

Section 31(1)(a)(b) – Law enforcement

Harm

Disclosing details of the numbers within individual specialist units would provide a person who may be intent on criminal activities with invaluable information as to the position of the Force in those areas, thus allowing them to adjust their own tactics accordingly.

Considerations 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 the West Midlands Police Force is adequately prepared in all areas.

Considerations Favouring Non-Disclosure

The release of information disclosing the numbers or capabilities of West Midlands Police within specialist teams would furnish individuals with the opportunity to fully understand the police capacity and therefore be more effective in carrying out criminal activities.

Therefore, the safety of the public could be compromised and inappropriate release could cause damage to the service and the community.

Balancing Test

For a public interest test, issues that favour disclosure 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 investigations we conduct and the operational capability tactical approach of the police.

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.

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 interfere with ongoing investigations or could compromise the future law enforcement role of the force.