

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)

Decision notice

Date: 5 August 2015

Public Authority: Chief Constable of Avon and Somerset
Constabulary

Address: Force Headquarters
PO Box 37
Valley Road
Portishead
Bristol
BS20 8QJ

Decision (including any steps ordered)

1. The complainant made a series of requests for information over a short period of time to Avon and Somerset Constabulary ("the Constabulary") about its injury on duty ("IOD") award review. The Constabulary considered that all the requests were vexatious and relied on section 14(1) of the FOIA to refuse to comply with them. The Commissioner's decision is that the Constabulary was entitled to refuse to comply with the requests under section 14(1) of the FOIA.
2. The Commissioner does not require the Constabulary to take any steps.

Background

3. Where a police officer has to leave the police service because of injuries sustained on duty they may be offered an IOD pension and an additional award to compensate them for any potential loss of future earnings. The award is calculated on a case by case basis and comprises a gratuity and a monthly payment. The gratuity is banded on a scale of one to four, with four being the highest. The award was originally funded centrally by the Home Office, but is now funded from the budget of each police force.

4. Both the pension and the award are paid for life, but the Police (Injury Benefit) Regulations 2006 ("PIBR") make provision for a review of the award by the police force concerned to ensure that the correct banding still applies over the life of the award, which can cover many years. Where significant changes have taken place which affect an individual's potential earnings, the banding may be increased or decreased as appropriate.
5. In 2014, following the publication of new Home Office guidance on the issue, the Constabulary took a decision to conduct a pilot review of the IOD awards it paid to 16 former officers. It was the first police force in England and Wales to do so. The decision has proved controversial among the former officers. The Constabulary says that awards may be increased as well as decreased, according to individual circumstances. However, many former officers are concerned that they will only be disadvantaged by the review.

Request and response

6. Between 18 January 2015 and 22 February 2015, the complainant submitted 14 requests for information to the Constabulary via the What Do They Know Website¹ ("WDTK"), a website for submitting and archiving FOIA requests. The requests are reproduced at annex A to this decision notice.
7. The Constabulary dealt with two of the requests and issued a refusal notice in respect of the remaining 12 on 25 February 2015, stating that it was not obliged to comply with the requests because they were vexatious within the meaning of section 14(1) of the FOIA. It explained that its resources were being placed under significant and unjustified strain by the number of requests it had received from the complainant and others relating to its IOD award review. It said that it would not be responding to any further, similar requests. The complainant subsequently submitted a further two requests, which it did not respond to on that basis.
8. The complainant requested an internal review and the Constabulary responded on 21 May 2015, upholding its decision.

¹ <https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/>

Scope of the case

9. The complainant contacted the Commissioner on 28 April 2015 (prior to the outcome of the internal review) to complain about the way his requests for information had been handled. He expressed the view that the Constabulary was routinely designating any requests for information relating to its IOD award review as vexatious within the meaning of section 14(1), to impede scrutiny of the review process.
10. Since the Commissioner is being asked to consider the designation of multiple requests as vexatious by reference to other requests, he considers that the appropriate time to determine whether the requests are vexatious is the time of the refusal notice. This means he has assessed the situation as it was on 25 February 2015, and has done so in respect of the full number of requests received by the Constabulary at that time.
11. The Commissioner considers that the focus of this notice is on the Constabulary's application of section 14(1).

Reasons for decision

Section 14(1)

12. Section 14(1) of the FOIA states that section 1(1) does not oblige a public authority to comply with a request for information if the request is vexatious.
13. The FOIA does not define the term vexatious, but it was discussed before the Upper Tribunal in the case of *Information Commissioner vs Devon County Council & Dransfield* [2012] UKUT 440 (AAC), (28 January 2013)².
14. In that case the Upper Tribunal defined a vexatious request as one that is a "*manifestly unjustified, inappropriate or improper use of a formal procedure*". The Tribunal made clear that the decision of whether a request is vexatious must be based on the circumstances surrounding the request.

