

## Public Interest Test

### Evidence of Harm

With the United Kingdom set to leave the European Union there is undoubtedly a period of uncertainty with unknown consequences for the entire country and public at large.

There is a lot of information published on the Gov.UK website to keep the general public up to speed on the ongoing negotiations for Brexit. Some of the publications include information about the Article 50 process; the policy paper on The Future Relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union, to name but a few, see below link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/legislating-for-the-withdrawal-agreement-between-the-united-kingdom-and-the-european-union>

There is also a vast amount of media speculation and rumour surrounding potential fall-out should there be a no-deal Brexit. Examples can be found at the below links:

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-latest-news-life-saving-drugs-access-catastrophic-effect-healthcare-treatment-expert-ema-mhra-a7810896.html>

<https://www.ft.com/content/883fc90c-46c9-11e7-8d27-59b4dd6296b8>

[https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-45237152?intlink\\_from\\_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cwlw3xz0lvvt/brexit&link\\_location=live-reporting-story](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-45237152?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cwlw3xz0lvvt/brexit&link_location=live-reporting-story)

Although there is some information within the public domain about Brexit generally, any release under FOIA is a disclosure to the world, not just to the individual making the request. To provide information in respect of, what assets, units and personnel are on standby for immediate deployment in the event of a major emergency incident would reveal which forces have plans in place and which forces do not.

This knowledge would enable criminals and terrorists to geographically map force areas which are 'vulnerable' thereby rendering them easy targets.

Police forces work in conjunction with other agencies and information is freely shared in line with information sharing protocols. Modern day policing is intelligence-led and this is particularly pertinent with regard to both law enforcement and national security. The public expect police forces to use all powers and tactics available to them to prevent and detect crime or disorder and maintain public safety.

The prevention and detection of crime is the foundation upon which policing is built and the threat from terrorism cannot be ignored. It is generally recognised that the international security landscape is increasingly complex and unpredictable. The current UK threat level from international terrorism, based on intelligence, is assessed as 'Severe' which means that a terrorist attack is highly likely, see below link:

<https://www.mi5.gov.uk/threat-levels>

In order to counter criminal and terrorist behaviour, it is vital that the police have the ability to work together, where necessary covertly, to obtain intelligence within current legislative frameworks to assist in the investigative process to ensure the successful arrest and prosecution of offenders who commit or plan to commit acts of terrorism.

To achieve this goal, it is vitally important that information sharing takes place between police officers, members of the public, police forces as well as other security law enforcement bodies within the United Kingdom. Such an action would support counter-terrorism measures in the fight to deprive terrorist networks of their ability to commit crime.

To Provide information in relation to Question 4 would evidence What assets, units and personnel are on standby for immediate deployment in the event of a major emergency incident (terrorist or otherwise) and would provide those intent on committing criminal or terrorist acts with valuable information as to where the police have resources to cope with an emergency incident .

Furthermore, Brexit is currently subject of huge diplomatic negotiations between Governmental Heads of State within the United Kingdom and EU countries. Smooth relations between the UK and other States is reliant on upholding confidence and trust. Should the United Kingdom fail to preserve these qualities, by confirming or denying whether information is or isn't held, which in itself reveals information, the ability to protect and promote UK interests through international relations will be hindered.

The Police Service has a duty of care to all individuals, including members of the public, police officers and police staff members. As the whole country is affected by the impending exit from the European Union, and irrespective of whether forces have any assets, units and personnel standby for immediate deployment the health and safety of the community at large would be compromised by highlighting what resources we have available or that are on standby should any incident occur

### Public Interest Considerations

Section 24(1) National Security

#### Factors favouring disclosure

The public are entitled to know how public funds are spent and resources distributed within an area of policing, particularly in relation to contingency planning. To provide information relating to plans for a non-deal Brexit are held by West Midlands Police would improve public debate. In addition West Midlands Police would be held to account where large scale policing may be required to combat community unrest and terrorist activity.

#### Factors against disclosure

Security measures are put in place to protect the community that we serve. As evidenced within the harm to provide information of specific contingency/emergency plans within individual force areas, would highlight to terrorists and individuals intent on carrying out criminal behaviour, planned policing tactics with regard to security and crime prevention techniques. This would ultimately increase the risk of harm to the general public and significantly undermine any ongoing or future operations to protect the security or infrastructure of the United Kingdom.

