



STRATEGIC POLICING AND CRIME BOARD 4th February 2014

WMP Freedom of Information Update
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PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To update the Strategic Policing and Crime Board members on the issues facing West Midlands Police regarding Freedom of Information requests.

BACKGROUND

2. This report is the third report regarding the processing of FOI requests that follow updates to the Board on 16 July and 5 November by the then Chief Information Officer.
3. Previous reports to the Board showed that there was a significant backlog of 231 FOI answers, due to increasing demand; staff sickness and staffing levels in the team as a result of financial savings.
4. The team consists of one manager and three FOI officers. This is currently enhanced by four extra officers to deal with the backlog.
5. The approach to solving the backlog has been approved by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).
6. Following the departure of the CIO at the end of December, FOI now sits with the Head of Corporate Communications, within the Deputy Chief's Constable's portfolio.

ACTIONS TAKEN

7. The force has written to all 231 requestors of unanswered FOIs from before January 2013, offering an apology for the delay but also seeking confirmation regarding the information that they were seeking so that an effective response was forthcoming.

8. Where no response was received after one month, a further letter was sent similar to the first, but this time confirming that a non response would be interpreted that the information was no longer required.

9. The current situation is as follows;

Total number of requests due before January 2013:	231
Written to	231
Of which contacted twice	191
Replied	64
Does not want data	48
Wants data	16
Of which:	
a. yet to action	6
b. answered	10
Email address no longer responding	11

10. The response and the narrative used on all correspondence was agreed by the ICO.

11. In addition there are 147 overdue requests from January 2013 to January 2014. The majority are less than six weeks overdue.

12. It is anticipated that the backlog will be reduced to around 30 by end of April this year.

AVOIDING BACKLOGS IN THE FUTURE

13. A plan consisting of a number of actions is in place to mitigate any future backlog:

14. FOI answers are now published on the Force website. This will build a library of FOI answers which the public can access easily without recourse to the FOI team. For the FOI team this should mean no duplication in answers and the potential for a reduction in demand.

15. Work will start soon on a publication scheme whereby information that could later be requested as part of the FOI process is published pro-actively thus, once again, reducing demand on the team.

16. The Deputy Chief Constable has authorised two extra FOI Officers to be appointed on one year contracts from April 2014 when the posts will be reviewed.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

17. The appointment of two FOI officers on one-year contracts.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

18. The FOIA is an Act of Parliament that the force is obliged to comply with.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 19.** FOI allows everyone to submit and get a response to a request. All requestors are treated equally.

West Midlands Police

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Temp Deputy Chief Constable