



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2015-03287

Keyword: Operational Policing

Subject: Deployment of Drones / Unmanned Aerial Vehicles

Request and Answer:

Question 1

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, I ask for a disclosure of the following information relating to the PSNI's use of drones.

Since the PSNI's introduction of Drones / Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in June 2013 how many times have they been deployed? Please break this figure down on a month by month basis.

Answer

Your request for information has now been considered. In respect of Section 1(1)(a) of the Act I can confirm that the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) does hold information to which some of your request relates and responses to your questions are provided below.

Please find a table included at the end of this response which displays the number of UAV deployments since June 2013.

Question 2

In relation to question 1, please specify from which PSNI policing districts from which the drones have been despatched from - and how many times from each district within the specified time period?

Answer

Please find a table included at the end of this response which displays the number of UAV deployments since June 2013 along with the policing district in which the UAV was deployed.

Question 3

Since the introduction of drones how many accidents have occurred and have there been any repair costs?

Answer

The PSNI has had no operational accidents since the introduction of the UAVs.

Question 4

How many drones does the PSNI own? Which models? And how many officers are trained to operate them?

Answer

The PSNI has a total of 9 Small Unmanned Aircraft comprising of:

- 3 x Micro Craft
- 3 x Small Craft
- 3 x Vertical landing and take-off Quadcopter

The PSNI has a total of 11 members of staff who are trained to operate these Unmanned Aerial Vehicles.

Question 5

Please details the types of PSNI operations in which the drones are used.

Answer

Please find a table included at the end of this response which displays the number of UAV deployments since June 2013 along with the type of operation in which the UAV was involved.

Question 6

What is the cost of the PSNI's drone project to date?

Answer

The PSNI have no cost code with which to record the total cost of the PSNI drone project and therefore it has been determined that there is no information held with which to answer this request. Please note that the total cost of such a project would include a wide range of costs, including initial purchase, storage, training and employment of officers, transportation, deployment etc.

Partial NCND

In addition the PSNI neither confirms nor denies that it holds any other information relevant to the covert use of UAVs by virtue of the following exemptions:

Section 23(5) – Information supplied by, or concerning, certain security bodies

Section 24(2) – National Security

Section 31(3) – Law Enforcement

Section 23 is an absolute class-based exemption and therefore there is no requirement to conduct a harm or public interest test.

Sections 24 and 31 are prejudice based and qualified exemptions. This means that there is a requirement to articulate the harm that would be caused in confirming or denying that any other information is held as well as conducting a public interest test.

'Neither Confirm nor Deny' (NCND)

There may be occasions when complying with the duty to confirm or deny under section 1(1) (a) would in itself disclose sensitive or potentially damaging information that falls under an exemption. In these circumstances, the Act allows a public authority to respond by refusing to confirm or deny whether it holds the requested information.

The decision to issue a 'neither confirm nor deny' response is not affected by whether we do or do not hold the information but relates to the consequences of confirming or denying the information is held. The starting point and main focus in most cases will be theoretical considerations about the consequences of confirming or denying that a particular type of information is held. The

decision to neither confirm nor deny is separate from a decision not to disclose information and needs to be taken entirely on its own merits.

PSNI follow the Information Commissioner's Guidance in relation to 'NCND' and you may find it helpful to refer to this at the following link:

https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1166/when_to_refuse_to_confirm_or_deny_section_1_foia.pdf

Section 1(1) (a) of the Act requires a public authority to confirm whether it holds the information that has been requested.

Section 23(5) provides an exemption from this duty. Section 23(5) of the FOIA states that "the duty confirm or deny does not arise if, or to the extent that, compliance with section 1(1) (a) would involve the disclosure of any information (whether or not already recorded) which was directly or indirectly supplied by, or relates to, any of the bodies specified in subsection (3)."

The police service in its' fight against crime and terrorism may engage at times with the bodies listed at Section 23 of the FOIA and on occasions there may be information provided to police from one of these bodies. As advised above the decision to issue a NCND response is not affected by whether we do or do not hold the information but relates to the consequences of confirming or denying the information is held. To confirm or deny whether intelligence was used in specific investigations would undermine police services' ability to use intelligence information as an operational tool for investigating crimes including those that may have occurred historically. The NCND response is used to avoid risks caused by providing inconsistent responses to a series of similar requests where the information may originate from a number of sources and not necessarily a security body.

Harm for the partial NCND

As you may be aware, disclosure under FOIA is a release to the public at large. Whilst not questioning the motives of the applicant, confirming or denying that any other information is held regarding the covert use of this specialist equipment would show criminals what the capacity, tactical abilities and capabilities of the Service are, allowing them to target specific areas of the UK to conduct their criminal/terrorist activities. Confirming or denying the specific circumstances in which the police service may or may not deploy UAVs covertly, would lead to an increase of harm to covert investigations and compromise law enforcement. This would be to the detriment of providing an efficient policing service and a failure in providing a duty of care to all members of the public.

