



## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



**Request Number:** F-2022-02551

**Keyword:** Policing Themes, Operations and Investigations Events and Public Order

**Subject:** Royal Visit

### 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 (PSNI) does hold some information to which your request relates and this is being provided to you. We further consider the information you seek in request number 1 and 3 is exempt by virtue of section 24, 31 and 38 of 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

How much did it cost to prepare for & carry out the activities related to Kate & William's visit?

### Request 3

Please would you provide an itemised list of costs or best estimate?

### Answers 1 and 3

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 24 (1) National Security** – Information required for the purpose of safeguarding national security.

**Section 31(1) (a) (b) - Law Enforcement** – Information would be likely to prejudice (a) the prevention or detection of crime (b) the apprehension or prosecution of offenders.

**Section 38(1)(a)(b) – Health and Safety** - Information is exempt information if its disclosure under the FOIA would, or would be likely to (a) endanger the physical or mental health of any individual.

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

Section 24 and 31 are prejudice based qualified exemptions which means there is a requirement to evidence the prejudice (harm) in disclosure and consider the public interest.

Section 38 is a prejudiced based exemption which means that it is necessary to show the harm that may be caused by release and consideration must be given as to whether there is a public interest in disclosure.

### **Harm Test – Section 24**

The release of the information requested would result in harm to the national security of the United Kingdom. Releasing costs associated with the protection of Members of the Royal Family would provide those intent on committing acts of terrorism with valuable information as to the level of resistance they might expect to encounter with undertaking such an act. Disclosing the information sought would also give valuable tactical information to those who seek to harm such figures.

The release of information which might assist a potential terrorist in planning an attack on a Member of the Royal Family, including the possibility of identifying the protection levels afforded to the Head of State, would threaten the prime institution of the United Kingdom's constitutional arrangements, and thus the nation's security.

### **Public Interest Favouring Disclosure – Section 24**

It is accepted that disclosure of expenditure by the police on behalf of the taxpayer can enhance the accountability of the service and its standing within an open and democratic society. Although a sensitive issue, such openness can also enhance understanding of national security issues. The public have both a right and an interest in participating in the debates surrounding national security issues, and knowledge of where money is being spent would enhance their ability to participate meaningfully in such discussions.

### **Public Interest favouring Non-Disclosure – Section 24**

The fact that there are a number of groups that would seek to harm the national security of the United Kingdom is generally accepted not just by the Intelligence and security services, but also by the media and the public. Persons such as the Royal Family, who undertake constitutional and representative duties - both nationally and internationally, therefore provide a target for such persons. Groups planning such attacks are known to conduct extensive research into the opposition they might face. Disclosure of this information might enhance their capability. Additionally, it could lead to the need to review tactics, provide extra staff and additional costs. Disclosure therefore would be detrimental from a national security perspective.

### **Public Interest Balancing Test**

When considering disclosure of the costs of Royalty protection, we must weigh the public interest in allowing access to such information against the harm that might be caused by its supply. Any disclosure of information that would allow extremists to gauge the level of protection afforded to Royalty would provide anyone intent on committing acts of terrorism with intelligence as to the level of police resistance that they may encounter. This would hinder the ability of law enforcement bodies to protect these individuals and would clearly not be in the public interest.

It is obviously desirable that PSNI accounts for how it spends public money, particularly at a time of constraints in public spending. Articles in the media and comments attributed to members of the public indicate a growing interest/concern in this subject.

However the threat to national security from terrorist groups is real and ever present and would be made more likely to be realised were more information about the costs of protection arrangements revealed. There is also a strong likelihood that the release of these figures would reveal which

individuals law enforcement authorities believe to be most at risk of terrorist attack. The ability to identify any types of intelligence that law enforcement authorities might rely on would clearly not be in the wider public interest.

All UK police forces have a duty to fulfil their national security functions. The disclosure of this information would increase the risk to the safety of Members of the Royal Family and is inextricably linked to national security, any attacks on these individuals would be an attack on the sovereignty of the United Kingdom and its constitutional arrangements.

For this reason, it is considered that the public interest in non-disclosure significantly out-weighs that in favour of disclosure.

### **Harm Test – Section 31**

Release of the information may prejudice the prevention and detection of crime.

Members of the Royal Family are at times the target of criminal and fixated elements and terrorist threats. Security and protection arrangements are implemented to prevent and or/reduce the likely success of such criminals and/or the mentally ill. The funding provided is based on the level of protection required. Disclosure of the amounts involved would inevitably compromise the safety of those being protected by enabling an assessment to be made of the security arrangements and the security level of resistance that they might expect to encounter.

It might also reveal policing tactics for other VIPs, something which might undermine protection arrangements generally.

Those planning attacks are known to use a wide range of resources, including press reports and physical reconnaissance. Reducing the information available or making it more difficult to acquire is obviously desirable.

