



Making Northern Ireland Safer For Everyone Through Professional, Progressive Policing

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2010-01980
Keyword: Operational Policing
Subject: Deployment of Officers - 12 July 2010

Request and Answer:

Your request for information has now been considered and the decision has been taken not to supply the information you have requested.

Question

Would it be possible to request information on the number of officers deployed for the 12th of July 2010 parade in Belfast and also, if possible, a breakdown by rank?

Answer

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) (b) and (c) Law Enforcement,

Section 38(1) (a) and (b) Health and Safety,

Sections 31 and 38 are Prejudiced based exemptions and this means it is the Public Authority's responsibility to evidence the harm.

The above exemptions are Qualified exemptions and therefore a Public Interest Test must be carried out.

Harm and Public Interest Considerations

Section 31

The disclosure of this information may allow criminals to plan how best to engage or occupy police resources used in future 12th July parades in Belfast, in an effort to maximise their chances of committing serious crime. As a Service we have considerable experience of this where organised criminal groups create diversionary calls to divert police resources (e.g. hoax call or deliberately activating intruder alarms) or deliberately create disturbances or commit minor crime e.g. (road traffic offences) with the same aim. It is reasonable to assume that confirmation of the number of officers involved would assist such activity by allowing more accurate judgements to be made by criminals.

Factors favouring disclosure

The information concerns efficient and effective use of resources by the Service and the proper allocation of resources is a matter that the Service should hold up to public scrutiny.

Disclosure of the information would illustrate to the public how funds are being spent.

Factors favouring non-disclosure

The current or future law enforcement role of the Service may be compromised by the release of information. A clear link exists between knowledge available to criminals and the way they operate, with the resultant impact to the Service. An example of this is that we know that criminals have previously struck (e.g. ATM's and warehouses) at times when they believe officers to be on meal breaks or when there are likely to be fewer police (e.g. early hours of morning).

Section 38

The disclosure of the information requested would be likely to increase the number of attacks on operational police officers by those being arrested or who have committed crime, or by those who would set out to attack police as evidenced by 'mob' attacks on police in West Belfast in recent years. Criminals may plan their attacks on their belief that a large number of officers will be present in one particular area.

Factors favouring disclosure

Disclosure would lead to a better awareness for the community, ensuring the public are able to carry on their daily routines knowing they are safe.

Factors favouring non-disclosure

By revealing information which could jeopardise the safety of the public in the Belfast area, the public would lose confidence in the Police Service and their ability to protect the wellbeing of the community.

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.

Balancing Test

Public awareness and debate are strong arguments in the spirit of the legislation favouring release of this information. This however is weighed against the need to ensure the efficient and effective conduct of the Police Service in relation to the prevention and detection of crime and the Public Safety considerations involved in the delivery of operational policing which clearly favour non-disclosure.

In balance I would contend that the public interest in disclosing the information is outweighed by that in maintaining the exemptions listed, as it is doubtful if it can ever be in the public interest to disclose information which would prejudice the prevention or detection of crime, or which would jeopardise the delivery of operational policing.

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.psnj.police.uk

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