



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2012-01968

Keyword: Operational Policing

Subject: Officers Employed on Response Duties

Request and Answer:

Question 1

The total number of Officers currently employed solely or predominantly on Response duties on each of your force's Basic Command Units (BCU).

Question 2

The number of teams into which these Officers are divided.

Answer

Section 17(1) 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) and (b) Law Enforcement
Section 38 (a) and (b) Health and Safety

Sections 31 and 38 are prejudice based and qualified exemptions, therefore a Harm Test and Public Interest Test are necessary.

In relation to Questions 1 and 2 of your request it has been decided not to provide the information requested.

Harm Test

Disclosing the number of officers currently deployed on response duties and the numbers in each team within each district could divulge information of use to terrorists or other criminal elements intent on harming police officers or disrupting the process of law enforcement. The level of response by police could be ascertained, leaving districts and officers vulnerable to criminal activity or terrorist attack. Disclosure could directly impact on the law enforcement ability of police and could potentially

pose a risk to both police officers and members of the public.

Public Interest Test

Factors favouring release – Section 31

The PSNI must be accountable for their procedures. The public would be better informed about the policing measures in place.

Factors favouring retention – Section 31

Disclosing details of officers on response duties could be used by criminals to evade police and undermine the law enforcement role of the PSNI. This information could assist terrorists to predict the level of response available and enable them to target areas or individuals.

Factors favouring release – Section 38

The public have an interest in knowing that adequate arrangements are in place to protect communities. Information relates directly to the efficiency and effectiveness of the Service and its officers.

Factors favouring retention – Section 38

Disclosing the level of police response in district areas could highlight opportunities for terrorists to launch attacks, placing both officers and members of the public at risk.

Decision

Disclosing the numbers of officers on response duties in each district location has the potential to reveal the strength of police deployments. Disclosing the level of police response in a specific area could enable terrorists to launch an attack or target individuals. Criminal elements could use this information to evade police, directly undermining the law enforcement role of the police. The PSNI is currently under an increased threat of terrorism and the release of operational policing details into the public domain would not be in the public interest. The lives of individuals are of paramount importance and the PSNI will not divulge any information which could put any individual at risk.

In relation to questions 1 and 2 of your request, I am satisfied that the exemptions are appropriately engaged and the information should not be disclosed.

Question 3

Your policy on the minimum number of officers on duty at any given time on each BCU.

Question 4

Where this varies by hour of the day, details of the policy on minimum numbers of officers on duty at any given time of the day at each BCU.

Answer

In relation to questions 3 and 4 of your request, searches were conducted however these searches failed to locate any records or documents relevant to your request based on the information you have provided. District Policing Command has confirmed they do not hold any information relevant to your request. All districts within PSNI were contacted and it has been established that no such policy exists. Accordingly, I have determined that the Police Service of Northern Ireland does not hold the information to which you seek access.

Although there is no written policy on minimum numbers on duty at any given time, districts operate a system of resource allocation based on management information, patrol area allocation and relevant legislation. This ensures that there are sufficient numbers of officers on duty to cope with the peaks and troughs of 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.psni.police.uk

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