Making Northern Ireland Safer For Everyone Through Professional, Progressive Policing

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST

Request Number: F-2011-01130

Keyword: Operational Policing

Subject: Probationary Constables and PSNI Vehicles

Request and Answer:

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

I have today decided to:

- disclose records in relation to questions 1, 2 and 5 in full; and
- fully exempt records in relation to questions 3 to 4 pursuant to the provisions of Section 31(1)(a)(b)(c) and Section 38(a) and (b) of the Act

Question 1
I am seeking to find out what percentage of officers working in each district A, B, C, D E, F, G and H are classed as Probationary Constables?

I would like the total number of officers in each area and the percentage of Probationary Constables as a separate figure.

Answer
Please find the responses to both questions in the table below:

District	Number of Police Regulars	% of which are Probationer Constables
A District	553	17
B District	501	10
C District	495	12
D District	564	16
E District	748	30
F District	549	26
G District	559	19
H District	437	7
Grand Total	4406	18

Question 2
What exactly is a Probationary Constable – i.e. when do they start, how long do they stay as a probationary officer, when does the probation finish?

Answer
A Probationer Constable is a police Constable on a probationary period within PSNI.

All entrants to PSNI complete a 21 week Student Officer Training Programme and are known as 'Student Officers'.

On successful completion of the Student Officer Training Programme they are attested as police officers and commence a 2 year fully operational probationary period. During this phase they are referred to as 'Probationer Constables'.

These 2 years include an 11 week Operational Development Training Programme, and a further Stage 3, 4 and 5 of Probationer Training, where there is assessment throughout including completion of a Personal Development Portfolio of supporting evidence.

On successful completion of this 2 year period, the Probationer Constable is "signed out" of their Probationary Period and confirmed in the rank of Constable.

Question 5
I would also like to know how many PSNI vehicles have more than 80,000 miles, 100,000 miles and 120,000 miles.

Answer
The total number of vehicles with over 80,000 miles is 494.
The total number of vehicles with over 100,000 miles is 157.
The total number of vehicles with over 120,000 is 52.

Question 3
I would also like to know how many PSNI armoured cars have more than 80,000 miles, 100,000 miles and 120,000.

Question 4
I would like the total number of armoured cars currently in operation by the PSNI.

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 the fact
(b) specifies the exemption in question and
(c) states (if not otherwise apparent) why the exemption applies.

It has been decided not to release details of the current fleet of PSNI vehicles and the mileage between 80,000 to 120,000 miles. 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 (a) and (b) – Health and Safety

Both these exemptions are prejudice based qualified exemptions and this means that the public authority is required to provide harm that could occur following the disclosure of the requested information and must consider the balance of the public interest in releasing the information against the public interest in withholding it.

The harm and public interest considerations are outlined below:

Harm test

Section 31
Armoured vehicles form part of the security fleet and are a specialist vehicle. To release details of their numbers could compromise the security and operational effectiveness of the PSNI. For example, if it is seen that the numbers of armoured vehicles currently in use was low, it would suggest that the capability of the fleet was weak. This could give criminals/terrorists an opportunity to take advantage of this situation and target police vehicles.

Harm test

Section 38
The disclosure of this level of detail would be likely to be valuable intelligence for terrorist groups thereby exposing both officers and the community at large to risk of attack. To identify the number of armoured vehicles available potentially notifies terrorist groups of the likely strength they could encounter when mounting future operations. This potentially puts officers' lives and members of the public at risk.

Public Interest Test

Factors favouring release – Section 31
Release of this information could inform how public money is spent and provide an insight into resources used in law and enforcement.

Factoring favouring retention Section 31
Disclosure could reveal resource levels and capabilities within PSNI. This could compromise law enforcement tactics which could potentially lead to more crime being committed and individuals being placed at risk. The use to which this type of information may be used is of particular concern in light of the nature and extent of the prevailing dissident threat. It may also be used by criminals/terrorists in combination with other information they have gathered to try and prejudice law enforcement.

Factors favouring release – Section 38
The considerations favouring release in this case are generic and arise from the purpose and rationale for Freedom of Information legislation. The factors outlined above in favour of release under Section 31 are therefore also relevant to Section 38.

Factors favouring retention – Section 38
Disclosure of this information could endanger officer's lives by providing the number of armoured vehicles that they could be travelling in, during their line of duty and therefore should be vigorously protected. The detailed information in question would be useful to terrorists planning to carry out attacks on police, which have in the past been known to be indiscriminate in nature, therefore endangering unsuspecting bystanders in addition to the intended target.

Decision
The PSNI has a duty to fulfil its law enforcement function and whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing activities and the appropriateness of how public funds are allocated, the delivery of effective law enforcement is of paramount importance.

The Police Service will not disclose information, no matter how generic, if to do so would undermine the prevention or detection of crime, the apprehension or prosecution of offenders and the administration of justice.

The information if released would provide the number of armoured vehicles in the PSNI, although it

does not release specific information as to the locations of where these vehicles are actually located. This information would be useful to terrorists planning to carry out attacks on police, which have in the past been known to be indiscriminate in nature, therefore endangering unsuspecting bystanders in addition to the intended target. The current terrorist threat remains high.

Therefore, at this time, it is our opinion that for these reasons the information should not be disclosed and therefore will not be putting any officer's or members of the public's life at risk.

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.