

# Freedom of Information Policy

## Principles.

1. This policy sets out the Police Ombudsman's Office response to the issues raised by the Freedom of Information Act.
2. The Police Ombudsman's Office has as 'corporate values' the ideals of 'openness' and 'accountability.' It aims to ensure that the police complaints system is as open and transparent as possible within the requirements of the law. The Office has a dedicated Information Directorate, the main function of which is to ensure that the public and police attitudes to its work are based on accurate information.
3. It is within that context that the Police Ombudsman's Office adheres to its commitments under the Freedom of Information Act. This policy should be read in conjunction with our Public Information Policy.
4. The Police Ombudsman's Office will aim to provide material and information free of charge.

## Process.

5. The Office has available on its website a 'Publications Scheme' which details the information it routinely makes available and provides a guide to how that material can be accessed.
6. The website also provides guidance for members of the public, police officers and members of its own staff on how they can use the Freedom of Information Act to request material which is not routinely made available.

7. The Police Ombudsman's Office will define as a request for 'information' any request which relates to written, audio or visual material held and recorded by this Office. The views, commentary or judgment of staff within the Police Ombudsman's Office, if not held and recorded by the organisation, will not be defined as 'information' under the Freedom of Information Act.
8. The Office will record and monitor all Freedom of Information requests which cite the Act.
9. All other requests made to the Office, although they carry the weight of the Freedom of Information Act, will be deemed as 'normal business.' These requests will include:
  - (a) Requests for access to information (which do not cite the Freedom of Information Act) from other agencies and in line with existing protocols and governance.
  - (b) Requests (which do not cite the Freedom of Information Act) seeking a view, comment or guidance.
  - (c) Requests (which do not cite the Freedom of Information Act) for the disclosure of information in relation to on going criminal or civil proceedings;
  - (d) Requests (which do not cite the Freedom of Information Act) from members of the public, their representatives and from the media;
  - (e) Requests (which do not cite the Freedom of Information Act) seeking routine updates from those involved in complaints, including complainants and police officers;

(f) Requests for personal information, which will be answered in line with the Data Protection Act.

10. The Police Ombudsman's Office shall try, as far as it can, to ensure that those making the decisions about the release of information are not those who have created that information. The Police Ombudsman has delegated to the Senior Information and Media Relations Officer the authority to make a decision on releasing information. He will take into account the views of the persons who created the material and where appropriate the views of the Offices' Legal Directorate. (In cases where the information requested has been created by the Information Directorate, the Director of Legal Services will make the decision about disclosure of the material sought.)

11. The Police Ombudsman's Director of Information will deal with all appeals against those decisions.