

[REDACTED]

FOI 567/20/21
10 September 2020

[REDACTED]

I refer to your email dated 20 August 2020 in which you asked for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

This request has been dealt with under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Freedom of Information Act 2000

The Freedom of Information Act creates rights of access for any person making a request for information to a public authority. The rights of access are twofold. First, to be informed by the public authority if it holds information of the description specified in the request, and if that is the case, secondly, to be provided with that information. These rights are subject to important limitations, which are designed to achieve a proper balance between the right to know and considerations of law and policy in the broader public interest.

You had asked the following;

Under the Freedom of Information Act, please could I request the following information:

1. What inspections activities does the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland perform?
2. How many inspections (of each type if possible) were performed in 2019/20?
3. How many inspectors do you employ, and what was the annual cost of these inspectors in 2019/20?
4. Do you use third parties to perform these inspections? If so, who did you use, and what was the annual spend in 2019/20?
5. What information management system, if any, do you use to manage the inspections, and what was the annual spend on this in 2019/20

For avoidance of doubt, by 'inspections' I mean 'activities that are carried out to ensure the inspected entity meets legislative requirements for their role or function or condition, delivers on their duty of care for individuals or the public and/or adheres to any rules set by government on use of government funds'.

How many super injunctions are in place in Northern Ireland?

In response I can advise that the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) is the principal prosecuting authority in Northern Ireland. As such the Service does not have an externally-facing inspectorate-type function and has no responsibilities in terms of carrying out inspections or reviews of other entities or bodies.

In terms of its internal arrangements, the Service's Policy and Information Unit provides an independent assessment of the quality of decision-making, case preparation and presentation within the organisation. This is largely carried out on an ad hoc basis and no staff are permanently tasked with these duties. As such, it is not possible to provide an annual cost for this activity over the course of the last financial year.

Independent assurances are provided by a number of external agencies, including:

- Internal Audit is provided by the Department of Justice's Internal Audit Branch operating within the NICS Group Internal Audit and Fraud Investigation Service. A three year rolling programme of systems based audits is agreed with the PPS Audit and Risk Committee. The internal audit service is provided in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.
- The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) are responsible for the audit of the PPS Annual Report and Accounts and the Comptroller and Auditor General will provide an opinion on whether they provide a true and fair view; identify, assess and examine risks to regularity, propriety and financial control and report on significant weaknesses; and provide constructive advice to help improve their corporate governance, financial risk management control and reporting.
- The PPS is subject to review by Criminal Justice Inspection (CJI), within the provisions of Part 3 of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002. CJI provides an independent assessment of business efficiency and effectiveness through a programme of thematic reviews.

The PPS is not charged directly for these services and therefore it is not possible to provide precise details of annual costs or the numbers of staff required to carry out these functions.

Finally there is also an Independent Assessor of Complaints (IAC) for the Public Prosecution Service. The role of the IAC is to conduct a review where a complainant is not satisfied with the way in which the PPS has dealt with the matter. The IAC is appointed on the basis of a public recruitment competition. The annual budget for this function is approximately £15,000.

Finally I can confirm that the PPS does not have a dedicated information management system covering all of the above functions.

If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review in accordance with our review procedure. In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to the Assistant Director (Policy), Public Prosecution Service, Belfast Chambers, 93 Chichester Street, Belfast, BT1 3JR or alternatively by sending an e-mail to info@ppsni.gov.uk. You should state clearly the grounds on which you are requesting the review.

Alternatively, you may wish to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision.

The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:
Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Yours Sincerely,

PPS FOI Section