

Reference: 2024-020

Thank you for your email in which you requested the following information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA):

Would the SFO be able to give me an estimate of costs in the GPT case over its prosecution of the company and individuals from the opening of the case in 2012 up until yesterday. Could you include both investigation and legal costs (court, lawyer costs etc) on the case please.

Response

I can confirm that the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) holds the information you have requested.

However, this information is exempt by virtue of Section 31 of the FOIA.

Section 31(1) provides that:

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,*
- (c) the administration of justice.*

How the exemption is engaged

Section 31 permits the exemption of information from release when the “disclosure of which would, or would be likely to, prejudice certain specified law enforcement matters”. This exemption is engaged in this response because of the prejudice or likely prejudice caused by the cumulative effect of disclosing information in response to a series of requests of a similar nature (the ‘precedent effect’).

The SFO investigates and prosecutes only the most serious or complex fraud, bribery and corruption. We have a relatively small caseload and routinely disclosing information about the cost of cases risks creating an increasingly detailed picture of how the SFO decides to deploy its resources within and between cases.

The SFO routinely publishes its Annual Report and Accounts, where some information relating to costs can be found. The SFO has recently published its 2022-2023 Annual Report and Accounts which can be found [here](#).

Public interest test

Section 31 is a qualified exemption and requires consideration of the public interest in order for the exemption to be maintained. More information about exemptions, the precedent effect and the public interest test is available on the ICO’s website at <https://ico.org.uk/>.

We acknowledge that there is public interest in understanding the general process the SFO uses to investigate fraud, the resourcing of our work, and how public money is spent. The SFO already takes steps to meet this interest by publishing our Annual Report and Accounts.

We consider that the stronger public interest lies in maintaining the exemption at section 31(1) of the FOIA. We are satisfied that releasing the information you have requested could set a precedent whereby the costs of each SFO case could be released through the FOIA, thereby allowing members of the public (including suspects and/or defendants) to determine which cases the SFO is prioritising, and any areas of focus for the organisation, while also providing details that could indicate changes in our caseload.