



Making Northern Ireland Safer For Everyone Through Professional, Progressive Policing

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2008-05521
Keyword: Human Resources
Subject: LIMITED HOME PROTECTION SCHEME

Request:

Could you please provide me with the following information under the Freedom of Information legislation?

1. The number of officers who have been given extra protection under the Limited Home Protection Scheme in the last year.
2. The total number of officers who are under the Limited Home Protection Scheme.
3. The ranks of those who are under the Limited Home Protection Scheme.

Answer:

Your request for information has now been considered and the decision has been taken not to supply the information you have requested.

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires the Police Service of Northern Ireland, when refusing to provide such information (because the information is exempt) to provide you the applicant with a notice which:

- (a) states that fact,
- (b) specifies the exemption in question and
- (c) states (if not otherwise apparent) why the exemption applies.

The exemption/s, as well as the factors the Department considered when deciding where the public interest lies, are listed below:

Qualified

Section 24 (1) National Security

Section 31 (1) Law Enforcement

Section 38 (1) Health and Safety

HARM

The release of information under FOIA must be considered a release of information to the world as a whole.

Providing the level of detail you have requested about any police officers on the scheme could lead to the identification of

individuals or speculation as to the identity of individuals. Consequently all information held about them is considered confidential and is held securely. Release of information which could lead to the identification of those officers on the scheme could prejudice national security as it would result in the scheme losing credibility and clients (many of whom feel very vulnerable and concerned about their safety and that of their families) would feel their security is being compromised.

Clients give their personal details to the LHPS on the implied understanding that it will be treated in confidence and that no such information will be made public. Release of the information you requested could compromise the personal security of individuals on the scheme and undermine the sole purpose and integrity of it.

Any disclosure of the requested information would clearly identify any intelligence held by the PSNI to any interested criminal group or organisation in respect of specific threats made to their Officers. The harm in doing this is that the criminal and terrorist fraternity can then potentially gauge the level and exchange of intelligence with other partner's, identify police tactics and reveal operational capabilities that currently exist within the PSNI law enforcement process. Such a disruption could subsequently damage national security in reducing the ability and manner in which the PSNI would be able to effectively protect the safety and well being of its community.

By releasing information at the level of detail you are requesting, could lead to individuals being personally identified and their own and family's safety endangered should the information be acted upon by an individual or criminal organisation intent on breaching current PSNI security processes. PSNI staff provide their personal details and other information on the understanding that it will be treated in strict confidence and that no such information will be made available in the wider public domain.

By way of an example, a fictional scenario would be, if someone had been planning to attack a police officer in Northern Ireland during this period, they would be aware, on receipt of this data (particularly zero data), that their plans had not been detected by the authorities, and therefore may decide to resume their activities.

Public Interest Test

The public interest test is as follows: -

Considerations Favouring Disclosure

Accountability

The actions of the Police Service, particularly in relation to crime prevention and detection require an appropriate application of legislation. This information would go some way towards reassuring those factors.

Media and Public Interest

To satisfy the media and public interest in how the PSNI protect their staff.

Public Debate

Where the release of information would contribute to the quality and accuracy of public debate and encourage the community to be more vigilant and proactive in the fight against crime.

Considerations Favouring Non-Disclosure

Efficient and effective conduct of the service.

It would not be in the public interest to release information that may prevent or hinder current and future police investigations and regulatory enforcement. The protection and confidentiality of such actions must be preserved to ensure the full support of staff working within the PSNI.

Current investigations

It would not be in the public interest to release information that may be of assistance to anyone involved in criminal activity. The release of information would clearly hinder any subsequent investigation or prosecution and subsequently disrupt the administration of justice.

Exemption Provisions

This information is covered by a number of exemptions and these tend to give rise to a public interest consideration favouring non-disclosure.

Balancing Test

On balance it is not in the public interest to release this information.

If you have any queries regarding your request or the decision please do not hesitate to contact 028 9070 0164. When contacting the Freedom of Information Team, please quote the reference number listed at the beginning of this email.

If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible, or in any case within two months of the date of issue of this letter. In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to the Head of Freedom of Information, PSNI Headquarters, 65 Knock Road, Belfast, BT5 6LE or by emailing FOI@psni.pnn.police.uk

If following an internal review, carried out by an independent decision maker, you were to remain dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request you may make a complaint, under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, to the Information Commissioner's Office and ask that they investigate whether the PSNI has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. You can write to the Information Commissioner at Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. In most circumstances the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out, however the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at his discretion.

Please be advised that PSNI replies under Freedom of Information may be released into the public domain via our website @ www.psnipolice.uk

Personal details in respect of your request have, where applicable, been removed to protect confidentiality.