National Police Chiefs' Council

National Police
Freedom of Information
and Data Protection Unit

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03/08/2026

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REFERENCE NUMBER: 2999/2026

Thank you for your request for information regarding Op Vernal & Op Leste, which has now been considered.

Applicant Question:

1. Please disclose the purpose and strategic aims of Operation Vernal.
2. Please clarify whether Operation Vernal is an operation designed to police:

a) protest; and/or
b) which other issues arising from protest; and/or
c) if not protest, the target of the policing operation.

3. If the aims of Operation Vernal include policing protest, please clarify the nature of the protest it is deployed for – for example, Palestine Action related protest, pro-Palestine protest, anti-immigration protest etc.
4. Please provide information relating to the distinction between Operations Vernal and Leste in respect of the following:

a. The number of officers aimed for deployment under each operation and the relative size of protests each operation is designed to control;
b. The total number of arrests made under each operation within the last 12 calendar months;
c. The offences or categories of offences for which arrests were made under each operation within the last 12 calendar months.
d. The total number of Prevent referrals resulting from each operation within the last 12 calendar months;
e. The geographical focus of each operation.

5. Please clarify the dates on which each of Operations Vernal and Leste became live.
6. Please clarify the process of consultation regarding the creation and development of Operations Vernal and Leste, in particular please identify the bodies consulted.
7. Please clarify whether there has there been any monitoring or evaluation as to how Operations Vernal and Leste have been conducted, and whether this has led to any changes in the guidance or enactment of those Operations.
8. Please confirm whether any equality impact assessment was conducted in relation to Operations Vernal and Leste

a) prior to them becoming live or
b) sometime thereafter? Please provide documents relating to any equality impact assessments.

9. Please clarify if Operations Vernal and Leste remain live or whether they have been ended or superseded by any other operation(s) or policies.
10. If either or both or Operations Vernal and Leste have ended, please clarify the reasons for them ending, as well as the end date(s). Please also provide the name and a copy of the operation(s)/policies which supersede them, if any.

NPCC Response:

1. Operation Vernal was established by the National Police Coordination Centre Strategic Intelligence Branch (NPoCC SIB) following the fatal stabbings in Southport on 29 July 2024.

   The purpose of the operation was to collate and assess national strategic protest-related information and intelligence arising from the subsequent protest activity and public disorder risks, in order to support local, regional and national policing responses and provide strategic briefing to policing leads and government.

2. Operation Vernal was not a public order deployment operation. It was an intelligence and information gathering operation focused on protest-related activity.

   Operation Vernal gathered information and intelligence concerning protest activity, community tensions and public safety risks.

3. Operation Vernal was established following the public disorder and protest activity which occurred after the Southport stabbings in July 2024. It mentioned strategic-related intelligence and information associated with those events and subsequent related protest and counter-protest activity.

4.

   a) Operation Vernal was not a deployment operation.
   In relation to Operation Leste, individual police forces determined operational deployments according to local threat, risk and demand. NPCC does not hold a central record of officer numbers deployed.

   Pursuant to section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, NPCC does not hold recorded information relevant to this part of your request.

   b) The NPCC does not hold the total number of arrests made under each operation within the last 12 calendar months.

   Pursuant to section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, NPCC does not hold recorded information relevant to this part of your request.

   c) The NPCC does not hold the offences or categories of offences for which arrests were made under each operation within the last 12 calendar months.

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Pursuant to section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, NPCC does not hold recorded information relevant to this part of your request.

d) The NPCC does not hold a total number of Prevent referrals resulting from each operation within the last 12 calendar months.

Pursuant to section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, NPCC does not hold recorded information relevant to this part of your request.

e) Operational Vernal circulated nationally to UK police forces.
Operation Leste was a national operation.

5. Operation Vernal commenced in August 2024, with the intelligence requirement being issued on 2 August 2024.

Operation Leste became operational on 25 July 2025.

