

6 August 2024

FOI Ref 16685

Request - You asked us the following:

- Police practices for the main searching activity during missing persons investigations (e.g. evaluating the effectiveness of various operational models such as dedicated missing persons teams, CID, CSE teams)
- Police approaches in terms of tools used to locate missing persons in a timely fashion (e.g. GPS systems, social media platforms).
- Police strategies utilised to effectively manage risk –e.g. guidance and operational directions provided to distribute response proportionate to the classification of risk (no apparent risk, low, medium, high).
- Police officers' experiences, views and perceptions of the usefulness and effectiveness of these strategies, tactics or tools.
- Cost effectiveness of police practices in missing persons investigations (e.g. evaluation of the cost vs the successful outcomes achieved by using GPS tracking software, DNA analysis, or social media platforms).

We received your request on 25/03/2024 and have processed this under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Please find below our response.

Staffordshire Police holds the following requested information.

- Police practices for the main searching activity during missing persons investigations (e.g. evaluating the effectiveness of various operational models such as dedicated missing persons teams, CID, CSE teams) – **No information held.**
- Police approaches in terms of tools used to locate missing persons in a timely fashion (e.g. GPS systems, social media platforms). – **Information held.**
- Police strategies utilised to effectively manage risk –e.g. guidance and operational directions provided to distribute response proportionate to the classification of risk (no apparent risk, low, medium, high). – **Information held.**
- Police officers' experiences, views and perceptions of the usefulness and effectiveness of these strategies, tactics or tools. – **No information held.**
- Cost effectiveness of police practices in missing persons investigations (e.g. evaluation of the cost vs the successful outcomes achieved by using GPS tracking software, DNA analysis, or social media platforms). – **No information held.**

Staffordshire Police discloses/withholds the following information.

- Police approaches in terms of tools used to locate missing persons in a timely fashion (e.g. GPS systems, social media platforms). – **Partially disclosed, Staffordshire Police utilise press appeals, CCTV research, house to house enquiries and interrogation of police systems.**
- Police strategies utilised to effectively manage risk –e.g. guidance and operational directions provided to distribute response proportionate to the classification of risk (no apparent risk, low, medium, high). – **Disclosed, Staffordshire Police use the College of Policing Approved Professional Practice as guidance when providing a response to missing persons and their risk.**

Please note that this data has been provided to the best of our ability, subject to the limitation of current recording protocols and systems/software.

Every effort is made to ensure that the data presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that this has been extracted from multiple sources, developed for specific policing purposes, for which data extraction methods have not been specifically designed to directly correlate with the terminology of this request. Therefore, the data presented is subject to the inaccuracies and idiosyncrasies inherent in any large-scale recording system.

As a consequence, care should be taken in the interpretation and presentation of this data, so as to not misrepresent the whole or any part of the data disclosed.

The above information has been withheld for the following reasons:

While Staffordshire Police have disclosed some of the methods and tools we use in order to locate missing persons, a missing persons investigation is no different from a criminal investigation with regards to police tactics. Disclosure of further details relating to the tools and tactics regularly employed within missing persons investigations would prejudice police activities both for ongoing and future investigations. Whilst not questioning the motives of the applicant, it is well known that criminals and other adversaries monitor information released under the Freedom of information Act and therefore we must be mindful of the information we place into the public domain and the impact this may have.

Disclosure of detailed information upon the regular processes, tools and tactics employed by Staffordshire police within any given missing person investigation would allow the criminal fraternity access to this information. This would allow them to develop strategies and tactics to circumvent these to their own benefit, allowing them to more effectively target their offending or take measures to avoid detection. This would therefore be highly likely to cause significant harm to the law enforcement function of Staffordshire Police and impair the administration of justice.

The following exemptions have been applied:

- **Section 31(1)(a)(b) - Law Enforcement.**

Information is exempt from disclosure under S31(1)(a)(b) where the release of Information would, or would likely to, prejudice the prevention and detection of crime and/ or the apprehension or prosecution of offenders. This exemption is qualified and prejudice-based and, as such, we are required to evidence the harm in disclosure and apply the public interest test.

Public Interest Test

Factors favouring disclosure under Section 31(1)(a)(b)

To disclose this information would adhere to the basic principle of being open and transparent, it would also lead to a better public awareness of the workings of the police force and the methods used with operations and during routine policing.

Factors favouring non-disclosure under Section 31(1)(a)(b)

Releasing such data would give those individuals with the intent to do so, the intelligence required to disrupt police activity. This knowledge would allow those with ill intent to target their offending more effectively which would inevitably lead to an increased likelihood of criminal activity and an increased danger to the public. Any disclosure of information which is likely to undermine Staffordshire Police's ability to serve the public in preventing and detecting crime can only be considered as being harmful to the public.

Disclosure of further details relating to the tactics, tools and strategies employed within missing person cases would harm police activities and therefore impact on Staffordshire Police's ability to enforce the law, negatively impacting upon the prevention and detection of crime, the apprehension or prosecution of offenders, and unnecessarily endanger the public.

Balance test

When considering whether disclosure is appropriate, we must weigh the strongest reason for disclosure against the strongest reasons for non-disclosure. In this case, whilst the factors favouring disclosure are important in that it would adhere to the basic principle of being open and transparent, we believe when weighed against the risk of disclosure undermining our ability to prevent and detect crime and hindering our ability to protect the public, then non-disclosure takes precedence.

Next steps

You can ask us to review our response.

If you would like us to carry out a review of our response, please let us know within two months of the date of receipt of this email, review requests should be addressed to:



STAFFORDSHIRE
POLICE

foi@staffordshire.police.uk

Or by Post to:

Central Disclosure Unit
Staffordshire Police HQ
PO Box 3167
Stafford
ST16 9JZ

Please remember to quote the reference number in any future communications.

Freedom of Information
Central Disclosure Unit