



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: FOI-2023-00570

Keyword: Crime/Incident Statistics Theft and Burglary

Subject: Phone and Bag Thefts

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 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

Could I please have data on phones stolen and bags stolen in on the street thefts in the past five financial years for the Northern Ireland please? This includes

Request 1

How many phone and bag thefts there were reported - broken down by the year and the months these happened?

Request 2

Whether they were stolen by people on bikes, on foot, in cars etc.

Request 3

If the victims were injured during the theft.

Request 4

The victims location and time of the incident i.e. shopping centre, street, car.

Request 5

Outcome of case i.e. resolved, closed etc.

Request 6

Time it took to reach the outcome of the case

Request 7

If the items were recovered and returned to the owner.

Request 8

The models of the phones reported.

Additionally, if there is any data soon to be released at the end of this financial year (April 2022- April 2023) on the above information please supply this too.

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').

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. To respond to your requests the offences that would fall under this category are 'Theft from the person and Robbery' which would be based on the following guidance in the Home Office Counting Rules for Recorded Crime which is applied to the recording of Theft from a person (Home Office Classification 39). For assistance these are outlined below:

Clarification - Recorded Crime: Robbery or Theft from the Person

The use or threat of force in a theft from the person, in order to commit the theft, should be recorded as a robbery. For example, if the victim or a third party offers any resistance that needs to be overcome, or if anyone is assaulted in any way, then this constitutes force. Similarly, if a victim is under any impression from the offender's words or actions that the offender may use force, then this constitutes threat of force.

Where property is stolen from the physical possession of the victim and some degree of force is directed to the property but not to the victim (e.g. a bag is taken cleanly from the shoulder of a victim or a phone is taken cleanly from the hand) the allegation should be classified as theft from the person and not a robbery.

Clarification - Recorded Crime: Theft from the Person or Other Theft

A theft without the use or threat of force should be recorded as a theft from the person if one of the following circumstances applies at the time of the theft:

- (i) The goods stolen were being worn by the victim; or
- (ii) The goods stolen were physically attached in some way to the victim, or carried by the victim; or
- (iii) The goods stolen were contained in an article of clothing being worn by the victim.

If none of these circumstances apply, the theft should be recorded under one of the other theft codes as appropriate.

To respond to your requests and whilst the information maybe held electronically, each record would need to be manually examined to ascertain if it meets the criteria i.e. on the street thefts requested which would include reviewing how the items were stolen i.e. a person on a bike. The recording system has a property description of Personal communication device/Mobile phones & accessories, unfortunately there is no property description available to specifically identify 'bags'. Therefore all theft from the person and robbery offences would need to be examined and with nearly 4,700 such offences recorded in the five financial years 2017/18 to 2021/22 this would be over cost (at an estimated around 783 hours). To include records within the current financial year would only increase the over cost estimate. On this occasion as the basic search criteria cannot be identified within cost, the remaining requests which rely on this identification subsequently cannot be answered within cost.

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, however at this time the PSNI can provide no refinement.

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.