The threat from terrorism cannot be ignored. It is generally recognised that the international security landscape is increasingly complex and unpredictable. Since 2006, the UK Government have published the threat level, based upon current intelligence and that threat has remained at the second highest level, 'severe', except for two short periods during August 2006 and June and July 2007, when it was raised to the highest threat, 'critical', and in July 2009, when it was reduced to 'substantial'. Nevertheless, the UK continues to face a sustained threat from violent extremists and terrorists and the current threat level is set at 'severe' in both the UK as a whole and in Northern Ireland individually.

It is well established that police forces use covert tactics and surveillance to gain intelligence in order to counteract criminal behaviour. It has been previously documented in the media that many terrorist incidents have been thwarted due to intelligence gained by these means.

Confirming or denying that any other information is held in relation to covert use around UAVs would limit operational capabilities as criminals/terrorists would gain a greater understanding of the police's methods and techniques, enabling them to take steps to counter them. It may also suggest any limitations of police capabilities in this area, which may further encourage criminal/terrorist activity by

exposing potential vulnerabilities. This detrimental effect is increased if the request is made to several different law enforcement bodies. In addition to the local criminal fraternity now being better informed, those intent on organised crime throughout the UK will be able to 'map' where the use of certain tactics are or are not deployed. This can be useful information to those committing crimes. This would have the likelihood of identifying location-specific operations which would ultimately compromise police tactics, operations and future prosecutions as criminals could counteract the measures used against them.

Any information identifying the focus of policing activity could be used to the advantage of terrorists or criminal organisations. Information that undermines the operational integrity of these activities will adversely affect public safety and have a negative impact on both national security and law enforcement.

Section 24

Factors favouring NCND

The information if held simply relates to national security and confirming or denying whether it is held would not actually harm it. The public are entitled to know what public funds are spent on and what security measures are in place, and by confirming or denying whether any other information regarding UAVs is held would lead to a better-informed public.

Factors against NCND

By confirming or denying whether any other information is held would render Security measures less effective. This would lead to the compromise of ongoing or future operations to protect the security or infra-structure of the UK and increase the risk of harm to the public.

Section 31

Factors favouring NCND

Confirming or denying whether any other information is held would provide an insight into the police service. This would enable the public to have a better understanding of the effectiveness of the police and about how the police gather intelligence. This would greatly assist in the quality and accuracy of public debate, which could otherwise be steeped in rumour and speculation. Where public funds are being spent, there is a public interest in accountability and justifying the use of public money.

Some information is already in the public domain regarding the police use of this type of specialist equipment and confirming or denying whether any other information is held would ensure transparency and accountability and enable the public to see what tactics are deployed by the Police Service to detect crime.

Factors against NCND

Confirming or denying that any other information is held regarding covert use of UAVs would have the effect of compromising law enforcement tactics and would also hinder any future investigations. In addition, confirming or denying methods used to gather intelligence for an investigation would prejudice that investigation and any possible future proceedings.

It has been recorded that FOIA releases are monitored by criminals and terrorists and so to confirm or deny any other information is held concerning specialist tactics would lead to the law enforcement being undermined. The Police Service is reliant upon all manner of techniques during operations and the public release of any *modus operandi* employed, if held, would prejudice the ability of them to conduct similar investigations.

By confirming or denying whether any other information is held in relation to covert use of UAVs would hinder the prevention or detection of crime. The Police Service would not wish to reveal what tactics may or may not have been used to gain intelligence as this would clearly undermine the law enforcement and investigative process. This would impact on police resources and more crime and terrorist incidents would be committed, placing individuals at risk. It can be argued that there are significant risks associated with providing information, if held, in relation to any aspect of

investigations or of any nation's security arrangements so confirming or denying that any other information is held, may reveal the relative vulnerability of what we may be trying to protect.

Balance Test

The security of the country is of paramount importance and the Police service will not divulge whether any other information is or is not held if to do so would place the safety of an individual at risk, undermine National Security or compromise law enforcement. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and providing assurance that the police service is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat posed by various groups or individuals, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding the integrity of police investigations and operations in the highly sensitive areas such as extremism, crime prevention, public disorder and terrorism prevention. As much as there is public interest in knowing that policing activity is appropriate and balanced this will only be overridden in exceptional circumstances. These areas of police interest are sensitive issues that reveal local intelligence therefore it is our opinion that for these issues the balancing test for confirming or denying whether any other information is held regarding UAVs, is not made out.

However, this should not be taken as necessarily indicating that any information that would meet your request exists 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.

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.

