



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2022-01135

Keyword: Operational Policing

Subject: PSNI Presence At Schools

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

I would like the following data about police in UK schools: The total number of Safer School Officers or school-based police officers from your force on:

- a. 1 April 2021; and
- b. 1 April 2022.

Request 2

The total number of times where police officer(s) from your force have:

- a. Been called to deal with a behavioural or disciplinary incident at a school involving student(s) between 1 April 2021 - 1 April 2022.

- b. Conducted a search of a student at a school (for example, on suspicion that a student is carrying illegal drugs, a weapon, stolen property or something which could be used to commit a crime) between 1 April 2021 - 1 April 2022.
- c. Conducted a strip search of a student at a school between 1 April 2021 - 1 April 2022.

For point 2, please provide this information broken down by the ethnicity, gender and age of the student(s) involved and whether they are entitled to Free School Meals or have Special Education Needs.

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').

Enquiries made in relation to your request have identified that retrieval of this information would exceed the 18 hour cost limit set under the FOI Act by the Secretary of State. With regard to Request 2 PSNI can advise that in relation to a search for a previous FOI request re PSNI attendance at schools, covering the three year period 2017 to 2019 we stated:

"The information requested is held electronically on the PSNI computer system, however it is not held in readily retrievable format which can be provided without manual intervention. In an attempt to assist a keyword search for 'school', was carried out in the location field. For the years 2017- 2020 this search returned a total of 11,780 incidents. It should also be noted as this is a manual field which is dependent on the information being input into the system a small number of the incidents returned were included as they had things such as 'School Road' in the location field (Not necessarily referring to an actual school building)"

"However to ascertain if Police attended a 'school property' and the reasons for it, a manual trawl would need to be carried out, which would entail reading through each record to establish if it met the circumstances requested. With a total of 11,780 incidents each taking approximately 5 minutes this would equate to approximately 981 hours"

Consequently although you are requesting a single year period of 1st April 2021 to 1st April 2022 the volume of calls with the keyword of “school” is going to be circa 3000 to 4000 recorded incidents with the key word “school” in this time period. At approximately 5 minutes this request would take at the very least an estimated 250 hours to determine what information we hold for all of Request 2, thus putting this request over cost

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

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 however we are unable to provide a refinement.

- PSNI can advise that in relation to Request 1 we have stated in previous similar FOI releases that:

PSNI do not have police officers dedicated to schools who work solely or even mainly with schools. Local Policing Team and Neighbourhood Policing Team officers engage with schools in their areas, delivering lessons and engaging with young people based on bespoke local needs. The PSNI neighbourhood delivery team are in the process of reviewing a specific schools officer role. The paper to support this proposal has yet to obtain governance approval.

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 remain dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you may make a complaint to the Information Commissioner’s Office, under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, 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’, or use the ICO self-service portal available at www.ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/officialinformation-concerns-report/official-information-concern/

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 their 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.

