**Public Interest Test – 568A/22**

**Applicable Exemptions**
Section 31 – Law Enforcement
 **Harm**West Midlands Police (WMP) provide a generic e-mail address for members of the public to contact them for non-emergencies. This e-mail address is monitored / staffed 24 hours a day to ensure that communications are directed to the correct department effectively reducing the risk that correspondence will be missed. This is also the e-mail address that the public should use when wanting to contact members of police staff. This improves the operational effectiveness and efficiency of WMP.

The central contact team are trained to be able to monitor this e-mail address and direct correspondence to the relevant departments, ensuring that the public are contacting the appropriate person. If the e-mail address of the Chief Constable / Professional Standards were routinely released the public may be tempted to contact them directly with their query / correspondence rather than this communication been directed through a most appropriate channel. Using a general e-mail inbox ensures that queries are not misdirected and delays are not experienced when reporting incidents.

The volume of e-mails this would generate could mean that the Chief Constables / Professional standards time would be taken up with reading and directing e-mails to other departments, this would not be an effective use of the Chief Constables / Professional Standards time and experience. The volume of e-mail would mean the e-mail account could constantly exceed its limit, preventing e-mails of significant importance from been received.

**Reasons for Disclosure**If Chief Constables or Professional Standards e-mail address / contact numbers were to be placed within the public domain, then the public could choose to circumnavigate the central contact team.  **Reasons for Non-Disclosure**

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

An increase in the number of e-mails may place an extra burden, preventing them from working as efficiently as possible.

Use of the central contact team also ensures that e-mails are answered and the public are responded to, as there maybe circumstances when they are away from the office / in a meeting meaning that the public would experience delays with their correspondence being dealt with.

During a time when the force is looking at efficiency savings, would this be the correct use of directing e-mails / phone calls, individual e-mail address do not have the capacity to accept the volume of e-mails disclosing this information would generate.

The increase in volume of e-mail / phone calls received would make it difficult to effectively manage the workloads.

**Balance**

The release of the information requested would be likely to undermine the effective operation of WMP 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 e-mail addresses / phone numbers to contact the Chief Constable / Professional standards 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 e-mails / phone calls 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.

 WMP need to be able to deal with emails in the most efficient way possible and our Contact Us team are equipped to deal with these in the most effective manner. This means that at this time the public interest favours withholding the requested information.