



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2014-04540

Keyword: Organisational Information/Governance

Subject: Change to PSNI Press Communications

Request and Answer:

Question

Under the Freedom of Information Act, I would like to request details in relation to a change in approach from the PSNI press communications office which has resulted in press releases and statements frequently containing quotes from named officers. This change has been enacted within the last few weeks.

Please disclose the following:

- A copy of all correspondence sent and received in relation to a change in approach from the PSNI press communications office which has resulted in press releases/statements regularly containing quotes from named officers. Within this please include a copy of any documents or correspondence setting out why the change is being implemented, and/or any review of communications that resulted in this change.

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.

Following discussions between the Chief Constable and the Head of Corporate Communications Department an email was circulated to all staff within the Department to advise of the new direction to attribute statements to a named spokesperson. Please find a copy of this email attached at the end of this correspondence on page 1. It was envisaged that attributing each statement to a named officer from the relevant area as opposed to 'a spokesperson' would add a more personal approach to the statement and provide the media with quotes.

Service Executive Team members were subsequently advised of this new direction (attached correspondence at end refers) the contents of which was then disseminated to all District Commanders and Head of Branches to ensure corporate awareness of this new procedure.

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.psnipolice.uk

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

[REDACTED]

Not relevant to Request

Sent: 20 August 2014 09:27

[REDACTED]

Not relevant to Request

Subject: Named spokespersons

All,

The Chief Constable has directed that any statement issued by the Press office is now attributed to a **named individual** rather than a spokesperson.

He wants this introduced with **immediate effect**.

This is a new way of working for everyone. It will take a little time to get used to but it's important we try to get it right from the outset.

In order to make the process as simple as possible, if we cannot get an appropriate named officer to approve the release of information, it has been agreed that the named spokesperson will be the **District /Branch Duty Officer**. There is a duty officer available in every district 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

This will often be Inspector rank and above. UCMC have the Duty Officer rotas for the 8 districts as will DCU Commanders/Heads of Branch Staff Officers.

It should always be the case that the Duty Officer is aware of anything significant within their District/Branch , so it shouldn't come as a surprise that he/she will be quoted in any appeal/statement, although as courtesy we should make them aware of our intent to release information to the media.

There will be a number of occasions when using a named individual is simply not feasible, for example the release of simple factual traffic and travel information, weather warnings or releasing details of a security alert - however we will have to make judgements on a case by case basis with this new procedure until we are all comfortable with it.

An e-mail will be issued shortly by SET members to their respective District Commanders and Heads of Branches advising them of this new direction.

We will have to test this new process and see how it works over the coming weeks, but can you please start to implement this new process from today.

Please let me know of any concerns you have, or any incidents where attributing to a named individual causes difficulties.

Many thanks for your help with this.

[REDACTED]

Not relevant to Request

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17/10/2014