceedings to be brought against an individual(s) are put at risk. Due to this being a live investigation, the release of specific details could affect the administration of justice.

## 4. The date operation Branchform started.

## Operation BRANCHFORM commenced July 2021.

If you require any further assistance, please contact us quoting the reference above.

You can request a review of this response within the next 40 working days by email or by letter (Information Management - FOI, Police Scotland, Clyde Gateway, 2 French Street, Dalmarnock, G40 4EH). Requests must include the reason for your dissatisfaction.

If you remain dissatisfied following our review response, you can appeal to the Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner (OSIC) within 6 months - [online](http://www.itspublicknowledge.info/Appeal), by email or by letter (OSIC, Kinburn Castle, Doubledykes Road, St Andrews, KY16 9DS).

Following an OSIC appeal, you can appeal to the Court of Session on a point of law only.

This response will be added to our [Disclosure Log](http://www.scotland.police.uk/access-to-information/freedom-of-information/disclosure-log) in seven days' time.

Every effort has been taken to ensure our response is as accessible as possible. If you require this response to be provided in an alternative format, please let us know.