6. No formal consultation process was undertaken regarding operation Vernal.

Regarding Operation Leste, there was ongoing liaison and coordination between policing and partner agencies including the Home Office, College of Policing and other relevant stakeholders. No formal consultation process is recorded.

The information above represents the recorded information held by the NPCC relevant to this part of the request.

7. Operation Vernal was an intelligence and information-gathering operation established to support the national policing response to events following July 2024. Whilst Operation Vernal was not subject to a standalone formal debrief, learning associated with the national policing response, including intelligence management considerations, was subsequently captured through Operation Navette and reflected in later review and debrief processes, including the structured debrief conducted in relation to Operation Leste.

A copy of the College of Policing Operation Leste Strategic Report is attached.

The Strategic Report engages (in part) S31(1)(a) and S31(1)(b) Law Enforcement exemption(s) and minor S40(2) Personal Information exemption.

For further information relating to the legislation, please see Annex A.

Other than the information described above and the attached Operation Leste Strategic Report, NPCC does not hold further recorded information relevant to this part of the request.

8. The NPCC does not hold any recorded information falling within the scope of this question.

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Pursuant to section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, NPCC does not hold recorded information relevant to this part of your request.

9. Operation Vernal is no longer active. The intelligence requirements for which it was established concluded, and related activity and learning were subsequently incorporated into wider national policing activity under Operation Navette.

   By way of context, HMICFRS subsequently examined the policing response to the public disorder which followed the Southport attacks in its report *An inspection of the police response to the public disorder in July and August 2024: Tranche 2, published on 7 May 2025.* This report is publicly available at: An inspection of the police response to the public disorder in July and August 2024: Tranche 2 - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

   Operation Leste is no longer active and was succeeded by Operation Ordo.

10. Operation Vernal did not have a formally recorded end date. The specific intelligence requirement for which it was created concluded, and its work was subsequently incorporated into wider activity under Operation Navette.

    Operation Leste concluded on 18 September 2025. The operation was established in response to protest activity relating to asylum accommodation and concluded following the reduction in that national requirement. Operation Ordo was subsequently established to support wider ongoing coordination prevention activity.

    Whilst NPCC holds the information above regarding the conclusion of Operations Vernal and Leste, NPCC does not hold recorded information within the scope of this request for copies of superseding operational policies. Pursuant to section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, such information is not held by the NPCC.

Yours sincerely
Freedom of Information Officer & Decision Maker

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COMPLAINT RIGHTS

Internal Review

Any request for an internal review will be acknowledged and responded to, based on the specific wording of your initial request only.

We ask that any rationale to request an internal review, does not include any requests for new information and ask that these be submitted by separate email. We will acknowledge as a new request and may aggregate to your initial request in compliance with the legislation.

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If you are dissatisfied with the response you have been provided with in compliance with the Freedom of Information legislation, you can lodge a complaint with NPCC to have the decision reviewed within 40 working days of the date of this response.

The handling of your request will be looked at by someone independent of the original decision and a fresh response provided.

It would be helpful, if requesting a review, for you to articulate in detail the reasons you are not satisfied with this reply.

If you would like to request a review, please write or send an email to NPCC Freedom of Information, c/o PO Box 481, Fareham, Hampshire, PO14 9FS.

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Annex A

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires the NPCC, when refusing to provide information by way of exemption in question and (c) states why the exemption applies. In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 this letter acts as a refusal notice to those aspects of your request.

The legislation: Section 31 Law Enforcement

(1) Information which is not exempt information by virtue of section 30 is exempt information if its disclosure under this Act would, or would be likely to, prejudice -
(a) the prevention or detection of crime
(b) the apprehension or prosecution of offenders

The withheld information relates to policing methodologies, intelligence development, mobilisation arrangements, command structures, deployment considerations, information-sharing processes, intelligence assessment models, national public order coordination arrangements and identified operational vulnerabilities arising from the management of significant public order events.