² <http://www.osspsc.gov.uk/Aspx/view.aspx?id=3680>

15. In the Dransfield case, the Upper Tribunal also found it instructive to assess the question of whether a request is truly vexatious by considering four broad issues: (1) the burden imposed by the request (on the public authority and its staff); (2) the motive of the requester; (3) the value or serious purpose of the request; and (4) the harassment of, or distress to, staff.
16. The Upper Tribunal cautioned that these considerations were not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, it stressed "*...the importance of adopting a holistic and broad approach to the determination of whether a request is vexatious or not, emphasising the attributes of manifest unreasonableness, irresponsibility and, especially where there is a previous course of dealings, the lack of proportionality that typically characterise vexatious request.*" (paragraph 45).
17. In the Commissioner's view the key question for public authorities to consider when determining if a request is vexatious is whether the request is likely to cause a disproportionate or unjustified level of disruption, irritation or distress.
18. The Commissioner has also identified a number of "indicators" which may be useful in identifying vexatious requests. These are set out in his published guidance on vexatious requests³. The fact that a request contains one or more of these indicators will not necessarily mean that it must be vexatious. All the circumstances of a case will need to be considered in reaching a judgement as to whether a request is vexatious.
19. The Commissioner recognises that there is nothing in the FOIA which prevents the aggregation of requests from disparate sources for the purposes of section 14.
20. The Constabulary considered this request with a number of other requests which it argued were made by individuals acting in concert. In reviewing its arguments the Commissioner has also noted the approach taken by the Information Tribunal when reviewing a number of decision

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http://ico.org.uk/~media/documents/library/Freedom_of_Information/Detailled_specialist_guides/dealing-with-vexatious-requests.ashx

notices involving Walberswick Parish Council⁴. In these cases the Tribunal accepted that a number of applicants were acting together in pursuance of a campaign, and that this was a relevant consideration as to whether the requests were vexatious.

21. Section 14 of the FOIA does not specifically contain a provision that if two or more requests are made "*by different persons who appear to the public authority to be acting in concert or in pursuance of a campaign*" then the requests may be considered together. The Commissioner must therefore assess the degree to which it can be said that the complainant and other requesters are acting in concert, before going on to consider whether it is reasonable for the Constabulary to refuse the complainant's requests on this basis.

Evidence from the parties

The complainant's view

22. The complainant is a former police officer who had his IOD award reviewed by the Constabulary. He objected to his request being designated vexatious, considering that he had a legitimate interest in being given information about a process which was likely to materially affect him.
23. He accepted that the Constabulary had the right to review awards paid to pensioners in line with the provisions of the PIBR. However, he considered that while the review provisions existed to cater for changes in the degree of disablement of an individual, the Constabulary's review was motivated by a desire to reduce expenditure on disabled former officers. He believed that comments made in emails which had been disclosed by the Constabulary in response to previous FOIA requests, and comments allegedly made by the force's Police and Crime

⁴ http://www.informationtribunal.gov.uk/DBFiles/Decision/i1092/EA-2013-0080_02-10-2013.pdf

[http://www.informationtribunal.gov.uk/DBFiles/Decision/i1113/MacCarthy,%20John%20EA.2013.0079%20\(31.10.13\).pdf](http://www.informationtribunal.gov.uk/DBFiles/Decision/i1113/MacCarthy,%20John%20EA.2013.0079%20(31.10.13).pdf)

[http://www.informationtribunal.gov.uk/DBFiles/Decision/i1060/Harvey,%20Stephanie%20EA.2013.0022%20\(07.08.13\).pdf](http://www.informationtribunal.gov.uk/DBFiles/Decision/i1060/Harvey,%20Stephanie%20EA.2013.0022%20(07.08.13).pdf)

Commissioner that such payments are of no benefit to local people, supported this interpretation.

24. He considered that it was in the public interest that the Constabulary be absolutely transparent about the review process.

