



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2022-01091

Keyword: Organisational Information/Governance

Subject: 999 Calls Regarding Domestic Violence

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) we 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. We have explained to you below that when PSNI estimates whether the appropriate limit is likely to be exceeded, it can include the costs of complying with two or more requests if certain conditions are met. In this case those conditions are met and complying with all of your requests would in our estimation exceed that appropriate limit set out in Regulation. We have explained this further below but also we followed the Information Commissioner’s Office guidance ‘*Requests where the cost of compliance exceeds the appropriate limit*’ in relation to this request, which also provides further detail on the application of section 12 (1) of the FOIA. This guidance is available on the ICO website at the following link:

https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1199/costs_of_compliance_exceeds_appropriate_limit.pdf

You requested the following information from PSNI:

Request 1

Please can you provide data pertaining to the number of 999 calls that were made to report or in relation to domestic violence for the calendar years:

- a. 2016
- b. 2017
- c. 2018
- d. 2019
- e. 2021/2022 (to date)

Request 2

Please can you provide data pertaining to the number of 999 calls relating to domestic violence across 2016 – 2022 respectively that were assigned:

- a. Grade 1
- b. Grade 2

- c. Grade 3
- d. Grade 4

Please also provide the time taken to attend for each part of the question.

Request 3

Please can you provide a copy of your Call Grades and Deployment Policy or direct me to where I can find this.

Request 4

Please can you tell me the total number of calls relating to domestic violence that were assigned grade 1, 2, 3 or 4 in comparison to or categorised by the area the incident was reported to have taken place in or the area officers were instructed to attend for the calendar years:

- a. 2016
- b. 2017
- c. 2018
- d. 2019
- e. 2021/2022 (to date)

Grades 1 to 3 typically refer to an emergency response, a prompt response and a routine response. Please provide a description of the different grades (including expected response times to attend) used by the force if these differ.

Request 5

Please provide the longest individual time taken to attend a grade 1, 2, 3 or 4 emergency call in 2021 for domestic violence, including what grade the call was assigned.

Request 6

Please provide the total number of occasions that police did not attend:

- a) Grade 1,
- b) Grade 2
- c) Grade 3
- d) Grade 4 emergencies last year (2021) relating to domestic violence.

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').

When a public authority is estimating whether the appropriate limit is likely to be exceeded, it can include the costs of complying with two or more requests if the conditions laid out in Regulation 5 of the Fees Regulations can be satisfied. Those conditions require the requests to be:

- made by one person, or by different persons who appear to the public authority to be acting in concert or in pursuance of a campaign;
- made for the same or similar information; and
- received by the public authority within any period of 60 consecutive working days.

Regulation 5(2) of the Fees Regulations requires that the requests which are to be aggregated relate *"to any extent"* to the same or similar information. This is quite a wide test but public authorities should still ensure that the requests meet this requirement.

The information requested is held electronically on the PSNI computer system, however it is not held in a readily retrievable format which can be provided without manual intervention. An initial search was carried out for the year 2022 and this search returned a total of 3,060 - 999 domestic related calls. To establish if these calls were made in relation to domestic violence each individual call would need to be manually reviewed. Allowing a conservative estimate of 3 minutes to review each individual call would equate to approximately 153 hours for the year 2022 alone, grossly exceed the statutory limit of 18 hours set by the Secretary of State under the FOIA. This would be further increased for the remaining years requested.

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.

Advice and Assistance

Under Section 16 of the FOIA PSNI will always try to assist you to refine your request and provide advice where we can. PSNI have considered how your request may be refined to bring it under the appropriate limit. Unfortunately, as a manual trawl of records would be required for retrieval of any relevant information, it is not possible to offer any refinement. However, PSNI could provide the following:

- The number of calls received by 999 (volume) that were classified as "Domestic" / **not** "Domestic Violence" for the time periods requested.

Please note: PSNI do not grade calls as requested in Request 2 and Request 6.

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 Corporate Information Branch, 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 Corporate Information Branch, 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.