It also follows that any heightened risk to individuals in receipt of protective security arrangements represents a similar risk to a member of any organisation (e.g. the police) providing protection. Any physical attack on any person, regardless of whether they are a Member of the Royal Family or not, is a crime and therefore where release would harm their safety (or that of any other person) section 31(1)(a) is engaged.

### **Public Interest favouring Disclosure – Section 31**

The public have a genuine interest in what the police do and how they do it. Their interest is legitimate and to be encouraged within a democratic society where policing is by consent.

Public accountability for the use of resources and taxpayers' money, and a willingness to be transparent and open are desirable characteristics in all public authorities.

The interest in how much money is spent on protection is therefore to be expected, especially when there is some concern as to whether such expenditure is appropriate and justified.

### **Public Interest favouring Non-Disclosure – Section 31**

Disclosure of any information that would provide terrorists, criminals or the fixated with information as to the levels of protection that may be afforded to the Royal Family would not be desirable as it would provide anyone intent on committing an act of terrorism with vital intelligence as to the level of resistance that they may encounter. Disclosure of information in respects of total costs would augment that already available, making the task of prevention more difficult and the chance of attack more likely. This would hinder the ability of the law enforcement bodies to perform their public protection role and would clearly not be in the public interest.

One of the primary objectives of PSNI is the prevention of crime. The release of any information that

might increase the likelihood of a crime is not in the public interest.

### **Public Interest Balancing Test – Section 31**

When considering whether to release information of the type sought PSNI have to weigh the potential benefits associated with disclosure against the harm that might be caused by disclosure.

The main issue appears to be whether the public interest in knowing how much money is spent protecting the Royal Family out-weighs the public interest in safeguarding the ability of police to prevent crime.

Balancing the public right to know and PSNI's duty to account against the potential damage to its present and future operational capability in this case favours non-disclosure. The terrorist, fixated and criminal threats are real. Any disclosure of information that would increase the likelihood of terrorism or any other criminal activity places the public at risk, as well as members of the law enforcement bodies and the Royal Family. There is no public interest in disclosing information that would increase the risk to public safety.

### **Harm Test – Section 38**

Release of the information sought would endanger the physical health of the Royal Family and their Households, the police providing protection and members of the public.

Although the information sought relates to a total cost figure, the ability to extrapolate such information might compromise the safety of individuals.

The possibility of a mosaic effect being established whereby disclosed information could be matched with unofficial information to form assessments as to protective security measures is a real danger.

The release of information will also reveal policing tactics regarding Members of the Royal Family, and could be used to form part of a wider assessment of levels of protection afforded to others not subject to this request. The release of this information would therefore also be to the detriment of another who may not be in receipt of similar levels of protection.

Budgets are finite and staffing levels directly related to the money that is provided. Over time it is possible to determine from snippets of information released legitimately or inadvertently, likely police protection tactics.

### **Public Interest favouring Disclosure – Section 38**

Disclosure would provide an insight in how the police work and would improve public understanding of policing decisions. It would enable the public to determine whether policing arrangements are appropriate and would help with public scrutiny of an important Public Authority. It may help to remove speculation, rumour and conjecture.

### **Public Interest favouring Non-Disclosure – Section 38**

Disclosure of the information requested would be likely to increase the vulnerability of the Royal Family, the public and our officers and/or impact adversely upon our ability to provide a safe and secure environment. Revealing this information would also increase the risk to personal protection staff as collateral damage in the event of an attack. All people are entitled to live and work without a threat of violence directed against them. It is not in the public interest for unprotected members of the public to be placed in position of vulnerability by disclosing details in respect of principals in receipt of police protection.

Disclosure might lead to protection tactics having to be altered, staffing levels increased and the costs of protection rising, which are adverse effects definitely not in the public interest.

### **Public Interest Balancing Test – Section 38**

After weighing up the competing interests I have determined that the disclosure of the above

information would not be in the public interest. I consider that the benefit that would result from the information being disclosed does not outweigh disclosing information relating to protection costs.

Release of the information sought is not in the public interest, therefore the balance lies in withholding the information.

### **Decision**

After weighing up the competing interests PSNI can confirm that the disclosure of the above information would not be in the public interest. The PSNI considers that the benefit that would result from the information being disclosed does not outweigh the harm arising from disclosing information relating to the overall cost of providing protection to Members of the Royal Family.

### **Request 2**

Are these costs the responsibility of taxpayers in Northern Ireland? If not, who has paid or will pay them?

### **Answer 2**

The costs are covered by Police Service Northern Ireland expenditure.

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 Corporate Information Manager, Corporate Information Branch, PSNI Headquarters, 65 Knock Road, Belfast, BT5 6LE or by emailing [foi@psni.police.uk](mailto:foi@psni.police.uk).

If, following an Internal Review carried out by an independent decision maker, you remain unhappy about how your request has been handled you have the right to apply in writing to the Information Commissioner, under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, at 'Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. There are a number of other platforms you can use to contact the ICO and these can be found on the ICO's website at the following link: [Make a complaint | ICO \(https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/\)](https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/).

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](http://www.psni.police.uk)

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