Avon and Somerset Constabulary's view

25. The Constabulary set out the wider context in which the complainant's request was received. In the wake of new Home Office guidance, in 2014 the Constabulary decided to conduct a pilot review of IOD awards made to 16 former officers, the complainant being one. It provided full details of the review process to each of the former officers and ensured they had direct contact with the HR department, so that they could raise any individual concerns they had. It also published a substantial amount of information relating to the reviews: the information sent to reviewees, the questionnaire to be completed by reviewees, and correspondence between the Constabulary and the National Association of Retired Police Officers, the Crime Commissioner and Damian Green MP. Once the 16 reviews have been completed it said that it intends to publish further relevant documentation.
26. It was the Constabulary's view that the volume, timing, frequency, wording and nature of the requests submitted by 38 individuals (the complainant being one) suggested they were acting in concert against the Constabulary, in pursuance of a common aim. The cumulative effect of the requests was designed to cause disruption with the intent that the Constabulary's FOIA team should face overwhelming difficulties complying with its legislative requirements towards other service users. It also considered that requests were being submitted as part of a large scale "fishing expedition" for information which could be used against it. It believed that the principle aim of the disruption and the fishing expedition was to pressure the Constabulary to abandon the IOD award review.
27. The Constabulary commented that taken individually, the majority of the requests would not be deemed vexatious. Rather, it was the cumulative effect of a concerted campaign that rendered individual component requests, vexatious. The Constabulary referred to the Commissioner's guidance on this point:

"A request which would not normally be regarded as vexatious in isolation may assume that quality once considered in context. An example of this would be where an individual is placing a significant strain on an authority's resources by submitting a long and frequent series of requests, and the most recent request, although not

*obviously vexatious in itself, is contributing to that aggregated burden*⁵

28. The Constabulary stated that the complainant had submitted 16 requests for information via the WDTK website between 18 January 2015 and 11 March 2015 (9 were received on 22 February 2015 alone). The requests covered a range of topics. Seven asked for copies of email correspondence between individuals involved with the IOD review process, covering a 12 month period. One asked for information about the Constabulary's FOIA Officer. Several asked for staffing figures. One asked to know when the next 16 reviews would take place and who they would be conducted by.
29. The Constabulary said that the requests amounted to a fishing expedition. It argued that the complainant was utilising the FOIA in a persistent, unfocused manner due to a general belief that the review process was unlawful and a cost cutting exercise and that his requests were searching for information which might prove that misconception. When considered in the context of the other requesters' requests, compliance with the complainant's requests became unduly burdensome.

Evidence of complainant acting in concert with others

30. The Constabulary drew the Commissioner's attention to evidence that the complainant and the other requesters were known to each other online. It referred the Commissioner to an IOD Pensioners' Association website⁶ which had recently been created to represent the interests of former officers from different constabularies who have been injured on duty.
31. It said there was a clear link between the website and the FOIA requests, as information disclosed by the Constabulary in response to earlier FOIA requests had been placed on the website and was openly commented on by contributors.

⁵ <https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1198/dealing-with-vexatious-requests.pdf> paragraph 56

