



Making Northern Ireland Safer For Everyone Through Professional, Progressive Policing

## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



**Request Number:** F-2009-02524

**Keyword:** Organisational Information/Governance

**Subject:** NON-GEOGRAPHIC TELEPHONE NUMBERS

### Request and Answer:

I can confirm that the Police Service of Northern Ireland has now completed its search for the information.

I have today decided to:

- disclose records in answer to questions 1 to 4 in full and;
- fully exempt records in answer to question 5 pursuant to the provisions of section 31 of the Act.

### Question 1

Does your police force utilise in any form non-geographic telephone numbers (i.e. 0845, 0870, 0345 etc)?

### Answer

Yes – 0845 600 8000.

PSNI also publicises two numbers operated by other agencies, namely Crimestoppers 0800 555111 and National Anti-Terrorist Hotline 0800 789321.

### Question 2

If your force does operate one or more, please explain the justification for operating them.

### Answer

In 2005, the PSNI decided to launch its Single Non-Emergency Number to improve the service it offered to the community. The objective was to allow members of the public to make calls to a single number that would be re-directed to the police station responsible for managing their call; enabling access to our services and reporting non-emergency incidents. This would reduce the proliferation of telephone numbers publicised by the PSNI that had developed over the preceding years (e.g. end of 2005, 121 numbers were listed). A solution was sought that would represent:

- A single memorable number;
- A combination of telecommunications technology and call plan that would facilitate the caller being routed intelligently to the most appropriate PSNI location dependent upon the caller's geographical location; and
- A fair call charge to the caller regardless of their location within Northern Ireland.

The options at the time were limited:

- A single geographic number would have disadvantaged callers outside the vicinity of the geographic number (with some telephone service providers);
- The proposed national three-digit number to contact public authorities (the Single Non-Emergency Number,

SNEN) was not available;

- The only technology available to facilitate intelligent call routing was for the "08" range of numbers; and

Consequently, a solution based upon 0845 600 8000 was adopted as a pragmatic, interim solution that met the overall requirement, pending the results from the SNEN pilots underway in Great Britain, and progress of the PSNI's corporate approach to Contact Management.

### **Question 3**

If your force does not currently utilise one, has it in the past? If any have been withdrawn, what was the reason for withdrawing the service?

### **Answer**

This question is not applicable to the PSNI

### **Question 4**

If your force currently utilises or has in the past utilised a non-geographic number, please detail the revenue earned by the force as a result of callers using the telephone number over the past five financial years.

### **Answer**

The PSNI do not earn revenue from our 0845-600-8000 Single Non Emergency Number.

### **Question 5**

If you currently operate any non-geographic telephone numbers, please provide us with the local, geographical telephone number the non-geographic numbers forward to.

### **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, as well as the factors the Department considered when deciding where the public interest lies, are outlined below:

Section 31(1) (a) and (b) of the Act - Law Enforcement.

This is a Prejudice Based and Qualified exemption which means that the Public Authority must evidence the harm which may be caused by disclosure and carry out a Public Interest Test.

### **HARM**

Campaigners have previously taken the course of publishing geographic numbers that non-geographic numbers forward to so that callers may use that number to avoid higher call costs sometimes incurred by use of non-geographic numbers. I am satisfied therefore that the release of the geographic number, apart from entering the public domain in the usual way, would result in the number being actively promoted by campaigners. I am also satisfied that, under these circumstances calls would be made directly to the PSNI's geographic number. Further, it is difficult to estimate the volume of these calls but given that there are elements in society who would seek to disrupt policing activities, taking this together with those that simply wish to avoid perceived higher call charges, I am satisfied that there is a real and significant risk that prejudice would occur. Direct calls would not route automatically to relevant PSNI switchboards to answer. Consequently, individuals ringing the 0845 number may not get their call answered and/or experience poor service. There is also a serious risk of a denial of service and interference with the public's ability to make non-emergency calls for service related to incidents or make general enquiries.

### **PUBLIC INTEREST TEST**

#### **Factors Favouring Release**

- Members of the public who wish to avoid higher call charges could use the geographic number.

## ***Factors Favouring Retention***

- Misuse of the geographic number could result in a reduced service level upon making calls to the PSNI.
- A serious risk of a denial of service and interference with the public's ability to make non emergency calls for service.
- Direct calls would not route automatically to relevant PSNI switchboards to answer.
- The resulting reduced service level on the non-geographic number may result in the public using 999 for non emergency calls, thus disrupting that service.

## **Decision**

The Single Non-Emergency Number was introduced by the PSNI to improve the service it offered to the community. The main aim being to reduce the volume of separate local telephone numbers for non-emergency calls to the PSNI in different areas of the province. This has been achieved by a system where a single number is dialled by a member of the public in any area of the province, but the call is directed to the appropriate Call Management Centre dependant upon where the call is made from. If the number to which the 0845 line forwards calls is released, and calls made directly to this geographic number do not receive the same level of service for technical reasons, or this results in other callers ability to effectively use the 0845 number, being adversely effected, important calls may be delayed or missed. This in turn will impact upon the PSNI's ability to prevent or detect crime or apprehend or prosecute offenders. It is for this reason that the requested geographic number should not be released and the exemption under Section 31 of the Act applied.

This represents a refusal notice for this particular question.

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@psi.pnn.police.uk](mailto:foi@psi.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.psnipolice.uk/>

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