



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2018-00366

Keyword: Crime

Subject: Crime Reports Social Media

Request and Answer:

Your request for information below has now been considered. In respect of Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) I can confirm that the Police Service of Northern Ireland does hold the information you have requested however it is estimated that the cost of complying with your request for information would exceed the “appropriate costs limit” under Section 12(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Request 1(i)

How many crime reports have mentioned social media for the calendar years:

- a) 2013
- b) 2014
- c) 2015
- d) 2016
- e) 2017

In your search could you please look for the following platforms/ key words: Facebook; Twitter; Instagram; Snapchat; YouTube; WhatsApp

Request 1 (ii)

For each crime report please can you provide as much detail as possible about the nature of the offence and what category they fall into (however you record them) eg Criminal Damage, Drug Crime, violence against the person etc

Request 2 (i)

How many requests have been made for your social media team to monitor instances of suspected gang related violence on social media? Please provide figures by calendar year for the years:

- a. 2013
- b. 2014
- c. 2015
- d. 2016
- c. 2017

Request 2 (ii)

Please provide any further details that are centrally recorded about the nature of the offences committed eg knife-crime, physical assault, violent threats etc

Answer

Section 17(5) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires the Police Service of Northern Ireland, when refusing to provide such information (because the cost of compliance exceeds the appropriate limit) to provide you the applicant with a notice which states that fact.

It is estimated that the cost of complying with your request for information would exceed the "appropriate costs limit" under Section 12(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Section 12 of FOIA allows a public authority to refuse to deal with a request where it estimates that it would exceed the appropriate limit to either comply with the request in its entirety or confirm or deny whether the requested information is held. The estimate must be reasonable in the circumstances of the case. The 'appropriate limit' is currently £600 for central government and £450 for all other public authorities including PSNI. The relevant Regulations which define the appropriate limit for section 12 purposes are The Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulation 2004 SI 2004 No 3244. These are known as the 'Fees Regulations' for brevity.

Regulation 4(3) of the Fees Regulations states that a public authority can take into account the costs it reasonably expects to incur in carrying out the following permitted activities in complying with the request:

- (i) determining whether the information is held;
- (ii) locating the information, or a document containing it;
- (iii) retrieving the information, or a document containing it; and
- (iv) extracting the information from a document containing it.

Under those regulations PSNI can calculate the time spent on each of these permitted activities at £25 per hour (thus if the activity(s) takes more than 18 hours PSNI will be in excess of the 'appropriate limit').

The information requested is not held in a central location within PSNI and I contacted the relevant Departments who advised that it is held in both a manual and electronic format. Crime Operations Department have advised to respond to Request 2 (ii), if considered on a standalone basis, incidents of knife-crime, physical assault and violent threats could be monitored upon request, or via generic search terms, however they may not be linked to gang related violence. To extract the information and conduct a manual trawl of such data for the period specified, would be excessive. Central Statistics Branch has also advised that to respond to Request 1 would require a search for the requested text (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, etc.) in the call for service. They have advised that it is likely that there are other crimes where the requested terms are mentioned but where this text is held in logs/documents on the NICHE computer system. It is also likely that there will be incidents where the mention of the requested text in the call for service is not connected to the crime that has been recorded and the data extracts from NICHE which may provide a summary of the nature of the offence. There are a total of 4,019 records, which would each have to be read through manually. It is therefore estimated it would take well in excess of the FOI legislative cost of 18 hours to search all of the potentially relevant records.

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this letter should be considered as a Refusal Notice, and the request has therefore been closed.

You may wish to submit a refined request in order that the cost of complying with your request may be facilitated within the 'appropriate limit'. In compliance with Section 16 of the Act, I have considered how your request may be refined to bring it under the appropriate limit: it may be possible to provide a statistical for Request 1, and would provide a count of crimes where the call for service includes the following text: Twitter, Facebook (or Face book), SnapChat, Instagram, however it should be noted that the incidents would not be reviewed to establish the context in which the terms were used within the call for service; however it would not be possible to say whether or how the terms were connected

to the crime that was recorded.

However submission of a refined request would be treated as a new request, and considered in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, including consideration of relevant Part II exemptions.

If you have any queries regarding your request or this 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.