



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2013-05883

Keyword: Organisational Information/Governance

Subject: ANPR Cameras That Are In Effective Use By Your Police Service

Request and Answer:

Question

The number of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras, both static and mobile, that are in effective use by your police force (or in possession by your force), by quarter and year from the beginning of the implementation of the technology to date. I would prefer receiving the information in the format of an Excel spreadsheet.

Answer

Your request for information has now been considered and the decision has been taken not to supply the information you have requested.

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 24(2) – National Security

Section 31(3) – Law Enforcement

Sections 24(2) and 31(3) are prejudice based qualified exemptions and there is a requirement to articulate the harm that would be caused in releasing the requested information as well as considering the public interest to ensure that withholding the information is the appropriate response.

Harm

As you are probably aware, disclosures under the Freedom of Information Act are disclosures to the world at large and not just to the individual making the request. To release the number of ANPR cameras that the PSNI have would allow for a direct comparison with the amount of ANPR coverage by other UK Police Forces. Confirming the number of ANPR cameras would therefore be of direct use to those involved in criminal and terrorist activities by enabling them to avoid areas of more

extensive coverage. This would adversely impact on the detection and prevention of crime at a time when the threat level from terrorism in Northern Ireland is assessed as Severe. As such, releasing the information requested would be damaging to national security and would render national security measures less effective. It would also adversely impact on the PSNI's Law Enforcement by hindering or preventing the prevention and detection of crime as well as the apprehension of offenders and the administration of justice. Release of the requested information would have a detrimental effect on the security or infra-structure of the UK and also increase the risk of harm to the public.

Public Interest Test

Sec 24(2) Factors favouring release

Releasing details of the numbers of ANPR cameras in effective use would allow the public to gauge the appropriate use of public funds by the PSNI in carrying out their national security investigations. In addition it would provide appropriate transparency and reassurance that national security investigations are effectively carried out.

Sec 24(2) Factors against release

The PSNI faces many challenges in the protection of National Security against terrorism and organised crime. Confirming the number of ANPR cameras available to the PSNI, combined with information which may be publicly available now or become available in the future would enable those involved in criminal and terrorist activities to avoid areas of ANPR coverage and avoid detection.

Section 31(3) Factors favouring release

The Police Service is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve and there is a public interest in the transparency of effective law enforcement. Disclosure may reassure the public that the PSNI are using appropriate resources to prevent and detect crime and apprehend those responsible.

Section 31(3) Factors against release

Disclosure of details about ANPR cameras could compromise law enforcement tactics which could potentially lead to more crime being committed and individuals being placed at risk. The use of this type of information may be of particular concern in light of the nature and extent of the prevailing terrorist threat. It may also be used by criminals/terrorists in combination with other information they have gathered to try and prejudice law enforcement.

Balancing Test

Whilst there is public interest in the transparency of law enforcement and also in the use of public money the ability to deliver an effective service is of paramount importance to the PSNI. Releasing information on the number of ANPR cameras in use by the PSNI would undoubtedly compromise both national security and law enforcement. The PSNI will not take any action that will risk undermining national security and law enforcement as well as increasing the risk to public safety.

It is therefore our opinion that in respect of this request Sections 24(2) and 31(3) are engaged and that the information should not be released.

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.