



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: FOI-2022-02940

Keyword: Policing Themes, Operations and Investigations Policing Other

Subject: Strip Searches

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 some of 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

Request 1

How many 'strip searches' were carried out by your officers in the past three years (1st November 2019 - 31st October 2022) while the person being searched was in police custody.

Please list each occasion and the information by:

- a) sex of person searched
- b) age of person searched
- c) ethnicity of person searched
- d) reason given for the search
- e) outcome of the search (items found?)

Request 2

How many 'strip searches' were carried out by your officers in the past three years (1st November 2019 - 31st October 2022) while the person being searched was not in police custody.

Please list each occasion and the information by:

- a) sex of person searched
- b) age of person searched

- c) ethnicity of person searched
- d) reason given for the search
- e) outcome of the search (items found?)
- f) whether the individual was then arrested

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’).

When a public authority is estimating whether the appropriate limit is likely to be exceeded, it can include the costs of complying with two or more requests if the conditions laid out in Regulation 5 of the Fees Regulations can be satisfied. Those conditions require the requests to be:

- made by one person, or by different persons who appear to the public authority to be acting in concert or in pursuance of a campaign;
- made for the same or similar information; and
- received by the public authority within any period of 60 consecutive working days.

Regulation 5(2) of the Fees Regulations requires that the requests which are to be aggregated relate “to any extent” to the same or similar information. This is quite a wide test but public authorities should still ensure that the requests meet this requirement.

Enquiries made in relation to your request has identified that retrieval of information to respond to your request would exceed the FOI legislative cost of 18 hours as set by the Secretary of State.

This FOI request is overcost by virtue of Request 1d and 1e. Although PSNI does hold the requested information, they are not held in a format that would allow retrieval within 18 hours. It would be necessary to carry out a manual trawl of individual records of every detainee covering a period of the past 3 years. Between 1st November 2019 and 31st October 2022 there have been 3520 strip searches carried out by within custody. To examine these in order to determine the reason given for

the search and its outcome (Request 1d and 1e), would take over 293 hours, based on an estimate of 5 minutes search per detainee's record.

Under Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, if any part of the request exceeds the cost threshold then the whole request will be excess costs and there is no obligation to answer any part of the request.

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, we have considered how your request may be refined to bring it under the appropriate limit, unfortunately at this time we can provide no refinement in relation to the Request 1d and 1e.

It has been determined that strip searches are usually conducted in custodies, but they also might occur as a result of stop and search procedure. Both of them are being recorded in separate systems. Opposite to detail custody files, there is no marker on a stop and search system to explicitly document that a strip search was carried out. PSNI could retrieve number of strip searches in result of stop & search, but only where this information has been recorded in a free text field by Officer, which may or may not be the case. Also whilst the general location of the stop and search is recorded, it does not necessarily specify if the strip search took place within custody or not.

In regards to Request 1 it has been determined, that it is possible to provide you with information for Parts 1a-1c.

However in regards to Request 2, the retrieval of information requested is possible for time between 1 November 2019 and 5 October 2022, but as stated above, it depends on the information having been input into the live system in such a way, which will allow to identify those records as relevant. Please note that numbers provided may not be accurate.

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 Corporate Information Manager, Corporate Information Branch, PSNI Headquarters, 65 Knock Road, Belfast, BT5 6LE or by emailing 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

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