

## **Public Interest Test – 446A/22**

### 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 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 addition, while many police stations are not open all day, the central switchboard is staffed 24 hours a day.

This would also be the case with other public service areas such as hospitals and clinics. In most circumstances, calls are best dealt with centrally by staff who are trained to recognise emergencies and who know the most appropriate people/departments to deal with the call.

### **Issues favouring disclosure**

If these contact details were to be placed within the public domain, the public could choose to circumnavigate the central contact teams.

### **Issues favouring non-disclosure**

Use of central contact teams and phone numbers that are already within the public domain ensures that police forces and other emergency services are working more efficiently. This is because these teams are trained to assess and direct the public to the most appropriate departments. This also ensures that phone calls are answered and the public are responded to. If we were to release contact numbers not already within the public domain, the public may contact the wrong departments/teams or encounter circumstances when specific individuals are away from the office, meaning the public would experience delays with their correspondence being dealt with.

Additionally, an increase in the number of phone calls would place a burden on specific individuals/teams, preventing them from working as efficiently as possible.

### **Balancing test**

The release of these details would be likely to affect the effective operation of the police force and other emergency services 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 alternative contact details to contact individuals/teams directly.

However, this must be balanced with the impact any release would have on the operational capability of these services. Emergency services need to be able to deal with correspondence in the most efficient way possible and the central contact teams 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.