⁶ <http://iodpa.org/>

32. It also provided to the Commissioner with links to discussions on the IOD Pensioners' Association Facebook page⁷ in which discontent with the Constabulary's review was openly voiced. Posts on the page encouraged former officers to submit FOIA and subject access requests to the Constabulary, and the Constabulary's responses were discussed. The complainant had viewed the page, as evidenced by him commenting on and "liking" posts.
33. Other individuals who had submitted requests to the Constabulary had also commented on posts on the Facebook page. The Constabulary believed that this demonstrated that the complainant and the other individuals must have been aware of each other's interactions with the Constabulary in relation to the IOD reviews.
34. It pointed to a particular post on the Facebook page early on 29 April 2015 by the page owner, stating *"We have been asked to put a shout out to anyone from Avon and Somerset who is an IOD. Please contact us ASAP, your message will be treated in the utmost confidence"*.
35. A thank you post to those who had contacted IODPA was posted on the page later in the day. The Constabulary noted that both posts were "liked" by individuals that it had received FOIA requests from.
36. It further noted that on the same day, 29 April 2015, it received 18 requests for internal reviews from four individuals. Over the coming week it received a further eight requests for internal reviews from 4 individuals. It said that in each case it had issued the refusal notices in question (citing section 14) between 25 February 2015 and 3 March 2015. It suggested that the length of time between the refusal notices being issued and the internal review requests being submitted (nearly two months later, and all within a week of each other and employing similar wording) further pointed to a coordinated call to action having been made, and believed that this had come via the IODPA Facebook group posting on the 29 April. This, it said, was further evidence of people acting in concert, in furtherance of a campaign.
37. The Constabulary noted that it was a feature of the requests that most were made through the WDTK website. The Constabulary argued that given the volume of requests it was receiving, and based on its wider experience of receiving FOIA requests, it would have expected more

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/pages/IODpaorg/421461824680086>

variety in the medium by which requests were submitted, and that the majority of requests would be submitted from personal email accounts, if requests were not being coordinated in some way.

38. It also noted that the wording and the focus of some of the complainant's FOIA requests were very similar to those received from other individuals. The request for information about the Constabulary's FOIA functions (annex A, request 4) was of no apparent relevance to the IOD review, but it was a feature of the requests made by other requesters, at around the same time. Requests for correspondence between named individuals involved in the review (annex A, request 6 onwards) were also a feature of the wider requests it had received, which it said suggested a coordinated approach between requesters. A very specific question about the wording on the review questionnaire (annex A, request 15) was also repeated by two other requesters.
39. The Constabulary explained that it had initially tried to accommodate requesters by dealing with their requests and wherever appropriate, information had been disclosed. However, it had become aware of a clear pattern whereby when information was disclosed, the disclosure generated a further request from the requester. It was a feature of this cluster of requests that the further request did not appear to grow from or build on the information disclosed in response to the previous request (although requesters would sometimes build their requests around disclosures made to other requesters).
40. The Constabulary was concerned that there was potentially no end point to the requests. No matter how much information was disclosed to the group of requesters, further questions were submitted, almost regardless of the content of previous disclosures. Each answer generated another request, using similar wording to other requests already received, and frequently of peripheral or no relevance to the issue of IOD reviews.
41. The Constabulary believed this to be a deliberate and coordinated tactic by a group of people trying to disrupt and overwhelm its FOIA service provision, rather than representing a genuine desire for the information requested.
42. The Constabulary said that it would not have expected the review of awards paid to just 16 former officers to generate such a large number of requests for information. It cited the large number of requests it had received as evidence that a wider campaign had been orchestrated. It referred the Commissioner to a similar review it conducted during 2005/06, which generated only a handful of FOIA requests, many of which were forwarded to it via elected representatives. It said that while it understood that police pensioners from other forces may have an

interest in what the Constabulary was doing, information would be of limited relevance as its review process would not be applied to them. Each police force was expected to put in place its own processes and procedures for conducting its own review.

43. The Constabulary also noted a distinct reduction in the number of requests received once it started to designate requests for information as vexatious, and considered this to be further evidence of people acting together and sharing information about the responses they were receiving.

