



Making Northern Ireland Safer For Everyone Through Professional, Progressive Policing

## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



**Request Number:** F-2008-05364

**Keyword:** Operational Policing

**Subject:** POLICE VEHICLES/DRIVERS PROVIDED FOR POLITICIANS

**Request:**

**Please can you provide details for the following:**

- 1. The number of politicians in Northern Ireland who currently avail of vehicles and drivers supplied by the PSNI.**
- 2. The names of the politicians currently availing of this service.**
- 3. The cost to the taxpayer of this service for each of the previous five financial years.**

**Answer:**

Within the wording of your request, whilst the Police Service of Northern Ireland employ drivers in a number of capacities, we take the view that you are referring specifically to Close protection officers, for your information please see our policy directive [http://www.psnipolice.uk/01-07\\_policy\\_directive.pdf](http://www.psnipolice.uk/01-07_policy_directive.pdf)

Although this protection is provided the Police Service of Northern Ireland would never confirm or deny as to who we actually provide this facility for, the reasons for which are outlined in the following.

Section 1 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) places two duties on public authorities. Unless exemptions apply, the first duty at s1(1)(a) is to confirm or deny whether the information specified in a request is held. The second duty at s1(1)(b) is to disclose information that has been confirmed as being held. Where exemptions are relied upon s17 of FOIA requires that we provide the applicant with a notice which: a) states that fact b) specifies the exemption(s) in question and c) states (if that would not otherwise be apparent) why the exemption applies.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland can neither confirm nor deny that it holds the information you requested as the duty in s1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 does not apply, by virtue of the following exemptions:

Section 24(2) National Security;

Section 31(3) Law enforcement;

Section 38(2) Health and safety, and:

Section 40(5) Personal information.

Section 40 is an absolute exemption but the exemptions at s24, s31 and s38 are qualified, which means that we are required to consider whether the public interest in maintaining the exclusion of the duty to confirm or deny outweighs the public interest in disclosing whether the information is held.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland appreciates there will be a level of public interest in members of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the extent of police protection which may or may not be given to them. Assembly members are high profile figures who are publicly funded and receive protection drawn from public accounts. Protection files may provide some insight into aspects of a principle's life; it could be argued that by revealing such details the individual is more accountable to the public. Consequently, there will be questions as to why certain principles are in receipt of protection, along with interest in costs and value for money.

However, not all individuals are afforded police personal protection; if the PSNI were to receive a protection request about such persons we are obliged to neither confirm nor deny (NCND) this for the individual's own safety. Subsequently, if the PSNI confirms they have files for certain people but then refuses to confirm for others, requesters can infer the person who the PSNI is neither confirming nor denying is not in receipt of protection. This would not only compromise their Health and Safety, but also impact on tactical police personal protection decisions and national security. Therefore, if the Police Service of Northern Ireland confirms or denies who if any within the Assembly is/are afforded personal protection, it could be to the detriment of others.

However, this should not be taken as conclusive evidence that the information you requested exists or does not exist.

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.