

Public Interest Test – 745A/22**Applicable exemption:**

Section 31(1)(a)(b) – Law enforcement

Harm

Disclosures under the Freedom of Information Act are disclosures to the world, not just to the individual making the request. Disclosing details of the way in which we collate and share information would provide a person who may be intent on criminal activities with invaluable information as to the capability of the force allowing them to adjust their own tactics accordingly.

Providing this information would undermine individual force policing capabilities which consequently would be detrimental to their ability to deal with on-going crime, and would allow comparison between forces across the country and enable criminals to build a picture of what areas of our society are being monitored for criminality and attacks. This would prejudice the effectiveness of police forces and would allow inferences to be drawn about force level activity and identify vulnerability around the country.

Factors favouring disclosure

Police forces need to be properly equipped in order to meet the demands placed upon them. This information could go some way towards reassuring the public that West Midlands Police is adequately prepared in all areas.

The release of this information would provide an insight into the police service and enable the public to have a better understanding of the effectiveness of the police. This will also provide re-assurance to the community that West Midlands Police have in place protocols to deal with serious offences and keep them safe.

Factors favouring non-disclosure

Disclosing further information relevant to this request would render security measures less effective. Serious offences would increase as more crimes would be committed as a result of criminals gaining knowledge about the capabilities of individual force areas and, therefore, the public will be placed at a greater risk. Criminals would be able to identify vulnerable areas and target and exploit those areas, or avoid areas of high activity, resulting in the public being in fear of more criminal activity occurring. There would be an impact on police resources from disclosing further information as vulnerable forces may need to increase their resources to reassure and protect the surrounding community.

Balance Test

For a public interest test, issues that favour release need to be measured against issues that favour non-disclosure. The public interest is not what interests the public, or a particular individual, but what will be the greater good, if released, to the community as a whole.

We recognise that the public interest in being open and transparent is of great importance to all and release of information may assist in the public being more aware of the work that the police are carrying out. However, while the public interest considerations favouring disclosure are noted, this must be balanced with the impact any release would have on the operational capabilities of the force.

Because the Freedom of Information Act is 'applicant blind', any information released under the Act is available to everyone. It is well documented that criminals will use every advantage they can gain to successfully carry out their criminality. Releasing specific monitoring information into the public domain would compromise the current and future law enforcement role of the force.

Therefore, it is my view that the public safety from non-disclosure is of greater importance than the advantage of public confidence from the disclosure of this information. West Midlands Police will not disclose information that could harm the public or that could compromise the safety and operational effectiveness of the force or its officers.