Impact of the requests on the Constabulary

44. The Constabulary received the first FOIA request about the reviews in June 2014. As of May 2015 it had received 207 FOIA requests which it judged to relate to the reviews in some way (although not all actually asked for information about them), comprising 547 questions.
45. The majority of the requests (161) had been received between January 2015 and June 2015. In February 2015, the Constabulary calculated that requests for information relating to the IOD award review amounted to 49% of all requests received. It also calculated that it was experiencing a 44% increase on requests compared with the same time the previous year. It stated that overall, during the previous 12 months it received the second highest number of FOIA requests for a police force in England and Wales, with only the Metropolitan Police receiving more.
46. It explained that its FOIA team comprises three full time equivalent posts. The role of the team is to process any FOIA requests received by the Constabulary, from receipt to response. The FOIA team engages with the relevant business leads across the Constabulary to obtain the information requested.
47. The FOIA team was overwhelmed by the number of requests it received to the extent that it had to enlist the help of colleagues in other departments to simply keep up the logging process. Overtime had to be authorised to catch up on the publication log. The volume of requests distorted the ability of the FOIA team to process other FOIA requests not connected with the IOD award review within the statutory time limits.
48. The Constabulary said that other business areas were also seriously affected by the influx of requests. Its Occupational Health Unit, which delivers care, treatment and support to employees, had to divert 30 man hours per week to dealing with the requests that impacted upon it. This directly impacted on the delivery of its core services; appointments were not made and follow ups were not taking place. This was a matter

of considerable concern to the Force Medical Officer. The Constabulary also noted that the Human Resources unit was adversely affected, with overtime having to be commissioned just to catch up on core work.

The Commissioner's decision

49. The Commissioner acknowledges that at the time it originally considered the request the Constabulary was experiencing exceptionally high numbers of FOIA requests, and that this was highly problematic for it.
50. As stated in paragraph 21, the matter for the Commissioner to determine is the degree to which it can be said that the complainant and other requesters are acting in concert. If he is satisfied that they are, he must consider whether it is reasonable for the Constabulary to refuse the complainant's request on this basis.
51. In addressing the first point, the Commissioner has looked at the IODPA website. He notes that IODPA was set up to help former police officers from all police forces who have been injured while on duty, to network and to support each other in the wake of possible changes to their pensions and awards. It describes itself as having a campaigning remit, albeit it is not clear how formally established the association is.
52. IODPA appears to have been established in February 2015 – there are no website posts which pre date February 2015, and the first IODPA Facebook post is dated 7 February 2015.
53. The IODPA Facebook page can be "liked" by anyone with a Facebook account. Posts of relevance to IODPA are made daily by the page owner and anyone can comment on them, whether they have "liked" the page or not.
54. The Constabulary's award review is discussed frequently on the IODPA Facebook page. When someone comments on or "likes" a post their name is visible and the Commissioner notes that the complainant and other requesters who the Constabulary suspects of acting in concert are among those whose names regularly appear on the page, suggesting they frequently visit the page.
55. Furthermore, the Commissioner notes that eight people have submitted multiple complaints to him about the way the Constabulary handled their requests and there is evidence that at least 6 of them appear to have interacted on the IODPA Facebook page. The complaints to the Commissioner were received in close succession – thirteen over an eight week period (nine were received over a two day period from three separate complainants). Prior to this, from 2011 to January 2015 the Commissioner had only received three complaints about the Constabulary, only one of which related to the IOD award review.

