



Making Northern Ireland Safer For Everyone Through Professional, Progressive Policing

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2010-03514

Keyword: Operational Policing

Subject: Student Protest - 9 December 2010

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 records in answer to Q1 – Q4 in full and;
- fully exempt records in answer to Q5 pursuant to the provisions of Section 31(1)(a)(b)(c) Law Enforcement and Section 38(1)(a)(b) Health and Safety of the Act.

Question 1

I would like to find out the exact overall cost of policing yesterday's (Thursday 9 December 2010) student protest in Belfast from start to finish?

Answer

The total cost of policing the student protest was £18,077.

Question 2

The length of time the police operation lasted? At what time exactly they were satisfied the operation was under control, order was restored?

Answer

The operation lasted from 11am to 6.30pm, during which the protest was peaceful for the vast majority of the time. The road in front of Belfast City Hall was closed for public safety reasons from 1500 hours to 1723 hours.

Question 3

Could I also find out the cost of bringing in extra police officers to help with the operation?

Answer

The cost for deploying additional officers was £5,225.

Question 4

The cost of any overtime paid out to officers due to the length of the protest?

Answer

The overtime cost was £8,797.

Question 5

Also, how many members of the PSNI were in attendance?

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

Section 31 - (1)(a)(b)(c) Law Enforcement

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

These are both prejudiced based, qualified exemptions, this means that it is the Public Authority's responsibility to evidence the Harm and carry out a Public Interest Test.

A summary of the Harm for Sections 31 and 38 along with the Public Interest Test are provided below:

HARM

Section 31

Disclosing the number of officers deployed for this situation could compromise the policing of future protests. Those intent on causing harm or disruption could use operational information to their advantage. This could weaken the methods and tactics used by the police and hinder the law enforcement role of the Police.

Section 38

Divulging this information could assist those intent on unlawful activities, increasing the risk to individuals, members of the public and officers.

PUBLIC INTEREST TEST

Factors Favouring Release – Section 31

The PSNI must be accountable for their procedures. The public would be better informed about the measures put in place for this type of situation.

Factors Favouring Retention – Section 31

To disclose information in relation to the police resources deployed would undermine the law enforcement role of the Service.

Factors Favouring Release – Section 38

Information relates directly to the efficiency and effectiveness of the Service and its officers. There is a public interest in knowing that adequate policing measures were taken by the PSNI.

Factors Favouring Retention – Section 38

Divulging the strength of police resources could assist those planning to disrupt protests and increase the risk of violence to individuals and officers.

Decision

Disclosure of this information could assist those intent on causing disruption and has the potential to escalate violence in similar situations. The PSNI has a duty to preserve order and protect life and property. The Police Service will not disclose information which could impose a risk. The safety of individuals and officers must take precedence over public interest and therefore I have decided not to disclose this information.

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.psnipolice.uk

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