



Ministry
of Defence

Air Command Secretariat
Spitfire Block
Headquarters Air Command
Royal Air Force
High Wycombe
Buckinghamshire
HP14 4UE

Ref. 2019/00556

[REDACTED]

4 February 2019

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your e-mail of 11 January 2019 asking for information about the deployment of military personnel to Gatwick Airport. Specifically, you requested:

- “1) The total cost of searching for the drone spotted over Gatwick Airport on December 18, 2018.*
- 2.i) The number of Armed Forces personnel deployed during the search for the drone and suspects.*
- 2.ii) Please could this be broken down to the ranks of officers.*
- 3) The overtime costs of accrued by Armed Forces personnel during the search for the drone spotted over Gatwick Airport on December 18, 2018.*
- 4) The number of overtime hours accrued by Armed Forces personnel during the search for the drone spotted over Gatwick Airport on December 18, 2018.”*

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. A search for the information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence and I can confirm that some information within the scope of your request is held.

A total of 10 RAF personnel ranging in rank from Senior Aircraftman to Wing Commander were deployed to Gatwick Airport between 20 December 2018 and 2 January 2019 in response to a request from Sussex Police following reports of repeated drone encroachments to the airport authority airspace. The military support was requested and provided under 'Military Aid to Civil Authorities' (MACA).

However, Section 26 (1)b of the Act provides that we should withhold information which would be likely to prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of relevant forces. The Act requires that we have to carry out a public interest test (PIT) in this respect to show that the reasons for withholding the information outweigh the reasons for releasing the information.

A public interest test has therefore been conducted and there is a very strong public interest in withholding the exact rank breakdown of the personnel deployed to Gatwick. Releasing such

information would provide the public with greater transparency on the number of personnel deployed to Gatwick and the nature of any future RAF deployment in support of the civil authorities. However, if we were to provide the detailed force rank structure for the deployment it could enable an aggressor to extrapolate shift patterns, operator numbers and operational capabilities which would allow them to alter their tactics for any future similar attack.

I therefore conclude that the balance of the public interest for providing full details of the rank structure for personnel that deployed to Gatwick Airport is firmly in favour of maintaining the exemption S.26(1)(b) and thus of withholding the information.

Information on the additional costs to the MOD of the deployment of RAF personnel to Gatwick is not held as those costs have not been fully identified and collated yet. In particular, any miscellaneous costs incurred during deployment will not have been processed through the MOD's payment system yet.

You may wish to note that military personnel are considered to be available for work on a 24 hour basis, so do not undertake overtime or receive overtime payments.


Responsibility for investigating the sightings and security at Gatwick Airport fell to Sussex Police and the relevant airport authorities. If you require further information relating to events at the airport and the status of the investigation into the incident you may wish to contact Sussex Police who can be contacted through their website at the following link: <https://www.sussex.police.uk/>.

If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please contact this office in the first instance.

If you wish to complain about the handling of your request, or the content of this response, you can request an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, Ground Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of the date of this response.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may raise your complaint directly to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not normally investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website at <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Yours sincerely


Secretariat 3a1
Air Command