



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2015-01258

Keyword: Organisational Information/Governance

Subject: Money Paid to Police Informants March 2014 - March 2015

Request and Answer:

Question 1

Please state the amount of money paid to covert human intelligence sources (CHIS)/informants in the last financial year (2014/15).

Answer

In 2014 / 2015 = £375,730

Question 2

Provide comparison figures for each of the previous five financial years.

Answer

In 2009 / 2010 = £405,115

In 2010 / 2011 = £395,800

In 2011 / 2012 = £434,000

In 2012 / 2013 = £422,172

In 2013 / 2014 = £466,332

In addition to this response PSNI can neither confirm nor deny that it holds any other information relevant to the whole of your request by virtue of the following exemptions:

Section 23(5)- Information relating to security bodies listed at Section 23(3)

Section 24(2)- National Security

Section 30(3)- Investigations

Section 23 is a class based absolute exemption and there is no requirement to consider the public interest in this case.

Section 24 is a prejudice based qualified exemption and there is a requirement to consider the public interest in this case.

Section 30(3) is a class based and qualified and there is a requirement to consider the public interest to ensure neither confirming nor denying any other information is held, is appropriate.

The police service works in partnership with other agencies in order to combat issues such as terrorism and organised crime. As such, information may sometimes be provided by bodies listed at Section 23(3). In this case, I am unable to confirm or deny whether the PSNI hold any other information relevant to your request and sections 23 (5) and 24(2) are cited in conjunction to protect the involvement or non-involvement of bodies listed at section 23(3).

The above information provides total payments to informants however it does not include any payments made to informants where funding may have been supplied by exempt bodies.

Harm for the Partial NCND

Disclosure of informants data could impact on the recruitment and retention of CHIS in general, due to the perception of (rather than the actual) risk of identification. In an Information Tribunal case relating to the payments made to CHIS in Croydon (EA/2010/0006), it was accepted that this argument applied as much to CHIS providing intelligence in relation to national security concerns as to CHIS engaged in countering more traditional criminal threats. In this way, the disclosure of the requested information would damage national security through discouraging current national security CHIS from cooperating with the police service in other geographical areas, or preventing the recruitment of national security CHIS in the future – regardless of whether the area in question actually currently runs CHIS reporting on serious crime, terrorist or other threats.

Public Interest Test

Factors favouring confirming or denial held - Section 24

Confirmation or denial that any other information exists relevant to the request would lead to a better informed public and the public are entitled to know how public funds are spent. The information simply relates to national security and disclosure would not actually harm it.

Factors against confirming or denial - Section 24

Other organisations outside the police service are also widely engaged in rewarding informants in a number of ways, and therefore by confirming or denying that any other information exists relevant to the request would harm the close relationship that exists with such organisations, where trust and confidence in this specific area has been built up in the exchange of information and financial assistance during the Criminal Justice process.

To confirm or deny whether PSNI hold any additional information would allow inferences to be made about the nature and extent of national security related activities which may or may not take place in a given area. This could enable terrorist groups to take steps to avoid detection, and as such, confirmation or denial would be damaging to national security

By confirming or denying any policing arrangements of this nature would render national 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.

Factors favouring confirming or denial - Section 30

The Police Service is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve. Confirming that information exists could promote public trust in providing transparency and demonstrating openness and accountability into how the investigation took place. It could also provide reassurance to the public that the police service takes all reports of a crime seriously and conducts investigations appropriately. To confirm could allow the public to have a better understanding of the effectiveness of the Police Service.

Factors against confirming or denial – Section 30

To confirm or deny whether PSNI hold any information is held relating to informants is sensitive in nature. Under FOI there is a requirement to comply with S1(1)(a) and confirm what information is held. In some cases it is that confirmation, or not, which could disclose facts harmful to informants. In some cases there mere existence can place individuals in grave danger. The only methodology which will provide the required degree of protection to those individuals is if the force takes

advantage of its ability under FOI legislation to, when appropriate, not confirm or deny that the information requested, is or is not held. The Police Service will never disclose information which could identify investigative activity and therefore undermine their investigations. To do so would hinder the prevention or detection of crime.

Decision

The Police Service is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve. 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 or undermine National Security. 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 from criminals, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding both national security and the integrity of police investigations and operations in this highly sensitive area.

As much as there is public interest in knowing that policing activity is appropriate and balanced in matters of national security, this will only be overridden in exceptional circumstances.

These points were agreed by the Information tribunal in the case of ICO v Metropolitan Police, EA/2010/2006, where the request was for informant spend at borough level. Although the information in this case was subject to substantive exemptions, the key public interest balancing point was highly persuasive.

'CHIS are given strong guarantees that their identities will be protected. In some instances, a prosecution may be stopped rather than risk the identity, or in some cases even the existence, of a CHIS being revealed. We accept the evidence of DI D as to the "paranoia" of those acting, or contemplating acting, as a CHIS and accept that they would view the disclosure of the disputed information as a breach of confidence that would significantly undermine their confidence in having their identities protected.'

It is therefore our opinion that for these issues the balancing test for confirming or not that information is held is not made out.

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.