



**METROPOLITAN
POLICE**

TOTAL POLICING

Freedom of Information Request Reference No:

I note you seek access to the following information:

Can you provide me with the current figure for how much it has cost the Met police force to guard Julian Assange at the Ecuadorian embassy in London.

Please can this figure be calculated from the day Mr Assange entered the embassy to date please?

DECISION

In relation to your query regarding the financial cost to guard the Embassy since Julian Assange entered the building in June 2012, the MPS has issued the following press statement:

The estimated cost of policing the Ecuadorian Embassy between June 2012 and October 2015 was £13.2m, of which £7.2m is opportunity costs (police officer pay costs that would be incurred in normal duties) and £3.8m additional costs (estimated additional police overtime as a direct result of the deployments at the Ecuadorian Embassy). Indirect costs (e.g. covering support departments and administration overheads) amounted to £2.2m.

The costs provided are an estimate based on averages, as actual salary and overtime costs would vary daily.

The MPS withdrew the physical presence of officers from outside the Embassy on 12 October 2015.

REASON FOR DECISION

With regards to your additional query as to the costs to date, the Metropolitan Police Service can neither confirm nor deny whether any further costs for policing the Ecuadorian Embassy were incurred after 12th October 2015 as the duty in s1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 does not apply, by virtue of the following exemptions:

Section 27(4) - International Relations
Section 31(3) - Law Enforcement
Section 38(2) - Health and Safety

FOIA is considered to be a release to the world as once the information is published the public authority, in this case the MPS, has no control over what use is made of that information.

To confirm or deny whether any further costs have been incurred for policing the Ecuadorian Embassy, would cause operational harm to the MPS and affect our ability to fulfil our core function of law enforcement. To disclose any further information, if held, would technically be releasing sensitive operational information into the public domain and allow members of the public, which includes those with a criminal intent, to improve their plans for causing disruption and would assist them in avoiding detection and apprehension, whilst placing individuals at greater risk. This is likely to impact on police resources. The MPS are likely to need to adapt their tactics and strategies for dealing with such incidents etc., if information is disclosed regarding capabilities and tactical resources deployed.

By confirming whether any further expenditure costs exist would highlight that the MPS has continued concerns. Therefore, MPS resources and its ability to operate effectively and efficiently would directly be affected as this information, could be manipulated by those with criminal/terrorist intent to operate in those areas.

Confirmation that any further information were held may lead to an attack on this establishment as it may be deemed a vulnerable target. Any release of information, if held, could have a detrimental effect on the UK government's relationship with Ecuador and as a consequence other states or international organisations, would reconsider their affinity with the UK. This could consequently lead to a lack of trust and undermine law enforcement agreements in the future. It could also influence the sharing of information provided during the course of political and diplomatic exchanges.

It remains the case that the publication of any further information, if held, relating to additional policing could potentially lead to harm to individuals based within this Embassy, particularly if that information relates to the security costs.

Confirmation or denial whether any further costs exist could be to the detriment

of providing an efficient policing service and a failure in providing a duty of care to all members of the public.

The Police Service is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities they serve, and the MPS will not disclose whether any further information is or is not held, if it might jeopardise these important functions. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and providing assurance that the police service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat posed by criminals, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding the integrity of police operations in this highly sensitive area. As much as there is public interest in knowing that policing activity is appropriate and balanced in these matters, this will only be overridden in exceptional circumstances.

To confirm or deny the existence of any further information that would allow extremists to gauge the level of policing deployed to a specific site would provide anyone intent on committing acts of terrorism or criminality with intelligence as to the level of police resistance that they may encounter. This would hinder the ability of law enforcement bodies to protect individuals and could endanger officer lives, in addition to damaging the UK's relationship with another country (Ecuador), which would clearly not be in the public interest.

Therefore, it is our opinion that for these issues the balancing test favours neither confirmation nor denial.

However, this should not be taken as necessarily indicating that any information that would meet your request exists or does not exist.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your interest in the Metropolitan Police Service.

Information Rights Unit