

Overall Evidence of Harm

Every effort should be made to release information under Freedom of Information. However, to confirm or deny whether information is or isn't held relating to individuals who have returned to the United Kingdom from Syria or Iraq would undermine ongoing investigations, and the National Security of the United Kingdom.

The threat from terrorism cannot be ignored. It should be recognised that the international security landscape is increasingly complex and unpredictable. The UK faces a sustained threat from violent terrorists and extremists, and taking into account the current security climate within the United Kingdom, no information (such as the citing of an exemption which confirms information pertinent to this request is held, or conversely, stating 'no information is held') which may aid a terrorist should be disclosed. To what extent this information may aid a terrorist is unknown, but it is clear that it will have an impact on a force's ability to monitor terrorist activity.

The security of the country is of paramount importance and West Midlands Police will not divulge whether information is or is not held if to do so would undermine national security. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and providing assurance that the Police Service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat posed by a terrorist attack, or disruption due to extremism, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding both national security and the integrity of police investigations and operations in the highly sensitive areas of which they work.

Modern-day policing is intelligence led, and intelligence changes on a day-by-day basis.

Confirming or denying whether any information is held relevant to the request would show where policing interest has or has not occurred in any specific area which would enable those engaged in criminal activity to identify the focus of policing targets. Any information identifying the focus of this activity could be used to the advantage of terrorists or criminal organisations to plan an attack on the more vulnerable parts of the UK. Information that undermines the operational integrity of these activities will adversely affect public safety and have a negative impact on both national security and law enforcement.

West Midlands Police force works in partnership with other agencies in order to combat issues such as terrorism and organised crime. Confirming or denying that information exists relevant to this request would seriously undermine this partnership approach. Tensions within Syria and the surrounding countries are currently very high, and confirming or denying whether any information is held relevant to this request would exacerbate the situation and jeopardise international relations.

Public Interest Test

Factors favouring confirmation or denial for S24

Confirmation or denial that any information exists relevant to the request would lead to a better informed public. The public are entitled to know how public funds are spent especially with regards to safeguarding National Security.

Factors against confirmation or denial for S24

Other organisations outside the Police Service may, or may not, have an active interest in the subject of the question above. By confirming or denying that any information exists relevant to the request would harm the close relationship that exists between West Midlands Police force and other organisations. To confirm or deny whether the force hold any information relevant to the request would allow inferences to be made about the nature and extent of national security related activities which may or may not take place in a given area. This would enable terrorists or organized criminal groups to take steps to counter intelligence, and as such, confirmation or denial would be damaging to National Security.

By confirming or denying any policing arrangements of this nature would render national security measures less effective. This would lead to the compromise of ongoing or future operations to protect the security or infrastructure of the UK and increase the risk of harm to the public.

Factors favouring confirmation or denial for S30

There is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and providing assurance that West Midlands Police force is appropriately and effectively dealing with crime. This is particularly pertinent in high profile situations where there is a high degree of media speculation. Confirming or denying whether any information is held would allow the public to make informed decisions about these matters.

Factors against confirmation or denial for S30

Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and providing assurance that West Midlands Police force is appropriately and effectively dealing with crime, there is a strong public interest in safeguarding the integrity of police investigations and operations and in maintaining confidence in the Police Service. Confirmation or denial that any information is held relevant to the request would undermine any investigative process and compromise the integrity of any operations.

Factors favouring confirmation or denial for S31

By confirming or denying whether any information is held in respect of this request would allow the public to see where public funds are being spent. Better public awareness may reduce crime or lead to more information from the public as they would be more observant in reporting suspicious activity.

Factors against confirmation or denial for S31

By confirming or denying whether information is held in respect of this request, law enforcement tactics would be compromised which would hinder the prevention and detection of crime. This would result in more risk to the public and consequently require the use of more police resources.

Factors favouring confirmation or denial for S27

Confirming or denying whether any information is held on this issue would increase public knowledge about our relations with other countries, in particular Syria.

Factors against confirmation or denial for S27

Section 27 recognises that the effective conduct of international relations depends upon maintaining trust and confidence between governments. Confirming or denying that any information is held relevant to the request would destroy that trust and confidence, which in turn would hamper international relations affecting the UK's ability to protect and promote the country's interests.

Balance Test

The Police Service is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve. The security of the country is of paramount importance and West Midlands Police force will not divulge whether information is or is not held if to do so would place the safety of an individual at risk, compromise law enforcement or undermine National Security.

Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and providing assurance that West Midlands Police force is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat from terrorists and criminals, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding both National Security and the integrity of police investigations and operations in this highly sensitive area.

It is for these reasons that the Public Interest must favour neither confirming nor denying that the requested information is held. However, this should not be taken as necessarily indicating that any information that would meet your request does or does not exist.