

**Public Interest Test – 398A/21****Applicable exemption:**

Section 31(1) – Law enforcement

**Harm**

The police non-emergency number 101 is the number for people to call when they want to contact their local police in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland.

If direct-dial numbers and specific email addresses were introduced it is likely to adversely affect the efficiency and effectiveness of the police and there is a danger that there could be some delay to the appropriate police response. In most circumstances calls are best dealt with centrally by staff who are trained in recognising emergencies and who know who the best person to deal with the call is. In addition, while many police stations are not open all day, the central switchboard is staffed 24 hours a day.

**Issues favouring disclosure:**

If this email address were to be placed within the public domain, then the public could choose to circumnavigate the central contact team.

**Issues favouring non-disclosure:**

Use of the central contact team ensures that police forces are working more efficiently as the public are directed to the relevant department.

An increase in the number of emails and phone calls would place a burden on specific individuals, preventing them from working as efficiently as possible.

Use of the central contact team also ensures that emails and phone calls are answered and the public are responded to, as there may be circumstances when specific individuals are away from the office, meaning that the public would experience delays with their correspondence being dealt with.

**Conclusion**

The release of the information requested would be likely to affect the effective operation of the police force if it were in the public domain. We recognise that release of this information may assist those members of the public who wish to use external contact details to contact individuals/teams directly.

However, this must be balanced with the impact any release would have on the operational capability of the police. An increase in the number of emails to any individual (whatever their status within the force) would put an additional burden on them and the department they work within. This stops them from being able to work efficiently and carry out their operational duties.

Police forces need to be able to deal with emails in the most efficient way possible and the central contact team are equipped to deal with these in the most effective manner. This means that at this time the public interest favors withholding the requested information.