56. One IODPA Facebook post, dated 3 March 2015, is a spoof FOIA response, purporting to be from the Constabulary to the complainant, dismissing his request as vexatious in a humorous manner. The Commissioner considers this suggests that the complainant is sufficiently familiar to the people who visit the IODPA Facebook page to merit a joke being made at his expense.
57. The Commissioner has noted several posts on the Facebook page which appear to amount to a call to action. He has seen posts on the page encouraging people to make FOIA and subject access requests to the Constabulary. For example, a post, dated 11 May 2015 (since deleted) suggested that people make subject access requests to the Constabulary. It included a link to the Commissioner's website, giving more information about subject access requests.
58. On 27 February 2015, two days after the Constabulary had issued its first section 14 refusal notice, the Facebook page owner posted a message alerting people to its decision. It concluded, "*WE are ALL POLICE OFFICERS, and experts in gathering EVIDENCE to put lame DUCKS in front of a court.*" The Commissioner considers that this is a reference to the information gathering which the page has encouraged its viewers to undertake, and which has manifested itself in the multiple requests for information submitted to the Constabulary.
59. The Commissioner is therefore aware of the scale, type and pattern of the requests the Constabulary has received in the last year and of the information sharing and calls to action which are a feature of the IODPA Facebook page.
60. The Commissioner acknowledges that the bulk of the complainant's requests were submitted to the Constabulary between 18 January 2015 and 22 February 2015. Therefore, it cannot be argued that the complainant submitted those requests as a result of the particular posts cited above. However, the Commissioner considers it possible that at the point the Facebook page was created (indeed, it might even have been the reason it was created), one or more posts on the page encouraged interested parties to submit FOIA requests to the Constabulary. His reason for considering this to be plausible is that he received five complaints relating to 51 requests which were submitted to the Constabulary in the first 10 days of February 2015 (14 of which were submitted on 9 February 2015, two days after the first Facebook post). Prior to that the Commissioner had only received one complaint about the Constabulary which related to the IOD review issue, despite the fact the review had been underway for more than six months. This suggests a link between the setting up of the Facebook page and the requests.

61. The Commissioner acknowledges that the IODPA Facebook page contains no posts from early February which show that it was used in this way. However, as stated in paragraph 57, above, a post which encouraged individuals to make subject access requests to the Constabulary appears to have been deleted (the Commissioner was able to take a screen shot of it before it was deleted), and so it is entirely possible that similar posts in February have been deleted. Furthermore, the post referred to in paragraph 34 would appear to be evidence of activism of some kind being conducted via the Facebook messaging system, and thus not publicly visible.
62. Based on the Constabulary's position, the information which is freely available on the IODPA Facebook page and the Commissioner's experience of dealing with complaints about the Constabulary from the other complainants, the Commissioner accepts that it is reasonable for the complainant to be considered to have been acting in concert with the other requesters. He considers that, through their interactions on the Facebook page and use of WDTK, each will have been aware of the other's requests and the impact they were having on the Constabulary. Knowledge of this will have informed and guided the complainant's individual requesting pattern. This had the result that he was acting in concert with others in either a deliberately coordinated manner, or as a result of having been influenced by the online information that he is known to have been party to.
63. The Commissioner has therefore gone on to consider the Constabulary's arguments in support of its application of section 14(1) on the basis that the complainant was acting in concert with others when he made his request.
64. The Constabulary's application of section 14 rests principally on the burden to it of complying with the requests.

Would compliance with the requests create a significant burden in terms of expense and distraction

65. The Constabulary has concentrated the weight of its argument on the significant burden it believes has been imposed on it by the cumulative effect of the requests. The Commissioner's aforementioned guidance states that when considering any burden imposed in complying with a request, consideration will need to be given not only to the cost of compliance, but also whether staff would be diverted or distracted from their usual work.
66. The Constabulary has explained that its FOIA Team has had its contracted hours of work monopolised by responding to freedom of information requests from these individuals. This led to a reduction in its

service provision to other users and created additional costs in the form of overtime to enable the team to catch up. Other departments experienced a similar impact on their core service delivery.

67. The Commissioner does not doubt that compliance with the requests would impose a significant burden and the monopolising of the Constabulary's available resources and that in some cases this will have adversely impacted on the level of service extended to FOIA requesters not connected to the award review, as well as those in receipt of other core services.
68. The Commissioner thinks it unrealistic that a public authority could be expected to anticipate and budget for an increase to its FOIA workload of nearly 50% over such a short space of time.
69. Although broad and unfocussed, it is doubtful that, when considered on their own, compliance with the complainant's requests would cause a substantial burden. However, when viewed as part of a wider, concerted attempt by several individuals to put pressure on the Constabulary by means of the FOIA, the balance shifts to finding this factor engaged.
70. The Commissioner has noted a pattern of behaviour regarding the use of the FOIA in respect of the Constabulary that supports its view that a group exists that is aware of each other's requests and has harnessed that knowledge to both double check (through multiple submission of the same request) and undermine the Constabulary's compliance with the FOIA. The Commissioner has received a significant number of complaints from some of people the Constabulary believes are acting in concert, in a relatively short space of time.

