



Making Northern Ireland Safer For Everyone Through Professional, Progressive Policing

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2011-00727

Keyword: Organisational Information/Governance

Subject: Further Information Regarding Contractor Vetting Policy

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

Re: Contractor Vetting

Thanks you for your letter of the 21st February, but you appear to have only provided me with pages 1 to 7, when according to the index there are at least 26 pages. I would be grateful if you could provide me with the remaining parts of the policy.

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

Harm

Section 31

Revealing vetting measures would expose PSNI methodology, thereby making these means less effective and the organisation more vulnerable to compromise/infiltration. This would be likely to result in law enforcement tactics being directly and seriously compromised as those with criminal intent would know how to counter measures taken by police to enforce the law.

Section 38

Disclosure of this information could assist those intent in manipulating the vetting measures and could lead to people gaining access to other sensitive information held by the service including for example, the personal details of police witnesses, sources of intelligence or police officers and support staff. This could lead to the safety of individuals being seriously endangered, particularly in the present climate where dissident terrorists are currently known to be targeting and carrying out attacks on police personnel.

Public Interest Test

Factors Favouring Release – Section 31

Releasing guidelines in relation to vetting procedures would reassure the public of the measures taken by the PSNI to protect its assets and data.

Factors Favouring Retention – Section 31

The PSNI would become less effective at vetting to an appropriate standard as a result of a disclosure of information on vetting methodology, therefore the organisation would become more vulnerable to compromise/infiltration. The community would then suffer the effects of a PSNI workforce whose integrity and reliability is of a lower standard.

Factors Favouring Release – Section 38

The PSNI must be accountable for their procedures and release of the information would reassure the public of the vetting measures in place by the PSNI.

Factors Favouring Retention – Section 38

Disclosure of this information could assist those intent in manipulating the vetting measures and could lead to people gaining access to sensitive information held by the service. Individual's safety would be put at risk at making it possible for sensitive service and personal information to be accessed by those with intent to cause harm.

Decision

I have determined that the release of vetting procedures into the public domain would not be in the public interest. Release of this information would compromise law enforcement and risk the safety of individuals. The lives of individuals are of paramount importance and the PSNI will not divulge any information which would put any individual at risk.

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this letter should be considered as a Refusal Notice and the request has therefore been closed.

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.