

Questions 3, 6, 7, 8, 11, 14, 15 and 16 - June 2021 figures

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

Public Interest Test

Harm

Releasing data for June 2021, would reveal whether or not West Midlands Police currently has a large number of officers and staff absent from work due to contracting Covid-19, having to self-isolate after being in contact with someone who has contracted Covid-19 or shielding from the risk of contracting Covid-19. If the figures for June 2021 are very high, it would be reasonable to assume that this could still be having an impact going into July.

It might be argued that if numbers are low in June, then there is no harm in releasing the information. However, if we were only to disclose information when numbers were low, then if the same question were asked again at a later date and we were to withhold the information because numbers were high, this would effectively by default be confirming that numbers were high and the force's ability to effectively enforce the law was 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 staff 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 number of officers and staff absent due to contracting Covid-19, through having to self-isolate after being in contact with a person who had contracted Covid-19 or shielding from the risk of contracting Covid-19 in June 2021 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.

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 released information that suggested there might be a weakness in our 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 data for June 2021 is outweighed by the factors in favour of withholding the information. West Midlands Police will not release information that would prejudice the law enforcement role of the force.