| Police Scotland logo | Freedom of Information ResponseOur reference: FOI 25-0150Responded to: 11 February 2025 |
| --- | --- |

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

**How many recorded interviews with suspects or potential witnesses have been conducted by Police Scotland in connection with Operation Branchform between the following dates:**

**(a) 1 January 2024 to 9 August 2024**

**(b) 10 August 2024 - present day**

**Also, how many such suspects/witnesses were interviewed during each of the two periods?**

**For clarity, I therefore seek four figures:**

**1. Number of interviews with suspects 1 Jan - 9 Aug.**

**2. Number of interviews with potential witnesses 10 Aug - present.**

**3. Number of individuals interviewed as suspects 1 Jan - 9 Aug.**

**4. Number of individuals interviewed as potential witnesses 10 Aug - present.**

The information requested is considered to be exempt. 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 exemption that I consider to be applicable to the information requested is as follows:

**Section 34(1) (a) (i) & (b) – Investigations by a Scottish public authority**

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.

**Public Interest Test**

I appreciate there is a degree of 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 which is of serious concern and benefit to the public”, not merely something of individual interest. 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, when the Freedom of Information Bill was considered by the Scottish Parliament, the then Lord Advocate stated that the exemptions detailed in section 34(1) were essential for an effective justice system. Section 34, has no harm test and information will be exempt from disclosure simply because it has, at some point, been held by an authority for any of these purposes listed.

Accordingly, I can find no public interest in the disclosure of the requested information.

* 1. 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.