Taking into account the current security climate within the United Kingdom, no information 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.

Irrespective of what information is or isn't held, the public entrust the Police Service to make appropriate decisions with regard to their safety and protection and the only way of reducing risk is to be cautious with what is placed into the public domain.

The cumulative effect of terrorists gathering information from various sources would have a huge impact when linked to information gathered from various sources about terrorism. Information disclosed over time will give a more detailed account of the tactical infrastructure of not only a force area but also the country as a whole.

Any incident that results from such a disclosure would by default affect National Security.

Other organisations outside the Police Service are also widely engaged in targeting terrorism, see below links:

<http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/news/news-listings/362-nca-unveils-campaign-to-disrupt-the-use-of-airfields-and-light-aircraft-by-organised-criminals>

<https://www.mi5.gov.uk/terrorism>

To provide information relevant to contingency/emergency plans for a no deal Brexit would harm the close relationship that exists within such organisations, where trust and confidence in this specific area has been built up.

To disclose information of what West Midlands Police may or may not have 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 could enable terrorist groups to take steps to avoid detection and as such would be damaging to national security and 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 United Kingdom and increase the risk of harm to the public.

#### Section 27(1) International Relations

##### Factors favouring disclosure

Irrespective of what information may or may not be held to disclose information would provide openness and transparency by highlighting that West Midlands Police is proactively engaging with Governmental Departments and other law enforcement agencies both at home and abroad as part of global crime prevention initiatives.

##### Factors against disclosure

The importance of building and maintaining goodwill within international relations cannot be underestimated. Disclosing if West Midlands Police have assets on standby could be deemed we are in receipt of information from our international partners / other global law enforcement agencies which would undermine the relationship and trust built up between police forces and international agencies.

#### Section 31(1) Law Enforcement

##### Factors favouring disclosure

To disclose what assets, units and personnel are on standby for immediate deployment in the event of a major emergency incident (terrorist or otherwise to target community unrest and disorder would lead to better public awareness and reassurance which would assist public debate on this subject.

##### Factors favouring non-disclosure

Providing information of standby services etc., would suggest that West Midlands Police takes its responsibility to protect the safety of individuals seriously. Public safety is of paramount importance and although the Civil Contingencies Act stipulates that the public should be advised of any impending danger, to do so at a time when the planning may or may not be in progress would undermine the tactical options available and compromise the effective delivery of operational law enforcement.

Section 38(1) Health and safety

#### Factors favouring disclosure

Irrespective of what information is or isn't held, releasing information would provide reassurance to the general public that West Midlands Police robustly research and plan policing events in association with Governmental Departments both within the United Kingdom and abroad to safeguard their wellbeing. This awareness could be used to improve any public consultations/debates in this area. Furthermore, the public would be able to take steps to protect themselves.

#### Factors against disclosure

To release information could lead to the loss of public confidence in West Midlands Police's ability to protect the wellbeing of the community.

#### Balancing Test

The security of the country is of paramount importance and the Police Service is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve. As part of that policing purpose, various plans may or may not have been compiled.

The Police Service will not divulge what resources or information we have if to do so would place the safety of an individual at risk or undermine national security. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and investigations, providing assurance that the Police Service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat from criminals, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding both national security and the integrity of police operations when delivering effective operational law enforcement to ensure the prevention and detection of crime is carried out and the effective apprehension or prosecution of offenders is maintained.

This is also relevant in relation to information sharing among Governmental Departments and other law enforcement agencies both within the UK and abroad. Anything which places that confidence at risk would undermine the trust members of the public, as well as other agencies have in the Police Service.

As much as there is public interest in knowing that policing activity is appropriate and balanced in matters of national security, this will only be overridden in exceptional circumstances.

In addition any disclosure by West Midlands Police that places the security of the country at risk, no matter how generic, would undermine any trust or confidence individuals have in us. Therefore, at this moment in time, it is my opinion that for these issues the balance test favours non-disclosure in respect of Question 4.