

Harm

The College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice for Investigations is a public facing document and provides guidance on the key roles and principles on the process of criminal investigation. It includes guidance for both reactive and proactive investigations, from volume crime to major crime, see below link:

<https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/investigations/>

In addition, the College of Policing APP Information Management Module is a national standard adhered to by all police forces across England and Wales. Police information refers to all information obtained, recorded or processed for a policing purpose and includes information which is processed (known as data, including personal data) and information which has been subject to a process of evaluation (known as intelligence), see below link:

<http://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/information-management/?s>

To release the redacted information has the potential to undermine the flow of information (intelligence) received from members of the public into the Police Service and other outside agencies relating to these types of offences. Disclosure would also undermine both ongoing investigations, the APP for Investigations and also the APP for Information Management. Reduced intelligence could in turn lead to police officers having to be removed from their frontline duties in order to increase manpower on an investigation.

Finally, female genital mutilation is a highly emotive subject; it is not only a national problem but also a global one. In order to ensure that West Midlands Police delivers effective law enforcement, we liaise with various other national agencies to provide suitable support. Without this kind of liaison, police investigations could be compromised and potentially, any enquiries or investigations that other agencies may be undertaking as well.

Public Interest Considerations

Issues that favour disclosure

The disclosure of the redacted information would lead to a better informed general public in relation to intelligence that West Midlands Police receive. This is particularly pertinent when reports made pertain to such serious matters that West Midlands Police will act and subsequently robustly investigate on. This fact alone may encourage individuals to provide intelligence in order to assist with investigations. It would also promote public trust in providing transparency and demonstrating openness and accountability as far as intelligence that the police are currently focusing their investigations on is concerned.

Female genital mutilation attracts high profile media and public interest connotations. Disclosure of the redacted information could provide reassurance to the general public.

Issues that favour non-disclosure

There is an inherently strong public interest in public authorities being able to carry out effective investigations to prevent and detect crime. This helps to ensure that offenders are brought to justice. To allow the effectiveness of investigations to be reduced is not in the public interest. The public should be assured that there are necessary checks and balances in place to safeguard public funds and resources. Accordingly, West Midlands Police need to be able to carry out investigations effectively away from public scrutiny until such times as the details need to be made public. Otherwise, it will be difficult for accurate, thorough and objective investigations to be carried out.

Modern-day policing is intelligence led and West Midlands Police share information with other law enforcement agencies and related bodies, where appropriate, as part of their investigation process. Inappropriate release of information would act as a deterrent to provide information to the force. With this relationship impeded, it would be more difficult for the Force to gather information required to perform its public service functions. To disclose the redacted information would not only undermine the partnership approach to investigations and law enforcement in general but could have an adverse effect on the reporting of serious sexual offences and could hinder the prevention and detection of such crimes. This in turn could lead to the safety of individuals and victims being compromised.

Conclusion

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.

Although the issues of transparency and accountability are noted, the wider public interest lies in protecting the ability of a public authority to conduct effective investigations. The partnership approach to sharing intelligence is one of the driving forces that goes towards achieving this. A negative effect on the partnership approach to gathering information for the purposes of investigations would lead to a reduction in the prevention and detection of crime, ultimately putting public safety at further risk. Therefore, on balance, it is considered that the public interest in disclosing this information is outweighed by the potential impact release would have on the ability to carry out effective investigations.

Having considered the arguments for and against the release of the information requested, the balance in the public interest test favours non-disclosure. West Midlands Police will not disclose information that could compromise future investigations and proceedings, which would subsequently impact public safety.