

Public Interest Test – 1133A/20Applicable exemption:

Section 31(1)(a) – Law enforcement

Harm

West Midlands Police (WMP) are charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve. Disclosing all of the requested information would impact on the force's operational and tactical capabilities by providing members of the public with valuable knowledge of the processes we adhere to which could assist those with criminal intent to avoid detection.

Factors Favouring Disclosure

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 Forces need to be properly equipped in order to meet the demands placed upon them. This information could go some way towards reassuring the public that the West Midlands Police Force is adequately prepared in all areas.

Factors Favouring non-Disclosure

However, WMP must also consider the wider impact of disclosing specific detail about police training. By the very nature of our work, the disclosure of the information requested carries the potential risk of highlighting areas of weakness within police training.

There is evidence that criminals use information to change tactics and method of attack. This information, if released, could compromise law enforcement tactics, which may hinder the Police force's ability to prevent and detect crime and could be detrimental to the effective operation of policing activities. This in turn could compromise the safety of the public and the inappropriate release of information could cause damage to the service and the community. This would impact on trust and confidence within the local communities, with particular areas feeling vulnerable, criminal activities would increase within these areas.

Where current or future law enforcement capabilities of the force may be compromised by the release of information, it is unlikely to be in the interest of the public.

Balancing Test

The public interest test is a consideration of whether the community benefit of possession of the information outweighs the potential harm of releasing that information. It is not an evaluation of what interests the public.

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.

Having considered the arguments for and against release, the public interest test favours non-release of material which directly impacts on any on-going or future investigations. The greater public interest is served in maintaining the integrity of the justice process, and this in turn favours maintaining the exemption in relation to the withheld tactical material. WMP will not disclose information that could compromise the future law enforcement role of the force.