

Applicable Exemptions

Section 31 – Law Enforcement

Harm

West Midlands Police (WMP) provide a local rate number (101) for members of the public to contact the police for non emergencies. This central switchboard number is also the one the public should use if wanting to contact members of police staff.

The central switchboard staff are trained to be able to monitor and direct calls to the relevant departments, ensuring that the public are contacting the appropriate person. If the extension number of employees were to be routinely released, the public may be tempted to predict which department they need to contact and avoid using the central switchboard. This may lead to an increase in calls for those departments, affecting their ability to provide day to day services. Also, unlike other departments, the central switchboard is staffed 24 hours a day, reducing the risk that calls will be missed. This improves the operational effectiveness and efficiency of WMP.

Reasons for Disclosure

If extension numbers were made public, then the public could choose to circumnavigate the switchboard.

Reasons for Non Disclosure

Use of the central switchboard ensures that West Midlands Police are working more efficiently as the public are directed to the relevant department.

An increase in the number of calls may place a burden on those departments, preventing them from working as efficiently as possible.

Use of the central switchboard also ensures that calls are answered and the public are responded to, as department phones are not staffed 24 hours a day.

Balance

The release of the information requested would be likely to undermine the effective operation of WMP if it were in the public domain. We recognise that release of this information may assist those members of the public who wish to use extension numbers.

However this must be balanced with the impact any release would have on the operational capability of the police. An increase in the number of calls to a department puts an additional burden on that department. This stops them from being able to work efficiently and carry out their operational duties.

In addition members of staff who work on the switchboard have access to a frequently asked

questions database and can often resolve straightforward enquiries at this first point of contact. This represents a more efficient way of answering these queries, both for the public and West Midlands Police.

On balance, the need for the police to work efficiently and effectively communicate with the public, must take precedence over the desire of some people to use extension numbers. Consequently, on balance, it would not be in the public interest to release this information.