

EXEMPTION NOTICE

Reference: 4693/14

Information Requested:

1. Post match police reports on all games in your police authority area involving Reading FC played during the last football season - i.e between August 1 2012 and May 30 2013.
2. Post match police reports on all games in your police authority area involving Reading FC played during the current football season - i.e between August 1 2013 and the date of this request (February 13 2014).

REASONS FOR APPLYING THE EXEMPTION

Harm

The request asks for information regarding the post match report for matches held between Reading FC and teams who play within the West Midlands, which includes details of particular incidents, police actions. The cumulative effect of all the information requested will contribute to the understanding of police and supporter activities. If WMP disclosed such information it would indicate specific tactics and police responses.

Public Safety is of paramount importance and the Police Service will not disclose information which may lead to disorder and thereby jeopardise the prevention of crime and/ or safety of individuals under any circumstances.

Considerations favouring release of the information – section 31

Disclosing this information would provide greater transparency in the law enforcement process and the actions of West Midlands Police and its partners. It is clear that there is a public interest in public authorities operating in as transparent a manner as possible, as this should ensure they operate effectively and efficiently.

Police officers need to be seen to be effectively enforcing the law. Release of such information could go some way towards reassuring the public that the police service has the ability and resources in place to ensure the proper policing of a specific event.

Considerations favouring withholding the information – section 31

The public interest will favour non-disclosure when the current or future law enforcement role of the force may be compromised by the release of information. Releasing specific meeting venue information into the public domain would compromise the current and future law enforcement role of the force. It would likely allow offenders to change their tactics in order to avoid detection and prosecution.

Where current or future law enforcement role of the force may be compromised by the release of information, then this is unlikely to be in the interest of the public. In this case, for the reasons outlined above, providing the actual meeting venue detail would hinder the prevention and detection of crime.

Balancing Test

The Police Service is charged with enforcing the law, the prevention and detection of crime and protecting the public. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and providing assurance that the police service is appropriately and effectively enforcing the law there is a strong public interest in safeguarding the safety of the public and police operations.

In considering the public interest in relation to this request I have balanced the factors in relation to transparency and accountability against the public interest in ensuring that West Midlands Police are able to appropriately enforce the law and protect the public

For a public interest test, issues that favour release need to be measured against issues that favour non-disclosure. The public interest is not what interests the public, or a particular individual, but what will be the greater good, if released, to the community as a whole.

We recognise that the public interest in being open and transparent is of great importance to all and release of information may assist in the public being more aware of the work that the police are carrying out.

However, while the public interest considerations favouring disclosure are noted, this must be balanced with the impact any release would have on the operational capability of the police. Releasing details of tactics or specific locations of pre- or post- match meeting locations would mean that the police service is less effective, thereby compromising law enforcement and increasing the risk of injuries to the public.

West Midlands Police will not disclose information that could compromise the future law enforcement role of the force or cause harm to the public.