

**Q4. How many long term sick officers does your force currently have?**  
**Q5. How many officers are currently on restricted duties?**

Applicable Exemption: Section 31(1)(a) (Law enforcement)

Public Interest Test

Harm

Releasing the number of officers who are currently off work due to long term sickness or on restricted duties could, if this number was very high as a proportion of total officers, show that the forces resilience was reduced and its ability to effectively enforce the law. This information would be extremely useful to individuals or groups intent on committing crimes, if they were to perceive that the force was in a weakened position.

Public interest factors in favour of disclosing the information:

To release the number of West Midlands Police officers who are currently long term sick or on restricted duties, would better inform the public and, if the number of officers for either of these was very 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 the number of officers currently absent through long term sickness or on restricted duties and as explained in the harm above, this number as a proportion of the total workforce was very high, this could 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 being apprehended was reduced.

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 were to release information that might reveal a reduction in the 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 the public interest in releasing the number of West Midlands Police officers currently absent through long term sickness or on restricted duties, is outweighed by the factors in favour of withholding the information.