



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: FOI-2020-01829

Keyword: Crime

Subject: Holylands Policing Operation

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 and this is being provided to you. We further consider some of the information you seek in your request is exempt by virtue of Section 31(1) of the FOIA and have detailed our rationale as to why this exemption applies. 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

I was just hoping to find out the total cost of the operation between September 13 and 29?

Answer 1

In response to request 1, the total cost of the operation was approximately £217,062.

The costs include normal duty time, overtime and the support which was provided to Belfast City Police District by the Operational Support Department.

Request 2

The number of officers on patrol each night?

We have decided that the information in relation to Request 2 is exempt and our rationale for withholding this information is outlined below:

Answer 2

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 – Information which would be likely to prejudice (a) the prevention or detection of crime or (b) the apprehension or prosecution of offenders.

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

Section 31 is a qualified and prejudiced based exemption and this means it is the public authority's responsibility to evidence the harm and conduct a public interest test. PSNI applied this to the number of officers on patrol each night, during the Holylands operation between September 13th and 29th 2020.

Harm

A disclosure under FOI is considered a release to the world in general and not just to the applicant requesting the information. Once information is disclosed by FOI, there is no control or limits as to who or how the information is shared with other individuals.

PSNI considers that disclosure of the number of officers on patrol each night, during the Holylands operation could compromise law enforcement abilities. This is by creating a possibility that criminal organisations could use this information to gain more knowledge about operational policing in a specific area. This would hinder the law enforcement purposes of the PSNI in the prevention or detection of crime and the apprehension or prosecution of offenders.

Public Interest Test

Factors favouring release- Section 31

Release of this information would better inform the public, demonstrating openness, transparency and accountability on the part of the PSNI.

Factors favouring retention- Section 31

This information would set a precedent on the number of officers on duty in a particular location. This is counterproductive to law enforcement purposes, as this will assist in building up a picture of the PSNI's ability to respond to incidents within this area if the officer numbers can be deduced.

The release of the information reveals details of officer availability, which taken on its own or together with other information, either freely available or the subject of further requests could damage the law enforcement capabilities of the PSNI.

Decision

The PSNI is tasked with the prevention and detection of crime and protecting the public, and therefore must ensure it does not release information which would adversely affect law enforcement. It has been determined that to release the requested information into the public domain would not be in the public interest. The PSNI will not release information that may hinder its law enforcement purposes. The release of this information may provide information to criminals on operational policing in a specific area. This would aid them as they attempt to avoid future law enforcement activities.

In this case PSNI are satisfied that the exemption outlined above is applicable to this information.

Request 3

The total number of covid fines, arrests and prohibition notices issued between those dates?

Answer 3

In response to request 3; 382 covid fines, 0 arrests and 84 prohibition notices were issued between those dates.

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 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.