

Office of Police and Crime commissioner

Statement of the Ethics, Integrity and Complaints Committee

Volume of Freedom of Information Requests

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) gives the right to access recorded information held by public sector organisations. Anyone can request information.

Members of the Police and Crime Commissioner's Ethics, Integrity and Complaints Committee has recently considered the issue of the volume of work created by freedom of information requests and the demand placed on Leicestershire Police in handling such requests in a time of limited resource.

The Committee discussed an individual's right to information verses the victims right to anonymity and safeguarding and considered if suspects who are not convicted be named in investigations prior to any trial or public hearing?

Since the introduction of freedom of information law Leicestershire Police have had only 10,000 requests however this is increasing over 20% every year. This demand equates to an extra 4 additional analyst posts and 4 additional administrative posts to deal with the demand of FOI requests. Of all requests received 75% are from journalists and academics. Only a small proportion are from the public themselves. The police have to provide the information by law but in a time of austerity should the police be allowed to charge for this information? Whilst there is provision in legislation for public authorities to charge for providing information if the collation of that information exceeds 48 hours of work the majority of requests fall under that time limit. The current demand would require the recruitment of an additional 13 administrative posts to deal with the number of requests within the statutory time limits.

Members of the Committee felt that members of the public requesting information should be given priority and that a nominal fee should be considered for journalists and other organisations requesting information. Under current legislation this is not lawful however members voiced their concerns over the use of public money being spent on such administrative procedures. Whilst recognising that current legislation was bought in with good intent members felt that consideration should now be given to reviewing and amending the legislation to differentiate between requests from members of the public and journalists and to assist public authorities in meeting the demand.