Motive of the requester and purpose and value of the requests

71. The Constabulary initially tried to comply with the large number of requests it was receiving. However, it stated that increasingly, requests were resulting in more requests being received. The Constabulary considers that many of these requests were designed to cause annoyance and disruption, because despite its attempts to satisfy them, the Constabulary was then sent further requests. It considers that increasingly, the purpose of most requests was to derail and disrupt its FOIA service provision, rather than to obtain information.
72. The Commissioner has some sympathy with this argument, noting that some of the requests it received (including one from the complainant) asked specific questions about its FOIA functions, suggesting there was a particular interest in monitoring that area. The Constabulary's FOIA arrangements are ostensibly nothing to do with its IOD review, and so the Commissioner would not expect to find requests about them in the

context of requests for information about the review. However, information about the Constabulary's FOIA arrangements may be pertinent to someone with a desire to disrupt those arrangements, which is what the Constabulary alleges is one of the purposes of the requests.

73. The Commissioner fully accepts that, as a former officer whose IOD award is under review, the complainant has a legitimate interest in information about the review and the way it might affect. However, when his requests are considered in the context of acting in concert with the other requesters, those concerns sit to one side of the requests he has made. His requests are fairly broad and unfocussed and do not ask for information about the conduct of the review itself. Rather, they appear in the main to be an attempt to "dig" for wider information which might be of use in pursuing his grievance against the Constabulary. Whilst this might, in some circumstances, be a legitimate end in itself, when considered in the context of the volume of requests submitted by other requesters, the Commissioner concludes that this does undermine the value of his request.

Conclusion

74. The Commissioner accepts the Constabulary's argument that its reason for refusing those requests as "vexatious" is based largely on the significant burden they impose in terms of expense and distraction, when considered as a part of a wider and ongoing action by a group of requesters acting in concert. The Constabulary argues that the complainant has not only made a series of requests for information which would appear to have little benefit to the wider public if disclosed, but that this appears to be part of a concerted action with other people.
75. The Commissioner notes the concerns expressed to him by the complainant that the Constabulary's actions are unlawful and in contravention of the PIBR. The Commissioner is not in a position to judge these claims, nor is it within his remit to do so. He is mindful of the Tribunal's definition of vexatious as the "*unjustified, inappropriate or improper use of a formal procedure*". If a clear legal route exists for the complainant and other interested parties to pursue their concerns that the review is unlawful, submitting requests in such quantities that they disable the Constabulary's FOIA response mechanism would appear to chime with that definition.
76. The Commissioner is mindful that the Upper Tribunal has determined that the purpose of section 14 must be to protect the resources (in the broadest sense of that word) of the public authority from being squandered on disproportionate use of FOIA. In this case, the action that has been taken by the complainant and other individuals and the

associated burden being imposed on the Constabulary is disproportionate to whatever objective the complainant is trying to achieve and thus section 14 is engaged.

Right of appeal

77. Either party has the right to appeal against this decision notice to the First-tier Tribunal (Information Rights). Information about the appeals process may be obtained from:

First-tier Tribunal (Information Rights)
GRC & GRP Tribunals,
PO Box 9300,
LEICESTER,
LE1 8DJ

Tel: 0300 1234504

Fax: 0870 739 5836

Email: GRC@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk

Website: www.justice.gov.uk/tribunals/general-regulatory-chamber

78. If you wish to appeal against a decision notice, you can obtain information on how to appeal along with the relevant forms from the Information Tribunal website.
79. Any Notice of Appeal should be served on the Tribunal within 28 (calendar) days of the date on which this decision notice is sent.

Signed

Jon Manners
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