



Making Northern Ireland Safer For Everyone Through Professional, Progressive Policing

## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



**Request Number:** F-2009-02453

**Keyword:** Organisational Information/Governance

**Subject:** VARIOUS QUESTIONS RE PSNI

### Request and Answer:

I have decided today to:

- Fully exempt records in answer to question number 1 pursuant to the provisions of Section 21 (1) of the Act; and
- fully exempt records in answer to questions 7 and 8 pursuant to the provision of Section 31 and Section 38 of the Act; and
- disclose records in answer to the remainder of the questions in full

#### Question 1

What is the establishment for your force?

#### Answer

The PSNI has decided to exempt the information requested under Section 21 - Information Reasonably Accessible by Other Means. The information requested can be obtained from the PSNI web site using the attached link.

[http://www.psnipolice.uk/index/updates/updates\\_statistics/updates\\_strength\\_of\\_police\\_service\\_statistics.htm](http://www.psnipolice.uk/index/updates/updates_statistics/updates_strength_of_police_service_statistics.htm)

#### Question 2

How many officers do you have who routinely are engaged on operational duties but not in uniform (CID, Plain Clothes, CTU, etc.).

#### Answer

There are 2299 officers in Districts and Headquarter Departments routinely engaged in operational duties but who do not routinely wear a uniform.

#### Question 3

How many operational dedicated firearms officers do you have?

#### Answer

All police, regulars, full time reserves and part time constables are routinely armed. There is a dedicated Armed Response Unit which contains 59 officers of all ranks.

#### Question 4

Approximately how many are male and how many are female?

#### Answer

Of the 59 there are 58 males and 1 female.

**Question 5**

Are any or all of these officers are currently issued with stab/ballistic/spike protection?

**Answer**

All operational dedicated firearms officers are issued with stab/ballistic/spike protection.

**Question 6**

If so, is this personal issue?

**Answer**

Yes. All dedicated firearms officers are individually measured and the body armour is personally issued to them.

**Question 7**

Is this the same equipment issued to operational uniformed officers?

**Question 8**

What are your current operational stab/ballistic/spike protection levels? (HG1/KR1/SP1) for example.

**Answer**

Your request for information has now been considered and the decision has been taken not to supply the information you have requested in relation to questions 7 and 8.

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 exemptions, as well as the factors the Department considered when deciding on evidence of harm and where the public interest lies, are listed below:

Section 31(1) (a) (b) and (c) Law Enforcement. This is a prejudice based exemption which means that the public authority must demonstrate that it is satisfied that to release the information would, or would be likely to prejudice (a) the prevention or detection of crime, (b) the apprehension or prosecution of offenders or (c) the administration of justice. It is also a qualified exemption which means that the public authority must consider the balance of the public interest in releasing the information against the public interest in withholding it.

Section 38(1) (a) and (b) Health and Safety. This is a prejudice based exemption which means that the public authority must demonstrate that it is satisfied that to release the information would, or would be likely to (a) endanger the physical or mental health of any individual, or (b) endanger the safety of any individual. It is also a qualified exemption which means that the public authority must consider the balance of the public interest in releasing the information against the public interest in withholding it.

**Harm test**

Disclosure of this information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 is a release to the world and not just the requester. To disclose to the world the capabilities of the protective equipment used and the level of protection afforded to different police units would put officers at risk from personal injury or death. Furthermore, release of the information could seriously affect officers' health and safety and the way they carry out their roles.

**Public Interest Test****Favouring Disclosure****Accountability**

This information relates directly to the efficiency and effectiveness of the force and its officers. The public have an interest in knowing that the PSNI is issuing appropriate protection equipment to officers to enable them to fulfil their roles efficiently.

**Public awareness and debate**

Release of information may contribute to the quality and accuracy of public debate concerning officers' equipment. If the public are aware of protection standards required by PSNI it could help to reduce the fear of crime.

## Favouring Non-Disclosure

### Efficient and effective conduct of the force.

The current or future law enforcement role of the force may be compromised by the release of information regarding officer protection levels. To release this information may aid criminal knowledge and assist them in carrying out attacks on police officers who may be vulnerable.

### Public Safety

If officers are more vulnerable due to knowledge of protection provided by the equipment this could impact on their performance in their key functions and put the public at risk.

## Decision

I have decided not to disclose any information relating to protection levels of PSNI officers. The release of this information into the public domain would represent a substantial increase to the risk of safety of officers and would effect the efficiency of the law enforcement role of the service. These reasons outweigh the considerations in favour of disclosure.

### **Question 9**

What is your current force policy for non-uniformed staff engaged on operational duties to wear stab/ballistic/spike PPE?

### **Answer**

Please see the attached link which contains Policy Directive 06/06 Uniform and Protective Equipment:

[http://www.psnipolice.uk/policy\\_directive\\_0606\\_uniform\\_and\\_protective\\_equipment.pdf](http://www.psnipolice.uk/policy_directive_0606_uniform_and_protective_equipment.pdf)

The Police Service of Northern Ireland Style Guide also states that;

"Personal concealed body armour is issued for (1) operational 'on duty' use where the requirement is for;

- a) concealment in covert/plain clothes duty where a risk assessment indicated such equipment should be worn;
- b) for uniform officers undertaking specialist duty, who require a lightweight armour in order to perform their primary duty.

All officers, including detectives or plain clothes officers, and police staff to whom a stab resistant vest has been issued, are required to wear this equipment at all times whilst operationally active, except in the circumstances outlined below;

The requirement to wear a stab resistant vest will not apply where, on the basis of an informed and recorded risk assessment for generic activities or for pre planned events, there is no reasonably foreseeable risk of confrontation and/or alternative risk control measures are implemented which manage the risks. Any such risk assessment must have the approval of the District Commander or Head of Department."

### **Question 10**

Which company currently supplies your stab/ballistic/spike garments?

### **Answer**

The Police Service of Northern Ireland use three companies; Hawk Protection Ltd, Verseidag Ballistic Protection and Sioen Ireland Ltd.

### **Question 11**

When is that contract due for renewal?

### **Answer**

All three contracts are due for renewal between 2011 and 2013.

### **Question 12**

Over the past two years how many officers have been assaulted/injured whilst engaged on operational duty?

### **Answer**

In 2007-08 there were 605 officers assaulted or injured on duty.

In 2008-09 there were 381 officers assaulted or injured on duty.

### **Question 13**

Over the past two years how many days sickness have been lost as a consequence of these assaults/injuries.

**Answer**

During 2007-08 there were 21586 working days lost.

During 2008-09 there were 11788 working days lost.

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 @ [www.psnipolice.uk](http://www.psnipolice.uk)

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