

Date: Tue 16 May 2017 **Reference Number:** 20170840 **FOI Category:** Police Resources - Staff / Officers

Title: Police Officers - Social Media

Request Date: Thursday, 4 May, 2017

Response Date: Tuesday, 16 May, 2017

Request Details:

For the last three years (back to April 2014), can you please specify:

- *The number of complaints made against police officers for inappropriate use of social media*
- *The nature of the complaint – eg, alleged offensive language, homophobic language, inappropriate photograph, etc*
- *The action taken against the officer in each case (disciplinary, written warning, management advice, etc)*
- *The date of the complaint (a month by month breakdown will suffice)*

Secondly, for the same timeframe, can you please specify:

- *The number of complaints made against FORCE-RUN SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS for inappropriate use of social media*
- *The nature of the complaint – eg, alleged offensive language, homophobic language, inappropriate photograph, etc*
- *The action taken in each case*
- *The date of the complaint (a month by month breakdown will suffice)*

Exemptions Applied:

Section 31 (2) (a)(b) - Law Enforcement

SYP Response:

I contacted our Complaints and Discipline Unit for assistance with your request. Following a search of the system the PSD Administrative Support Officer has provided me with the enclosed data, however I cannot provide it to you in full.

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires South Yorkshire Police, 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 that would not otherwise be apparent) why the exemption applies).

I believe the following exemption will be engaged:

Section 31(2) (a)(b) - Law Enforcement

HARM

It would be harmful to release information into the public domain, of ongoing cases relating to alleged misconduct of employees. 1 case has been identified as being live, and the release of further details of the allegations at this stage may be likely to compromise such investigations and ultimately the right for a fair and transparent hearing.

PUBLIC INTEREST TEST

Section 31 – Favouring Disclosure

- The public would have a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding police complaints and the use of public funds to investigate such allegations.

Section 31 – Favouring Non-Disclosure

- If allegations are still being investigated, the disclosure of such information into the public domain may mean the investigation is prejudiced.

Balance

The principle of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 is to make public bodies more open and accountable and to help people to understand how public authorities carry out their duties. This must be balanced with the fact that we cannot take into account 'who' a requestor is. A response under Freedom of Information is essentially a response to the world as questions and responses are routinely published on our website

Although I am fully aware of the need for Public Authorities to demonstrate a level of openness and transparency, I am of the opinion that protecting information relating to any *ongoing* investigation is a more compelling argument. Therefore, at this time, the public interest favours withholding of the information in full. However, we are prepared to release details relating closed cases.

Force Run Social Media Accounts

Month/Year	Circumstances	Action
May-14	Complainants name and photograph were shown on an appeal on Facebook and the Doncaster Free Press website. This has had a negative impact on the complainant's reputation.	Local Resolved - NFA
Aug-15	Complainant alleges that they witnessed online bullying on South Yorkshire Police's Facebook page.	Local Resolved - NFA

Social Media Complaints

Month/Year	Circumstances	Action
Mar-16	A Special Constable has posted racially offensive comments on Facebook	Dismissed
Sep-16	Officer has posted confidential information about an incident they attended on a public area of Facebook	No case to answer
Oct-16	Complainant states that having dealt with an Officer in a professional environment, the Officer contacted the complainant via Twitter and communicated via private messaging through Twitter	Withdrawn