UAV Deployments by Date and Location

| Ref | Date | Purpose | Location |
|-----|--------|------------------------------|--------------|
| 1 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 2 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 3 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 4 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 5 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 6 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 7 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 8 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 9 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 10 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 11 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 12 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 13 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 14 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 15 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 16 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 17 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 18 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 19 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 20 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 21 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 22 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 23 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 24 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 25 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 26 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 27 | Jun-13 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 28 | Nov-13 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 29 | Nov-13 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 30 | Nov-13 | Support to District Policing | G District |
| 31 | Nov-13 | Support to District Policing | G District |
| 32 | Nov-13 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 33 | Nov-13 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 34 | Nov-13 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 35 | Nov-13 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 36 | Nov-13 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 37 | Nov-13 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 38 | Nov-13 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 39 | Nov-13 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 40 | Nov-13 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 41 | Apr-14 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 42 | Apr-14 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 43 | Apr-14 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 44 | Apr-14 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 45 | Apr-14 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 46 | Apr-14 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 47 | Apr-14 | Support to District Policing | D District |

| Ref | Date | Purpose | Location |
|------------|-------------|------------------------------|-----------------|
| 48 | Apr-14 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 49 | Apr-14 | Support to District Policing | G District |
| 50 | Apr-14 | Support to District Policing | G District |
| 51 | Apr-14 | Support to District Policing | G District |
| 52 | Apr-14 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 53 | May-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 54 | May-14 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 55 | May-14 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 56 | Jun-14 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 57 | Jun-14 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 58 | Jun-14 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 59 | Jun-14 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 60 | Jun-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 61 | Jun-14 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 62 | Jun-14 | Support to District Policing | F District |
| 63 | Jun-14 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 64 | Jun-14 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 65 | Jun-14 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 66 | Jun-14 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 67 | Jun-14 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 68 | Jun-14 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 69 | Jun-14 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 70 | Jun-14 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 71 | Jun-14 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 72 | Jul-14 | Search | E District |
| 73 | Jul-14 | Search | E District |
| 74 | Sep-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 75 | Sep-14 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 76 | Sep-14 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 77 | Sep-14 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 78 | Sep-14 | Search | E District |
| 79 | Sep-14 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 80 | Sep-14 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 81 | Sep-14 | Search | E District |
| 82 | Sep-14 | Search | E District |
| 83 | Sep-14 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 84 | Sep-14 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 85 | Oct-14 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 86 | Oct-14 | Support to District Policing | E District |
| 87 | Oct-14 | Search | D District |
| 88 | Oct-14 | Search | D District |
| 89 | Oct-14 | Search | D District |
| 90 | Oct-14 | Search | D District |
| 91 | Nov-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 92 | Nov-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 93 | Nov-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 94 | Nov-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 95 | Nov-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 96 | Nov-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |

| Ref | Date | Purpose | Location |
|------------|-------------|------------------------------|-----------------|
| 97 | Nov-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 98 | Nov-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 99 | Nov-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 100 | Nov-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 101 | Nov-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 102 | Nov-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 103 | Nov-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 104 | Nov-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 105 | Nov-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 106 | Nov-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 107 | Nov-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 108 | Nov-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 109 | Nov-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 110 | Nov-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 111 | Dec-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 112 | Dec-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 113 | Dec-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 114 | Dec-14 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 115 | Aug-15 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 116 | Aug-15 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 117 | Aug-15 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 118 | Aug-15 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 119 | Aug-15 | Support to District Policing | A&B District |
| 120 | Sep-15 | Support to District Policing | B District |
| 121 | Sep-15 | Support to District Policing | B District |
| 122 | Sep-15 | Support to District Policing | B District |
| 123 | Sep-15 | Support to District Policing | B District |
| 124 | Sep-15 | Support to District Policing | B District |
| 125 | Sep-15 | Support to District Policing | B District |
| 126 | Sep-15 | Support to District Policing | B District |
| 127 | Sep-15 | Support to District Policing | B District |
| 128 | Sep-15 | Support to District Policing | B District |
| 129 | Sep-15 | Support to District Policing | B District |
| 130 | Sep-15 | Support to District Policing | B District |
| 131 | Sep-15 | Search | G District |
| 132 | Sep-15 | Search | G District |
| 133 | Sep-15 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 134 | Sep-15 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 135 | Sep-15 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 136 | Sep-15 | Support to District Policing | D District |
| 137 | Oct-15 | Support to District Policing | G District |
| 138 | Oct-15 | Support to District Policing | G District |
| 139 | Oct-15 | Support to District Policing | G District |
| 140 | Oct-15 | Support to District Policing | G District |
| 141 | Oct-15 | Support to District Policing | G District |
| 142 | Oct-15 | Support to District Policing | G District |