



Making Northern Ireland Safer For Everyone Through Professional, Progressive Policing

## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



**Request Number:** F-2011-00342

**Keyword:** Organisational Information/Governance

**Subject:** Social Networking Sites

### Request and Answer:

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

#### Question 1

What is the PSNI's policy on staff usage of social networking sites such as facebook, myspace etc?

#### Question 2

Is guidance issued to staff regarding their use of such social networking sites?

#### Question 3

How many staff have been disciplined regarding their usage of social networking sites in the last year?

#### Question 4

How many staff have been criminally investigated in connection with potential crimes detected via social networking sites?

#### Question 5

What was the outcome of these particular cases?

### Answer

Section 17(5) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires the Police Service of Northern Ireland, when refusing to provide such information (because the cost of compliance exceeds the appropriate limit) to provide you the applicant with a notice which states that fact.

It is estimated that the cost of complying with your request for information would exceed the "appropriate costs limit" under Section 12(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which is currently set by the Secretary of State at £450.

The information you requested regarding discipline is not held centrally within the Police Service of Northern Ireland and so the Human Resource Managers in each of our District Command Units and Departments had to be contacted in an attempt to retrieve any available information.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that there is no standardised way to collate the requested information within different Districts/Departments which is why some Human Resource Managers may be able to retrieve the information and provide a response within the time permitted under FOI legislation and other managers of the larger areas would have to carry out prolonged manual searches of personnel records. One district alone estimated that this information would take 52½ hours to retrieve which greatly exceeds the cost threshold, before being added with estimates from the other Districts and Departments.

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.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland has also considered whether we can be of any assistance in terms of helping you refine your request to bring it under the cost limit. It may be possible to provide information regarding discipline and criminal investigations in connection with potential crimes detected via social networking sites which was reported to and investigated by our Professional Standards Department **or** from one or two selected District(s)/Department(s).

You may wish to submit a refined request in order that the cost of complying with your request may be facilitated within the 'appropriate limit'. Submission of a refined request would be treated as a new request, and considered in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, including consideration of relevant Part II exemptions.

Although excess cost removes the service's obligations under the Freedom of Information Act, as a gesture of goodwill, I have supplied information, relative to questions 1 and 2 of your request, retrieved before it was realised that the fees limit would be exceeded. I trust this will be helpful, but it does not affect our legal right to rely on the fees regulations for the remainder of your request.

Corporately the PSNI is currently engaged in trialling the use of Social Networking Sites in several locations to enable better engagement and communication with the public on various issues.

Personal use of Online Social Networking sites via PSNI ICT facilities is barred, therefore such access is disabled for staff and is only enabled for a small number of individuals who are responsible both for oversight of the PSNI Social Networking pilot sites and the monitoring of social networking sites to identify issues relevant to the PSNI.

With regard to private usage of such sites PSNI has issued guidance to staff in several formats as detailed below.

Guidance is issued to staff as below:

- Use of Social Networking Sites – Guidance for Police Personnel.
- Protect Yourself – A Guide to Personal Security.
- PSNI Code of Ethics.
- General circulation emails are sent to all personnel as required providing advice and guidance on identified issues in relation to risks posed by use of such sites e.g. Geotagging.

If you have any queries regarding your request or this 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](mailto: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](http://www.psni.police.uk)

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