| Police Scotland logo | Freedom of Information Response Our reference: FOI 24-2560  Responded to: 5 November 2024 |
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Your recent request for information is replicated below, together with our response.

**1) The correspondence sent to the Crown Office on 9 August 2024 presenting the findings of Police Scotland’s Operation Branchform**

In terms of section 16 of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (the Act), I am refusing to provide you with the above requested information.

Section 16 of the Act requires Police Scotland, when refusing to provide such information because it is exempt, 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.

I can confirm that Police Scotland holds the information that you have requested and the exemptions that I consider to be applicable are detailed below:

The exemptions that I consider to be applicable to the above requested information 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 35 (1) (a) & (b) – Law Enforcement**

It is incumbent on Police Scotland to prevent crime and detect offenders.

Release of the information requested would adversely impact on the operational effectiveness of the Service and would compromise any tactical advantage the police may have when dealing with crime.

Disclosure of this information would, or would be likely, to prejudice substantially the prevention or detection of crime.

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

**Public Interest Test**

Public awareness would favour disclosure as it would contribute to the public debate surrounding the police investigation.

I would, however, contend that the efficient/ effective conduct of the service favours retention of the information as it cannot be in the public interest to release information that would prejudice law enforcement.

I appreciate that there is a public interest in relation to police investigations. That said, it is essential that neither the investigation nor the potential for proceedings to be brought against an individual are put at risk.

Accordingly, at this time the public interest lies in protecting the integrity of investigative and criminal justice procedures by refusing to provide the information sought.

**and whether this correspondence was sent to anyone in the Scottish Government.**

**2) Whether those working on Operation Branchform or Police Scotland’s senior leadership team has met with any member of the Scottish Government regarding the investigation (outwith any interviews for the purposes of providing witness statements) and if so please state when these meetings have occurred, the minutes of these meetings and the attendees of those meetings.**

I can advise that Police Scotland does not hold this information. In terms of Section 17 of the Act, this letter represents a formal notice that information is not held.

By way of explanation, a search of our recording systems has not identified any relevant information.

**3) How much Police Scotland has spent on Operation Branchform to date, breaking down these costs by overtime worked, specialist equipment needed etc if possible.**

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.

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](mailto:foi@scotland.police.uk) 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](mailto:enquiries@itspublicknowledge.info) 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.