



Making Northern Ireland Safer For Everyone Through Professional, Progressive Policing

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2010-00980

Keyword: Human Resources

Subject: Police Officers - Long Term Sickness Leave

Request and Answer:

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

I have today decided to:

- disclose the numbers of officers on long term sickness leave and exempt the dates and reasons for absence pursuant to S40 (2)(a)(b), S40(3)(a)(i) of the Freedom of Information Act.

Question

I am writing to request the release of the following information under the Freedom of Information Act:

I would like details of the number police officers you currently have on long term sickness leave. If you do not have a definition of 'long term sickness' then please, for the sake of this request, consider one month or more as 'long term'.

Where possible I would like this information broken down into the following categories: Rank; date officer last worked; general description of illness.

Answer

In relation to the number of officers on long term sickness absence, I can advise you that there are currently 106 officers below Sergeant rank and 27 officers of Sergeant rank & above. This figure represents 1.8% of our Police Officer establishment.

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:

- states that fact,
- specifies the exemption in question and
- states (if not otherwise apparent) why the exemption applies.

Your request for information broken down into categories: rank; date officer last worked; general description of illness would require me to release personal details about individuals other than the applicant. Any personal data relating to health issues e.g. dates of sickness absence and description of illnesses is considered sensitive within the Data Protection Act and is therefore highly confidential. To release this information would be a breach of the Data Protection Act and is catered for within Freedom of Information by the exemptions under Section 40(2)(a)(b), S40(3)(a)(i) as outlined below.

Section 40(2)(3) is a Class-based exemption, therefore it is not necessary to evidence the harm caused by disclosure. The data protection rights of a third party would be breached by disclosure, therefore Section 40(2)(3) is an Absolute exemption and a Public Interest Test is not necessary. This is so because personal data is governed by other law (The Data Protection Act 1998).

All requests made under FOIA are applicant blind. A request must be treated as such and a public authority will always view any disclosure as into the public domain and not just to an individual.

Personal Data is regulated under the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998 and when information contains personal data about a third party it can only be released if disclosure would not breach any of the data protection principles.

Principle 1 is that personal data must only be processed lawfully and fairly. This data was imparted to the PSNI for the purpose of internal administration. To process this information for any other purpose, i.e. by releasing it under Freedom of Information would be unfair to the individuals concerned and therefore a breach of this principle.

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 letter.

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.