

Keeping People Safe



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2020-02028

Keyword: Organisational Information/Governance

Subject: Reports of Covid-19 Breaches

Request and Answer:

Your request for information has now been considered. In respect of Section 1(1)(a) of the Act we can confirm that the Police Service of Northern Ireland does hold some information to which your request relates and this is being provided to you by virtue of Section 40 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

Under the Freedom of Information Act, I would like to request details of reports made via the PSNI's 'Covid-19 Reporting Form'. The online portal was set up to allow people to report alleged breaches of coronavirus restrictions: <https://www.psni.police.uk/covid19/> I am seeking similar information to that disclosed in FOI reference FOI-2020-01562. For each submission made in the online form on October 19 2020, please disclose the following:

1. The submissions entered in the following sections:

- Date of incident (day/month/year)
- Time of incident
- City
- 'What type(s) of activity do you wish to report?' (Gathering of people not from same household; Gathering of people not from same household in a public place; Non-essential Travel; Licensed premises remaining open).

Request 2

The exact text typed (redacted where appropriate if necessary) into the 'description of activity' box in the online form.

If it is not possible to provide this information for the 24-hour period requested within the time and cost constraints of the FOI Act, please instead provide the information for the 12-hour period from 9am on October 19 2020.

Answer

As previously mentioned, the requested information is being provided pursuant to Section 40 of the FOIA and an explanation is provided below. Please see the redacted document attached separately to this correspondence.

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, as well as the factors the Department considered are listed below:

Section 40(2)(a)(b) by virtue of 40(3)(A)(a) Personal Information – Information constitutes personal data and disclosure would contravene any of the Data Protection principles

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 40 (2) of the FOIA is an absolute exemption which means there is no requirement on the PSNI to consider whether there is a public interest in disclosure. It is an interface exemption and we must consider whether release of the information would breach the General Data Protection Regulations ('GDPR') or the Data Protection Act 2018 ('DPA') Third party personal information contained in the reports constitutes 'personal data' under the GDPR (Article 4) and DPA (Part 1 s.3).

The release of information under the Freedom of Information Act is considered a release into the public domain and not just to the individual requesting the information. Once information is disclosed by FOI there is no control or limits as to who or how information is shared with other individuals, therefore a release under FOI is considered a release to the world in general.

Under the Freedom of Information Act, PSNI must consider if information can be released into the public domain. We have therefore considered whether the disclosure of this personal data is subject to the exemption at Section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 by virtue of s40 (3)(A)(a). As this information is 'personal data', PSNI considered whether disclosure would contravene any of the six data protection principles contained within the GDPR or DPA.

The six data protection principles are good information handling standards which PSNI must comply with in relation to how it handles personal information, including deciding whether to disclose it or not. In particular, the first principle requires personal data to be processed in a lawful and fair manner. In considering whether it is 'fair' to any individual to release information about them, PSNI considered the likely expectations of those individuals and the nature of the information involved. Individuals must have confidence that their information is treated sensitively and appropriately by PSNI. We consider those individuals would not have any reasonable expectation PSNI would disclose such information of this nature about them. We consider it would be extremely unfair to those individuals and therefore a breach of the first principle of data protection legislation. This information is therefore exempt under section 40 (2) of the FOIA as it contravenes data protection legislation to release it and the PSNI has made the decision to withhold that information.

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.psnipolice.uk

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