

**1. How many police officers have contracted COVID-19 since March 1st 2020? I would like this information broken down by month from March 1st 2020, up to and including today's date. If data has not been included up to and including today's date, please provide me with data starting from March 1st 2020, to the latest date where data is available.**

December 2020 and January 2021 - Applicable Exemption: Section 31(1) (Law enforcement)

#### Public Interest Test

##### Harm

Releasing data beyond November 2020, would reveal whether or not West Midlands Police currently has a large number of officers who have recently tested positive for COVID-19 and likely to be off sick and/or self-isolating as a result, thus potentially reducing the force's resilience. If December's and January's numbers were high, it would be reasonable to assume that this could still be having an impact going into February.

It might be argued that if numbers were low in December and January, then there is no harm in releasing the information. However, if we were only to disclose information when numbers were low, if the same question were asked again at a later date and we were to withhold the information, this would effectively be confirming that numbers are high and the force's ability to effectively enforce the law is reduced.

##### Public interest factors in favour of disclosing the information:

The Public would be better informed as to the impact that COVID-19 is having on West Midlands Police officers and if the number of officers affected was extremely high, this could help to manage the public's expectations if the level of service we were able to provide was reduced as a result.

##### Public interest factors in favour of withholding the information:

If we were to release this information and the numbers of officers testing positive for COVID-19 in December and January as a proportion of the total workforce was very high, this would reveal a level of vulnerability in the force's law enforcement capability. This would be positive intelligence to the criminal fraternity, who could use this as an opportunity to commit more crime if they perceive that the likelihood of them being apprehended is reduced.

Additionally, if the number of our officers testing positive for COVID-19 in December and January as a proportion of the total workforce was very low, then if we were to release figures and another force had high numbers and withheld their information, this would confirm to those persons or groups intent on criminal activity, police force areas in which they might more easily be able to operate.

##### Balancing Test:

For a public interest test, factors in favour of disclosing the requested information must be weighed against factors in favour of withholding the information. The public interest is not what interests the public, or a particular individual, but what will be for the greater good if released to the community as a whole.

The issue of a better informed public is noted, however this needs to be weighed against the increased level of crime that could be committed if we, along with other police forces,

released information that cumulatively confirmed areas where there might be a weakness in a force's ability to effectively enforce the law.

West Midlands Police has a duty to protect the public and enforce the law, and to release information that would prejudice this role is clearly not in the public interest. Therefore it is my view that, at this moment in time, the public interest in release of the number of West Midlands Police officers who tested positive for COVID-19 in December 2020 and January 2021 is outweighed by the factors in favour of withholding the information.