



## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



**Request Number:** F-2012-00504

**Keyword:** Operational Policing

**Subject:** Private Detectives

### Request and Answer:

#### Question 1

Does the Force's Special Constable (SCs) recruitment policy offer eligibility to Private Detectives? If so is the eligibility at the discretion of the Force's Chief Officer and has this policy changed in the last five years, if so how?

#### Question 2

What is the current number of SCs in the Force who also work as private detectives? What has been the number each year for the last five years?

#### Question 3

Do the Force's SCs have access to Police National Computer (PNC). If so how is the access restricted?

#### Question 4

Do the Force's SCs have access to other civilian personal information? If so, what is this information and on what databases is it held.

#### Question 5

Has the force ever used Private Detectives for completed external investigations on civilians and/or internal investigations on Police staff?

#### Question 6

Please break down the number of investigations each year for the last five years and the basic nature of the investigation work undertaken?

#### Question 7

Please detail the names of the companies hired to carry out private detective work?

### 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.

In an attempt to retrieve the information requested I contacted the 8 Districts within PSNI, Crime Operations and Legal Services Departments. Each unit provided time estimates as to how long it would take to retrieve this information from their systems. Legal Services confirmed that on rare occasions the services of a private detective could be used in respect of cases. However such information is not separately recorded and therefore to pinpoint the few cases they would have to manually trawl through files which would take longer than the 18 hour threshold. It is therefore estimated that the total time required for all Districts and relevant Departments to locate, and extract the information requested would take an estimated 106 hours.

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.

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’. In compliance with Section 16 of the Act, I have considered how your request may be refined to bring it under the appropriate limit; however the nature and structure of the information unfortunately makes this impossible.

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 PSNI’s obligations under the Freedom of Information Act, I have provided below the information which was retrieved before it was realised that the fees limit would be exceeded. I trust this is helpful but it does not affect our legal right to rely on the fees regulations for the remainder of your request.

#### **Question 1**

Does the Force’s Special Constable (SCs) recruitment policy offer eligibility to Private Detectives? If so is the eligibility at the discretion of the Force’s Chief Officer and has this policy changed in the last five years, if so how?

#### **Question 2**

What is the current number of SCs in the Force who also work as private detectives? What has been the number each year for the last five years?

#### **Question 3**

Do the Force’s SCs have access to Police National Computer (PNC). If so how is the access restricted?

#### **Question 4**

Do the Force’s SCs have access to other civilian personal information? If so, what is this information and on what databases is it held.

#### **Answer**

In response to questions 1-4, PSNI do not employ Special Constables.

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.