



## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



**Request Number:** F-2017-03488

**Keyword:** Operational Policing

**Subject:** PSNI Spending on Firearms and Ammunition

### Request and 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 does hold information to which your request relates. The decision has been taken not to supply the information you have requested and the reasons for this are set out in more detail below. We have also provided you with links to guidance issued by the Information Commissioner's Office which we have followed in responding to your request.

### Request 1

Please can you provide me with details of Police Service of Northern Ireland's spending on firearms and ammunition for the financial years 2010/11, 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14, 2014/15, and 2016/17?

### Request 2

For each year, please can you also provide me with details of the quantity and kind of guns and ammunition bought?

### Answer

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 31 (1) (a) (b) – Law Enforcement

Section 31 is a qualified and prejudiced based exemption; therefore the public authority has a responsibility to evidence the harm and the public interest in releasing the information.

## **Harm Test**

The Police Service of Northern Ireland is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve. In order to achieve those objectives, the PSNI is permitted to use reasonable force when necessary. Disclosing details of weaponry available to the police is likely to influence the criminals/terrorists who are prepared to resort to the use of extreme force in order to avoid detection and capture. By being aware of the police capabilities they will ensure that they are armed to overcome the Police response, endangering the public, police officers and themselves.

The threat of terrorist action also remains severe. Making PSNI capabilities publicly available removes the deterrent effect of not knowing how easy or difficult it would be to carry out terrorist crime. The only way to leave such doubt in the terrorists mind is to maintain a position of non-provision of this information.

## **Public Interest Test Section 31**

### **For Release**

Disclosure would assist the public in knowing whether the Service has the capability to deal appropriately with the challenges of using firearms, when appropriate to do so. Disclosure would also go some way to showing that public funds have been spent appropriately.

### **For Retention**

Disclosure will place the PSNI at a tactical disadvantage. It will enable criminals and terrorists to determine whether the Service is vulnerable in terms of the firearms they possess. This would have a detrimental effect on law enforcement.

## **Decision**

There are very strong arguments for non-disclosure of the information requested in requests 1 and 2. These revolve around the prejudicial effect on law enforcement which could hinder the prevention of crime, compromise police tactics and place individuals at risk. These far outweigh the arguments for release of the information. Therefore, at this time the balance falls in favour of non-disclosure.

The full text of exemptions can be found at [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk) and further guidance on how they operate can be located on the Information Commissioners Office website [www.ico.org.uk](http://www.ico.org.uk).

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.