

EXEMPTION NOTICE

Reference: 000471/14

Information Requested:

1. Please provide under freedom of information legislation the police's post-match reports on the following football fixtures:

West Bromwich Albion vs Aston Villa 25/11/2013

REASONS FOR APPLYING THE EXEMPTION

Harm

The request asks for information regarding the post match report for matches held between West Bromwich Albion and Aston Villa who play within the West Midlands, this 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.

Section 31

Considerations favoring release of the information

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.

Section 31

Considerations favoring withholding the information

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.

Section 38

Considerations favoring release of the information

This information could assist individuals in gaining an understanding of public safety in areas where football matches are being held and where people are gathering before and after matches. This would therefore help them gain awareness regarding personal safety issues.

Considerations favoring withholding the information

There may be occasions where the release of information relating to public safety may not be in the public interest. Public Safety is of paramount importance to the police service and its partner agencies. The potential harm in not being able to manage events properly and crime being committed or innocent people being targeted is of grave concern and, whilst wishing to embrace the ethos of information disclosure, this cannot take precedence over public safety

Where third party interests might be jeopardised by release of information that relates to personal affairs of individuals and/or sensitive commercial information held about business, financial, contractual or operational issues. In this case, the release of information relevant to a single address may compromise the privacy rights of individuals.

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.

