



Making Northern Ireland Safer For Everyone Through Professional, Progressive Policing

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2010-03379
Keyword: Operational Policing
Subject: PSNI Close Protection Unit

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 information in relation to question 3 in full;
- partially disclose information in relation to question 2 pursuant to the provisions of section 31 and 38 of the Freedom of Information 2000 (the Act); and
- fully exempt information in relation to question 1 pursuant to the provisions of section 31 and 38 of the Act.

Question 1

The number of officers assigned to the PSNI's Close Protection Unit (CPU), per month, from January 2006 until October 2010.

If the request of this information exceeds the cost-limitations under the Freedom of Information Act, I request annual figures for the number of officers assigned to the Close Protection Unit for 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and from 1st January 2010 until 31st October 2010.

Question 2

Monthly operating costs - if possible within the cost-limitations for retrieving the information - of the Close Protection Unit, from 1st January 2010 until 31st October 2010.

If not available due to cost-limitations, I request the total operating costs from 1st January 2010 until 31st October 2010.

Answer

The total cost of the Close Protection Unit from 1st January until 31st October 2010 is £8,834,473,00.

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

Section 31(1)(a) Law Enforcement
Section 38(1)(a)(b) Health and Safety

Sections 31 and 38 are prejudice based and qualified exemptions therefore a Harm Test and Public Interest Test are necessary.

Harm Test

The PSNI is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting communities we serve. Release of some of this information i.e. number of officers assigned to CPU and costs could with information possibly already known provide enough detail to allow terrorists to ascertain levels of protection provided and expose possible areas to significant risk of harm.

Public Interest Test 1st Applicable exemption – Section 31

For Release – The PSNI has a duty of protection in NI and the public have a right to know that resources, both in terms of police personnel and finance, are being used both adequately and responsibly to do so.

For Retention – To provide resource information in relation to this particular unit would clearly provide terrorists with valuable information that they could use easily to target officers / principals. Article 2 of the Human Rights Act 1998 imposes a positive obligation on police to protect life, including the lives of police officers. Release of this information would be useful to terrorists in targeting these officers and the individuals they protect for attacks thereby increasing the risk to those officers, a breach of Article 2.

The release of detailed data could well include the calculation of trend data. This may allow terrorists to accurately predict the level of resources which may or may not be deployed at certain times.

Public Interest Test 2nd Applicable exemption – Section 38

For Release – Disclosure would lead to a better public awareness and debate.

For Retention – The release of information concerning police resources at any time, taken on its own or together with other information, either already available or subject of further requests, could place police officers at risk of attack. Police officers and the individuals they are protecting would not expect PSNI to release any information that may jeopardise their health and safety.

Decision

There is always a strong interest in the accountability of the Service however balanced against this I have taken into consideration the likelihood of serious threat and the subsequent harm that could be caused to officers and the individuals they are protecting and therefore I have decided not to release resource information and monthly costs of the Close Protection Unit.

Question 3

A statistical representation - i.e. percentage - as to who officers have been assigned to protect from 1st December 2010 until 31st October 2010 i.e. members of the judiciary, police stations, civilians, police officers etc.

Answer

72% coverage is for members of the Judiciary.

28% coverage is for Lifestyle principals which includes visitors to Northern Ireland.

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.