



Councillor Christian Mitchell
Chairman
Sussex Police & Crime Panel
County Hall
West Street
Chichester
West Sussex
PO19 1RQ

22 March 2022

Dear Councillor Mitchell

Information Access Requests

Thank you for your letter dated 8 March 2022.

It is important that I start by providing you with a summary of the scale and volume of the requests for information received by the Information Access Team within Sussex Police each month. This demand is recognised to include approximately: 110 freedom of information requests, 100 subject access requests, 80 court orders, 120 Criminal Injury Compensation Authority (CICA) enquiries, 25 fitness to practice requests and 25 insurance-related investigations and equates to >450 requests each month.

The Force makes every effort to respond to each of the requests received within the statutory timescales provided. However, some of the current issues around the timeliness of the responses provided by the team are set against a steady rise in requests which has continued to increase in recent months. It is also recognised that some of the requests received are complicated and can take a significant amount of time to locate, obtain and process the information requested. This task can include seeking further clarification around the information requested and/or the terminology and definitions used by the requestor.

Sussex Police is currently responding to 92% of all requests received within the timescales prescribed, against a minimum performance of 90% set by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and compares favourably with other police force areas in England and Wales. The Force is also continuing to engage in open, honest and transparent dialogue with the ICO to improve performance in this area following a practice recommendation received in July 2021 and the introduction of a remedial action plan locally in respect of all requests for information.

It is recognised that there are currently two challenges affecting Sussex Police performance in this area. The first relates to the availability of resources, with many temporary resources seconded into the Information Access Team during 2021 to assist them with reducing the outstanding backlogs. These individuals have now returned to substantive posts, with further staff having left the team to pursue other roles within and outside the Force too.



As you have correctly highlighted in your letter, some of the additional investment secured through the police precept in 2020/21 was used to increase the capacity and capability of the Force to respond to requests for information and reduce the existing backlogs. Sussex Police has recently recruited two permanent members of staff within the Information Access Team who are each currently going through vetting, with further recruitment set to continue in 2022/23. However, the vetting, induction and training processes required to develop all new recruits into productive members of the team are considerable and can, indirectly, result in a short-term reduction to the capacity of trainers to handle request themselves. The reality of this situation is that the existing backlogs will continue to present the Force with substantial challenges until the new resources are fully embedded and operational within the Information Access Team.

The second challenge relates to the supporting software used to process the requests because a growing number of the requests received by the Force now involve video content, including CCTV, body worn video and dash camera footage. This requires specialist software to redact the personal data of third-party individuals from any video footage and/or audio content provided to requestors. The current arrangements in place to facilitate these redactions include a combination of basic software and support from the Forensic Digital Media Unit, although this position is not sustainable. As such, Sussex Police is looking to procure a new tool – as a matter of urgency – to improve productivity and support a more efficient delivery of this time-consuming function.

It is also my intention to discuss the processing of requests for information with the Chief Constable at my next Performance & Accountability Meeting on 22 April 2022 at 13:00. I plan to ask the Chief Constable for a further update in respect of the backlog of outstanding requests [outside of the statutory timescales], recruitment plans for 2022/23 and further assurances that plans are in place to improve the timeliness of the responses provided following the additional investment secured through the precept. This session will be available to view on my website through the following link:

www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/get-involved/webcasting/

In the meantime, I will continue to monitor the progress and performance of Sussex Police in this important area.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katy Bourne', written in a cursive style.

Katy Bourne OBE
Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner