

WEST YORKSHIRE POLICE RESPONSE (E-MAIL)

Dear Sir / Madam,

Following discussions with the Deputy Chief Constable (Mr David Crompton) and Assistant Chief Officer Nigel Brook, I have been asked to provide a response from West Yorkshire Police in respect of your consultation document, 'Making Open Data Real'. The comments below express the Force's view on current legislation, particularly Freedom of Information, and the impact this has on resourcing. Our comments are as follows:

One of the issues due to be explored relates to whether the current fees regulations and cost limits under the FOIA should be amended to facilitate the release of more data (Page 23, para. 8.6 (4)). As one of the larger Police Forces in England and Wales, West Yorkshire Police (WYP) currently deals with close to 1000 FOIA requests each year. Over 50% of these requests are in response to demands from the Media, the remainder coming from members of the public, students, political groups, businesses and various campaign groups.

Since the Act was introduced in 2005, WYP have never charged anyone for an FOIA request, and where the cost of retrieving information has proved prohibitive, we have negotiated with the requester so as to enable them to tailor their request so that they do receive a good part of the information they require. So, in answer to the questions raised around this issue, we do feel that the current fees regulations are generally more than adequate to meet the needs of most requests.

However, this service is provided to the public at no small cost to the Force. On average, and taking into consideration the cost of the FOI Team who deal with FOIA requests on behalf of the Force, the time spent by other officers retrieving information from around the Force and the associated administrative duties that are required to ensure the Force meets its obligations under the Act, each request costs the Force around £400. Over the course of a year, this equates to around £400,000. With around 50% of requests received being from the Media, is it fair that public funds are being used to subsidise their stories? No funds were ever provided by the public purse to fund this service; all public bodies had to fund the service from within existing funds. At a time when the Police Service is having its budgets cut by 20% over the CSR period, asking public services to pay further costs towards publishing datasets or any other information is not be helpful.

Perhaps the Government might consider how they could prevent the Act from being abused or misused by some members of the community. Introducing stricter criteria around what can be dealt with as an FOIA request could well reduce some of the more spurious and mischievous requests that are received by public bodies. These type of requests take a great deal of time and money to deal with, and generally lead to the Information Commissioner's Office for them to consider – impacting upon their workloads and resources as well as those of the public body.

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West Yorkshire Police