



## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



**Request Number:** F-2014-04188

**Keyword:** Crime

**Subject:** Child Sex Exploitation

### Request and Answer:

Could you please provide a current status (September 1) of the force's ongoing investigations into cases of child sex exploitation by detailing the following:

#### Question 1

How long any investigation has been running for?

#### Answer

This is to inform you that the Police Service of Northern Ireland has now completed its search for the information you requested. The decision has been taken to disclose the located information to you in full.

Operation Owl is the investigations into Child Sexual Exploitation and has been running since May 2013. This operation reviewed cases pertaining to 21 young people with a further 1 being added further into the investigation. It will continue until all cases are through the criminal justice system. Operation Owl became Operation Timett in September 2013, when more resources were deployed, but essentially they are the same operation.

#### Question 2

How many suspects have been identified? And individually separated - what are their ethnicity, age and genders?

#### Answer

Please see table 1 at page 3 below.

**N.B.** There is no overarching definition of ethnicity in Northern Irish law and categories are based on perception.

#### Question 3

How many victims have been identified? And individually separated - what are their ethnicity, age and genders?

#### Answer

Please see table 2 at page 4 below which shows the age of the victim at the time the incident was reported to police.

#### **Question 4**

How many of the suspects have been arrested or charged? Could this be listed alongside the suspects in a spreadsheet format (as for all the data)?

#### **Answer**

Please see the response to question 3 above.

#### **Question 5**

Also, how many officers overall have been dedicated to the investigations?

#### **Answer**

Since the start of Operation Owl there have been varying amount of officers involved and as stated above Op Owl and Op Timett are essentially the same operation.

#### Op Owl comprised of,

- 4 x full time senior practitioners social workers ( 2 from May 2013, 1 from July 2013, 1 from October 2013 to date) - with a line manager 1 day a week from May 2013 to date
- 1 x D/Superintendent SIO
- 1 x D/Chief/Inspector from May 2013 to 4th April 2014
- 1 x D/Inspector from May 2013 to date
- 2 x D/Sergeant from May 2013 - 1 returned to district 24/02/14 and 1 returned to district 01/09/14
- 1 x Acting/Inspector from May 2013 until 31/03/14
- 1 x crime analyst (part time not co-located) from May 2013 - May 2014
- 4 D/Constable from May 2013 - 2 returned to district June 2014 - 2 remain ( 1 was abstracted for 4 months 2013)
- 2 x Constables - 1 from June 2013 - Feb 2014 - 1 from September 2013 - 01/09/14

#### Op Timett (September 2013 - date)

- Holmes account opened 14/11/13 ( 1 DC, 2 civilians)
- MIT1 was deployed 1/10/13 intermittently until 24/12/13 (kept being redeployed in this time due to serious crime incidents) (1 x D/Inspector, 3 D/Sergeant and 8 D/Constable)

#### **Partial NCND**

Section 1 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) places two duties on public authorities. Unless exemptions apply, the first duty at s1(1)(a) is to confirm or deny whether the information specified in a request is held. The second duty at s1(1)(b) is to disclose information that has been confirmed as being held. Where exemptions are relied upon Section 17 of the FOIA requires that we provide the applicant with a notice which:

- a) states that fact,
- b) specifies the exemption(s) in question and
- c) state (if that would not otherwise be apparent) why the exemption applies.

The PSNI neither confirms nor denies that it holds any other information relating to this request by virtue of the following exemptions:

- Section 23(5) Information supplied by, or concerning, certain Security Bodies
- Section 40(5) Personal Information
- Section 30(3) Investigations
- Section 31(3) Law Enforcement

Sections 23 and 40 are class based absolute exemptions and there is no requirement to evidence the harm or consider the public interest.

Section 30 is a class based qualified exemption and consideration of the public interest must be

given as to whether neither confirming nor denying that information exists is the appropriate response.

With Section 31 being prejudice based and a qualified exemption, there is a requirement to articulate the harm that would be caused in confirming or not whether information is held as well as carrying out a public interest test.

### **Harm in complying with Section 1(1)(a) – to confirm or not whether information is held**

The College of Policing APP Information Management Module is a national standard adhered to by the PSNI. Police Information refers to all information obtained, recorded or processed for a policing purpose and includes information which is processed (known as data, including personal data) and information which has been subject to a process of evaluation (known as intelligence), see below link:

<http://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/information-management/?s=>

It is a business process with an intention to provide focus to operational policing and to achieve a disproportionately greater impact from the resources applied to any problem. It is dependent on a clear framework of analysis of information and intelligence allowing a problem solving approach to law enforcement and crime prevention techniques.

The impact of confirming or denying whether any other information is held in relation to this request, irrespective of what information is or isn't held, would be inappropriate as it would reveal police 'intelligence' about the status and activity of ongoing police investigations into child sexual exploitation.

