

# NORTHERN JOINT POLICE BOARD

23 January 2009

Agenda Item	
Report No	

## Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 Update Report

### Report by the Chief Constable

#### SUMMARY

This Report updates Members of the Board on the ongoing business arising from the Force's administration of requests made for information under the Freedom of Information (FOI) legislation.

#### Background

Members may recall that a report was submitted to the meeting of the Northern Joint Police Board in January 2008 which provided a breakdown of staff time involved in dealing with FOI requests, details of the nature of requests received and an indication of the costs involved in providing the information.

The purpose of this report is to provide Board Members with a brief update on the current position for the past year in respect of requests received under FOI legislation.

#### Breakdown of Requests for Information

During the period 1 January to 31 December 2008, Northern Constabulary was asked a total of 1458 FOI questions, which represents a **36.5% increase in demand over the same period in 2007**. Assessing against previous years, the current trend indicates this rate of increase will continue, with no sign of levelling off. This is contrary to the forecast expectation based on experience in other countries, that by this stage following initial implementation, the demand would have reached its peak and a known cost could be forecast on an annual basis. There is concern that additional funding will be required to support this business area in 2009-10, diverting resources away from operational policing.

Looking at the source of requests, the breakdown for 2008 was as follows:-

Media	739 questions asked representing	51% of the total
MPs & MSPs	72 questions asked representing	5% of the total
Private Individuals	479 questions asked representing	33% of the total
Solicitors	32 questions asked representing	2% of the total
Business Sector/Public Bodies	136 questions asked representing	9% of the total

## **Costs**

As indicated in the paper submitted to the Board in January 2007, the costs incurred by the Force in complying with the requirements of FOI legislation cannot be outlined in exact terms. This is because the Force does not currently have in place a system for formally measuring the amount of time spent by staff throughout the organisation in undertaking activities as a direct consequence of FOI questions.

With the full year activity levels for 2008 now to hand, the estimate of expenditure is **£122,680**. This figure is broken down into two main elements as follows:-

### **Administration and salary costs:**

#### **£35,200 in total**

Calculated as follows:

Post vacant January 2008 - one month salary not incurred	£1,954
Civilian FOI Officer - 11/12 of annual salary and on costs of NI and Superannuation	£21,500
Civilian DP Officer	£8,000
Senior Line Management - 5% of salary plus on cost of NI	£2,700
Attendance at meetings and training	£1,000
Contribution to Central Referral Unit	£2,000

(The last figure will increase to £2,250 for the financial year 2009-10.)

### **Service Unit contribution to FOI responses:**

#### **£87,480 in total**

Calculated as follows:

Time and effort involved by staff in Service Units and Area Commands on FOI related activities (based on an estimate of 4 hours input per request at £15 per hour).

**Even against the backdrop of the dramatic increase in the volume of work generated under FOI, our revised structure now in place for managing FOI within the FIMU has enabled us to realise a saving against 2007 costs. This amounts to £12,320 but does not equate to a cash saving, as some costs involved are based on FOI business being overseen at Chief Inspector level, rather than Chief Superintendent and an additional month salary should be projected for a full year's costs for the FOI Officer.**

## **Staff**

Following the retiral of PC Duncan Pockett, Mrs Pamela Sherriff was appointed to the police staff post of Freedom of Information Officer at the end of January 2008. The Freedom of Information role moved to the new Force Information Management Unit on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008.

## **Performance**

From February – December, 2008 under current administration, the Force has complied with the 20 day timescales at a level of 92.5%.

## **Future Reporting**

Current reporting is tied in with the historical commencement of the legislation in the month of January. This provides no reporting or oversight benefits and, in future, the reports on performance will tie in with the standard fiscal year reporting pattern.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Board is invited to note the content of this report.

**I Latimer  
Chief Constable  
16 January 2009**