

Operation Screen in the 1980s into child abuse at Skircoat Lodge Halifax

1 What was the purpose, remit and terms of reference of the operation

The purpose of Operation Screen was to examine sexual abuse allegations and other concerns within Calderdale Social Services and Residential Children's Homes. Skircoat Lodge Observation and Assessment Centre was the main focus, however some investigations were conducted into Mixenden Childrens Home and Dobroyd Castle School.

The terms of reference restricted enquires to allegations of sexual abuse or serious physical abuse perpetrated by carers who worked at residential care homes in Calderdale or others in authority with or toward children in their care.

2 What dates it ran

Operation Screen ran from October 1997 to January 2002.

3 What results it achieved in terms of number of arrests, number charged, number of convictions and for what offences for each if the information is held

Terence Thomas O'Hagan was charged with Buggery of a male under 16 and indecent assault on a male under 16 years. However he died before conviction.

Malcolm Osric Phillips received 7 years imprisonment for 12 counts of Indecent Assault on a Female under 14, 1 count of Indecent Assault on a Female 16 or over and 1 count of Gross Indecency with a Child (girl) under 16.

Andrew James Shalders received 15 years imprisonment for 11 counts of Indecent Assault on a Male under 14, 1 count of Indecent Assault on a Male Under 16 and 2 counts of Gross Indecency with a Child (male) under 16.

Additionally, 6 other individuals were arrested in connection with sexual and physical abuse. However there was insufficient evidence for charges and no prosecutions were brought.

4 Who the Police officer was in charge and how many officers were on the operation

Chief Superintendent Musgrove led the enquiry until his retirement in September 1998 when Detective Chief Superintendent Mclean took over. There were 10 Police officers in total involved in the operation.

5 Why the operation was instigated

West York Police became aware of a number of allegations of sexual abuse. These allegations were quite properly investigated as soon as they became known.

6 Where the operation was run from and what area did it cover

The operation was based at Halifax Police Station and the offences covering the Calderdale area. It was a joint Police/Social Services investigation.

7 Why was the name chosen and whether it had always had that name or whether there were connected operations

All operation names are taken at random from a list supplied by the Force Intelligence Bureau. The names have no specific meaning or relationship to the investigation

8 Where this information is now kept, and in what form -physical or electronic

All physical papers have now been destroyed in line with Management of Police Information (MOPI) Guidance 2010. However, an archived electronic account for the operation still exists. All Social Services documents were returned to Calderdale Social Services.

Additionally, West Yorkshire Police can neither confirm nor deny that we hold any other information relevant to the whole request by virtue of section 23(5) – Information supplied by, or concerning, certain security bodies.

However, this should not be taken as conclusive evidence that the information you requested exists or does not exist.

Please see Appendix A for the full legislative explanation as to why West Yorkshire Police can neither confirm nor deny whether any other information is held.

Appendix A

Our ref: FOI-20132/340270

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 creates a statutory right of access to information held by public authorities. A public authority in receipt of a request must, if permitted, state under Section 1(a) of the Act, whether it holds the requested information and, if held, then communicate that information to the applicant under Section 1(b) of the Act.

The right of access to information is not without exception and is subject to a number of exemptions which are designed to enable public authorities to withhold information that is unsuitable for release.

Importantly the Act is designed to place information into the public domain, that is, once access to information is granted to one person under the Act, it is then considered public information and must be communicated to any individual should a request be received.

DECISION

This letter serves as a Refusal Notice under Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Section 17 of the Act provides:

(1) A public authority which, in relation to any request for information, is to any extent relying on a claim that information is exempt information must, within the time for complying with Section 1(1), give the applicant a notice which:-

- (a) states the fact,
- (b) specifies the exemption in question, and
- (c) states (if that would not otherwise be apparent) why the exemption applies.

REASONS FOR DECISION

The reason West Yorkshire Police can neither confirm nor deny that it holds any other information in relation to you request is covered by the following exemptions:

Section 23(5) Information relating to security bodies listed at Section 23(3)

Confirming or denying the existence of whether any other information is held would contravene the constrictions laid out within Section 23 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 in that this stipulates a generic bar on disclosure of any information apply by, or concerning, certain Security Bodies.

Section 23(5) is a class based absolute exemption and there is no requirement to consider the public interest in this case.

This should not be taken as conclusive evidence that any information that would meet your request exists or does not exist.

Please note that police forces do not use generic systems or identical procedures for capturing the data. For these reasons this response to your questions should not be used for comparison purposes with responses you may receive from other police forces.