



Making Northern Ireland Safer For Everyone Through Professional, Progressive Policing

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2009-02984

Keyword: Human Resources

Subject: CRIME OPERATIONS STAFF - LISBURN

Request and Answer:

Question

The amount, in numbers of officers, working within the Crime Operations Department within the whole of the PSNI on the following dates:

- * 1st September 2009
- * 1st August 2009
- * 1st July 2009
- * 1st January 2009

Question

The amount, in numbers of officers, working within the Crime Operations Department within any PSNI station in the Lisburn area on the following dates:

- *1st September 2009
- *1st August 2009
- *1st July 2009
- *1st January 2009

Answer

Your request for information has now been considered and the decision has been taken to refuse the information requested as the information is exempt under S31 Law Enforcement. The harm in releasing this information is that the criminal and terrorist fraternity can potentially identify deployment to the detriment of Crime Operations Department's effectiveness.

However, it may assist you to know that on the dates requested below, Crime Operations Department consisted of the following total number of personnel, both police and support staff:

1st September 2009	- 1917
1st August 2009	- 1902
1st July 2009	- 1903
1st January 2009	- 1777

Crime Operations Department's staff conduct professional and detailed investigations into all serious and organised crime in Northern Ireland, including murder, terrorist offences, serious sexual assaults, organised criminal gangs, armed robbery, extortion and drugs offences. All staff are under the command of the Assistant Chief Constable, Crime Operations and he has authority to deploy resources to individual units as priorities dictate.

The Department integrates all the professional disciplines required to deliver highly effective investigations and manage intelligence on behalf of the organisation. There are 7 specialist branches in Crime Operations which deal with particular

areas of criminal activity, including Organised Crime, Serious Crime, Crime Analysis and Intelligence etc.

A structural chart of Crime Operations can be found in the PSNI website www.psni.police.uk

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 as well as the factors the Department considered when deciding where the public interest lies, is listed below:

Qualified Exemption

Section 31 (1) (a) (b) (c) Law Enforcement

It is therefore the PSNI's responsibility under the Act to explain the prejudice that any release would have.

Harm Test

The essence of the work undertaken by PSNI is to protect both individuals and society as a whole. The community is well aware of the real threat of serious crime.

Crime Operations has an important role in countering the many threats against society. It is therefore not considered to be in the public interest to specify the operational numbers as requested as this would impact on the effectiveness of using personnel in the future by identifying deployment to the detriment of its effectiveness.

Premature disclosure of information could prejudice the prevention or detection of crime or the administration of justice or the operational effectiveness of the PSNI to perform its functions and could provide a tactical advantage to others.

To divulge the specific level of personnel employed may pose a risk of exposure regarding the methodology and capability within Crime Operations.

Operational procedures, methodology and tactics must be protected by the correct application of the exemption. This is because the release of this type of information would rarely be in the Public Interest and may reduce the PSNI's capability to perform its overall functions under the Police (NI) Act 2000, which states:

"It shall be the general duty of police officers –

- (a) to protect life and property;
- (b) to preserve order;
- (c) to prevent the commission of offences;
- (d) where an offence has been committed, to take measures to bring the offender to justice."

Public Interest Test

The public interest test relevant to your request is as follows: -

Favouring Disclosure

Accountability

There is a general public interest in the way that Police work and for public bodies to be accountable for their actions. Information, which enables the efficiency and effectiveness of PSNI to be scrutinised, will be of benefit to the community.

Media and Public interest

To satisfy the media and public interest.

Public Debate

Where the release of information would contribute to the quality and accuracy of public debate.

Public Awareness

Concerns over serious crime and terrorism are quite rightly high on the public agenda, and disclosure of information surrounding staffing would be of interest to the public.

Considerations Favouring Non-Disclosure

Efficient and Effective Conduct of the Service

The past, current and future Law Enforcement role of the PSNI may be compromised, if specific numbers were identified, this may also highlight the methodology employed if released.

It is not in the public interest to disclose information that may compromise the PSNI's ability to fulfil its core function of law enforcement.

Current Investigations

It would not be in the public interest to release information that may prevent or hinder current and future Police investigations and regulatory enforcement.

Exemption Provisions

This information is covered by an exemption and this tends to give rise to a public interest consideration favouring non-disclosure.

Balancing Test

PSNI consider that the benefit, which would result from the release of the information requested does not outweigh disclosing information relating to the above exemption. On balance it is not in the public interest to release this information as to do so would compromise law enforcement.

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

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.psni.police.uk

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