In addition to confirm or deny whether any other information is held relating to specific details of suspects and victims has the potential of undermining the flow of information (intelligence) received from members of the public into the Police Service relating to these types of offences. Confirmation or denial would also undermine both ongoing investigations and the Authorised Professional Practice for Information Management. This could in turn lead to police officers having to be removed from their frontline duties in order to increase manpower on an investigation.

Finally, child sexual exploitation is not only a national problem but a global one. In order to ensure the PSNI delivers effective law enforcement we liaise with various other national agencies to provide suitable support. Not only would police investigations be compromised but any enquiries or investigations that other agencies may be undertaking would also be compromised.

### **Public Interest Considerations**

#### Factors favouring confirmation or denial - S30

Confirming or denying whether any other information exists relevant to this request would lead to a better informed general public identifying that the PSNI robustly investigate offences of child sexual exploitation which may encourage individuals to provide intelligence in order to assist with investigations and reduce crime. This would further promote public trust in providing transparency and demonstrating openness and accountability into where the police are currently focusing their investigations. The public are also entitled to know how public funds are spent, particularly in the current economic climate.

The issue of child sexual exploitation is a highly emotive subject area often attracting high profile media and public interest connotations. Confirmation or denial that any other information exists could provide reassurance to the general public.

#### Factors against confirming or denying - S30

Modern-day policing is intelligence led and the PSNI share information with other law enforcement agencies as part of their investigative process. To confirm or not whether any other information is

held relating to investigations into child sexual exploitation could hinder the prevention and detection of crime as well as undermine the partnership approach to investigations and law enforcement.

Should offenders take evasive action to avoid detection police resources may well be diverted from frontline duties and other areas of policing in order to locate and apprehend these individuals. In addition the safety of individuals and victims would be compromised.

#### Factors favouring confirming or denying - S31

There is a vast amount of information within the public domain relating to this subject and that in itself is considered to be a factor for disclosure. Examples of these can be found below:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-shropshire-29163581>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-29156736>

#### Factors against confirming or denying – S31

Confirming whether or not any other information is held in this case would suggest that the PSNI take their responsibility to protect the safety of individuals seriously. Public safety is of paramount importance and if offenders are provided with detail of ongoing investigations together with detail of victims of those offences, undoubtedly public safety would be compromised as it may encourage offenders to carry out further crimes.

The PSNI relies on information being supplied by the public. Irrespective of whether or not any other information is or isn't held, confirming that information is held would act as a deterrent to the public to provide information (intelligence) to the force which would undermine public safety, with repercussions that could hinder the prevention or detection of crime.

#### **Balancing Test**

The points above highlight the merits of neither confirming nor denying that any other information pertinent to this request exists. The Police Service relies heavily on the public providing information to assist in criminal investigations and has a duty to protect and defend vulnerable individuals. The public has an expectation that any information they provide will be treated with confidence and in line with the APP Information Management Module. Anything which places that confidence at risk, no matter how generic, would undermine any trust or confidence individuals have in the Police Service.

In addition, the effective delivery of operational law enforcement takes priority and the PSNI must use the appropriate exemptions to ensure the prevention and detection of crime is carried out and the effective apprehension or prosecution of offenders is maintained.

Therefore, at this moment in time, it is our opinion that for these issues the balance test for confirming, or denying, that any other information is held is not made out.

No inference can be taken from this refusal that information does or does not exist.

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](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.

**Table 1**

Where no details are in the arrested or charged columns then the investigation is on-going or no further action was taken.

<b>Suspect Ethnicity</b>	<b>Suspect Age</b>	<b>Suspect Gender</b>	<b>Arrested or charged.</b>
White	45	Male	Arrested and reported
White	22	Male	
White	26	Male	
White	24	Male	
White	24	Male	Arrested and reported
White	32	Male	Arrested and charged
White	18	Male	Arrested and reported
White	35	Male	Arrested and charged
White	28	Male	
White	33	Male	
White	28	Male	Arrested and charged
White	37	Male	Arrested and charged
White	27	Male	Arrested and reported
White	32	Male	Arrested and reported
White	28	Male	Arrested and reported
White	19	Male	Arrested and reported
White	24	Male	Arrested and reported
White	63	Male	Arrested and reported
White	28	Male	Arrested and reported
White	25	Male	Arrested and reported
White	25	Male	Arrested and reported
White	25	Male	Arrested and reported
White	33	Male	Arrested and charged.

**Table 2**

The age of the victim is the age at the time the incident was reported to the police.

<b>Victim Ethnicity</b>	<b>Victim Age</b>	<b>Victim Gender</b>
White	15	Female
White	18	Female
White	15	Female
White	16	Female
White	16	Female
White	17	Female
White	17	Female
White	14	Female
White	17	Female
White	19	Female
White	19	Female
White	19	Female
White	19	Female
White	19	Female
White	19	Female
White	19	Female
White	19	Female
White	19	Female
White	19	Female
White	13	Female
White	15	Female