



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2022-01626

Keyword: Operational Policing

Subject: Missing People

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 (PSNI) 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

How many people in your area went missing between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022? Please provide the numbers broken down by ethnicity and by age in the following table. In this question we are asking for the number of individuals, not total incidents/investigations

Request 2

How many total missing investigations were there between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022? Please provide the numbers broken down by ethnicity and by age in the following table

Request 3

Please provide a breakdown of the outcomes of missing investigations for children between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, broken down by ethnicity.

Request 4

Please provide a breakdown of the outcomes of missing investigations for adults between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, broken down by ethnicity.

Request 5

How many missing investigations for children between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, broken down by ethnicity, had a:

- a) Sexual Exploitation marker
- b) Mental health marker
- c) Criminal Exploitation marker
- d) Trafficking marker

Request 6

How many missing investigations for adults between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, broken down by ethnicity, had a:

- e) Sexual Exploitation marker
- f) Mental health marker
- g) Criminal Exploitation marker
- h) Trafficking marker

Request 7

Please provide the types of location from which the missing investigations for children were reported between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, broken down by ethnicity.

Request 8

Please provide the types of location from which the missing investigations for adults were reported between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, broken down by ethnicity.

Request 9

Please provide the number of missing investigations for children between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022 which lasted more than 48 hours, broken down by ethnicity.

Request 10

Please provide the number of missing investigations for adults between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022 which lasted more than 48 hours, broken down by ethnicity.

Request 11

Please provide the number of missing investigations for children between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022 which lasted more than 7 days, broken down by ethnicity.

Request 12

Please provide the number of missing investigations for adults between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022 which lasted more than 7 days, broken down by ethnicity.

Answers

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').

PSNI can advise that 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. This information is not held in a retrievable format that provides the information without manual intervention and a comprehensive search would need to be conducted to retrieve this information for Requests 3, 4, 7 and 8. The relevant business area has identified 11,000 records relevant to your Request. At an estimate of 5 minutes to examine an individual record to retrieve relevant information, such as identifying the outcome of the missing investigation, i.e. whether the individual was located (alive or deceased) or not. This information would require a manual trawl of all serials, as 'outcome' is not a searchable field. Additionally, in relation to Requests 7 and 8, PSNI record by address only and not by type of location, therefore a detailed analysis of each record would be required to fulfil this aspect of your Request. It is estimated that this would take 916 hours of work in total, therefore this would be grossly over the 18 hours as set by the Secretary of State.

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 can advise that we would be able to provide the following information:

- The number of missing persons for the requested time period, broken down by the age they went missing and their ethnicity.
- The number of missing persons reports for the requested time period, broken down by the age they went missing and their ethnicity.
- The number of missing children reports only, with 'Child Sexual Exploitation Markers', broken down by ethnicity. Please note that the further markers mentioned in your Request are not held on our records. Additionally, such a marker is not associated with missing adult reports.
- The number of missing children and adult reports which lasted more than 48 hours, broken down by ethnicity.
- The number of missing children and adult reports which lasted more than 7 days, broken down by ethnicity.

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 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.psnj.police.uk

Personal details in respect of your request have, where applicable, been removed to protect confidentiality.