Disclosure would provide greater insight into how policing services:

Assess and manage emerging threats and community tensions;
Develop and utilise intelligence models and assessment processes;
Mobilise and coordinate specialist public order resources;
Manage command and control arrangements during national operations;
Identify operational risks and vulnerabilities; and
Prioritise and deploy policing capability during periods of heightened demand.

The release of such information would be likely to assist individuals or groups seeking to disrupt public order operations, avoid detection or exploit known operational challenges. It would provide a more detailed understanding of policing capabilities, limitations and decision-making processes that is currently available in the public domain. This would be likely to reduce the effectiveness of future policing responses and prejudice the prevention and detection of crime and the apprehension or prosecution of offenders.

The NPCC recognises that public order policing remains an area of significant public interest. However, disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act is effectively disclosure to the world at large and the NPCC must consider the consequences of placing sensitive operational information into the public domain. Information which reveals how policing plans, assesses, coordinates and responds to future public order challenges has the potential to undermine operational effectiveness and public safety.

Factors favouring disclosure

There is a significant public interest in openness and transparency regarding policing operations and the lessons identified following major national events. Disclosure promotes public understanding of how policing responds to large-scale incidents, enables scrutiny of decision-making and contributes to public confidence in policing.

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The NPCC recognises the importance of accountability in relation to the use of public resources and the management of national policing operations. For this reason, substantial information has been disclosed within the report, including strategic findings, areas of learning, welfare considerations, organisational recommendations and examples of good practice identified following Operation Leste.

Factors favouring maintaining the exemption

There is a very strong public interest in ensuring that policing agencies retain the ability to prevent and detect crime effectively and to maintain operational readiness for future public order events.

The withheld information goes beyond general organisational learning and enters into areas that reveal operational detail concerning intelligence processes, mobilisation methodologies, command arrangements, capability considerations and identified vulnerabilities. Disclosure would provide insight into matters which could be exploited by those seeking to frustrate policing activity, evade law enforcement or contribute to disorder.

There is substantial public interest in protecting information which would undermine the effectiveness of future operations, reduce the ability of policing to respond to emerging threats, or adversely affect public safety.

Balance Test

The NPCC has carefully considered the competing public interest arguments.
The NPCC acknowledges the public interest in transparency and has therefore disclosed all information that can reasonably be released without causing prejudice. This includes information relating to strategic learning, officer welfare, organisational improvement, national coordination and high-level recommendations arising from the operation.

However, the NPCC considers that the public interest in disclosure is outweighed by the stronger public interest in protecting law enforcement capabilities, operational effectiveness and public safety. The disclosure of the withheld information would be likely to prejudice the prevention and detection of crime and the apprehension or prosecution of offenders.

Accordingly, the NPCC finds that Section 31(1)(a) and Section 31(1)(b) are engaged and the balance of the public interest favours maintain the exemption.

The legislation: Section 40 Personal Information

(1) Any information to which a request for information relates is exempt information if it constitutes personal data of which the applicant is the data subject.

(2) Any information to which a request for information relates is also exempt information if
(a) it constitutes personal data which does not fall within subsection (1), and
(b) the first, second or third condition below is satisfied.

(3A) The first condition is that the disclosure of the information to a member of the public otherwise than under this Act—

(a) would contravene any of the data protection principles, or
(b) would do so if the exemptions in section 24(1) of the Data Protection Act 2018 (manual unstructured data held by public authorities) were disregarded.

(3B) The second condition is that the disclosure of the information to a member of the public otherwise than under this Act would contravene Article 21 of the GDPR (general processing: right to object to processing).

Any information to which a request for information relates is also exempt information if it constitutes personal data which do not fall within subsection (1), and either the first or the second condition is satisfied.

S40(2) applies to third party personal data. Any release would breach the data protection principles contained within the Data Protection Act 2018. S40(2) has been engaged by virtue of S40(3)(a)(i). Any disclosure of withheld information would breach the first data protection principle of fair and lawful processing.

This is an absolute exemption and there is no requirement to apply the public interest test.