



Making Northern Ireland Safer For Everyone Through Professional, Progressive Policing

## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



**Request Number:** F-2009-00948

**Keyword:** Complaints/Discipline

**Subject:** LOSS OF DATA / RECORDS

### Request and Answer:

I am writing to confirm that the Police Service of Northern Ireland has now completed its search for the information and the answers to your questions are as follows.

Within the Police Service of Northern Ireland the information with regard to Police Officers and Police Office staff are dealt with by separate Branches and I have split the answers to your questions as such. The answers below refer solely to cases that have been referred to our Professional Standards Department.

#### Question 1

How many incidents involving the loss of staff personal data and records by a) police officers, b) police office staff, c) in transit to an outside party have been recorded in each of the last five years? Please include the number of records involved in each event.

#### Answer

- a) 2004 - 1 police identification card reported lost.  
2005 - 1 police identification card reported lost  
2006 - nil  
2007 - 1 police identification card reported lost and 1 police drivers authorisation card lost.  
2008 - nil
- b) No information held by Professional Standards Department.
- c) None of the items mentioned above were lost in transit to an outside party.

Police identification and drivers authorisation cards contain personal data of the officer concerned and they have therefore been included in the response to question 1.

#### Question 2

How many incidents involving the loss of) public personal data and records by a) police officers, b) police office staff, c) in transit to an outside party have been recorded in each of the last five years. Please include the number of records involved in each event.

#### Answer

a) 2004 - 3 incidents of statements having been lost - 3 statements in total. Three incidents of police notebooks having been lost - 3 notebooks in total. One incident of a list of names of criminals having been lost. The list contained 14 names and there is no information to suggest that the public had access to this document. The list was located within a police vehicle within the police estate. One incident of CCTV footage of an assault having been lost. There is no evidence that the general public had access to the footage.

2005 - 3 incidents of police notebooks having been lost - 3 notebooks in total.

2006 - 1 incident of a police notebook having been lost.

2007 - 4 incidents of statements having been lost - 7 statements in total. One incident of a police notebook having been lost.

2008 - One incident of a police notebook having been lost. One incident of a list of offenders having been lost. The list contained 10 names and there is no evidence to suggest that the general public had access to the document.

b) No information held by Professional Standards Department.

c) None of the items mentioned above were lost in transit to an outside party.

It can reasonably be assumed that police notebooks and statements contain personal details of third parties, hence their inclusion in the statistics provided.

The data supplied relate to incidents where a loss has been confirmed and does not include details of incidents where items have been reported as missing and recovered within a short period of time.

The information supplied in response to questions 1 and 2 has been supplied by the Professional Standards Department of the PSNI. The information supplied is not recorded centrally and had to be extracted from electronic databases and manually from a number of files. Data extracted in this manner has the potential to produce a greater margin of error to data extracted from one central database.

### **Question 3**

How many incidents have there been of Police Officers or Police staff accessing the Police national computer without prior authorisation? Please include the number of people a) suspended or b) dismissed for accessing it without permission.

### **Answer**

Data of this nature is not recorded centrally. Because of the way this data is recorded, the information requested will have to be extracted from a number of categories in an electronic database as well as a manual check of files. It is estimated that to comply with your request would entail the examination in excess of 130 files. The cost of doing so including determining whether the information is held, locating it and retrieving and extracting it would exceed the "appropriate limit" as stated in the Freedom of Information Regulations 2004, which is currently set by the Secretary of State at £450.

It is estimated that it would take in excess of 25 hours to examine the papers in question. The rate of £25 per hour has been set by Regulation.

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this letter should be considered as a Refusal Notice in relation to question 3 by virtue of the exemption provided by Section 12 of the Act.

You may wish to submit a refined request in order that the cost of complying with your request may be facilitated within the 'appropriate limit' - information for a 2-year period could be retrieved within cost. Submission of a refined request would be treated as a new request, and considered in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, including consideration of relevant Part II exemptions.

Whilst the PSNI takes extremely seriously any allegation of wrongdoing and will not hesitate to take appropriate action where breaches of misconduct occur, the number of cases must be put into context of the overall size of the PSNI of just under 8500 officers as of the date of your request.

### **Answer 1-3 relating to Police Office staff**

With regard to your questions relating to Police Office staff I can advise that this information is not held centrally within the Police Service of Northern Ireland and we had to contact the Human Resource Managers in each of our District Command Units and Departments in an attempt to retrieve any available information.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that there is no standardised way to collate the requested information within different Districts which is why some Human Resource Managers may be able to retrieve the information and provide a response within the time permitted under FOI legislation and other Managers of the larger districts would have to carry out prolonged manual searches of Personnel records e.g. Headquarters Department manager has the responsibility for some 2200 staff and a minimum of 20 minutes per file would take well in excess of the time permitted to locate and provide the information as set down in FOI legislation.

Because of this the cost of complying with your request for information in respect of the questions referring to Police Office staff would exceed the "appropriate limit" as stated in the Freedom of Information Regulations 2004, which is currently set by the Secretary of State at £450. To provide a response to these questions would entail the extensive utilisation of resources costing well in excess of the "appropriate limit" of £450 laid down by the Secretary of State.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland have also considered whether we can be of any assistance in terms of helping you refine your request with regard to Police Office staff to bring it under the cost limit however the nature and structure of the information unfortunately makes this impossible.

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this letter should be considered as a Refusal Notice, and as it would not be possible to submit refined questions with regard to Police Office staff the request has therefore been closed.

If you have any queries regarding your request or the decision please do not hesitate to contact me on 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](mailto: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 @ <http://www.psni.police.uk/>

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