

10 December 2024

FOI Ref 17540

Request - You asked us the following:

I am writing to request information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 about crimes involving vehicle number plates within your jurisdiction. Specifically, I am seeking data on incidents reported in the last five years that involved:

1. Non-compliant number plates:
 - a. Plates purchased from suppliers not registered with the Register of Number Plate Suppliers (RNPS).
 - b. Plates failing to conform to British Standards (e.g., BS AU 145e).
 - c. Mis-spaced or tampered plates, including those altered to obscure identification.
 - d. Plates incorporating unauthorized fonts, colours, designs, or patterns.
2. Criminal uses of number plates:
 - a. Plates used on cloned or "ringed" vehicles.
 - b. Stolen number plates reported as part of other crimes (e.g., theft, fraud, or burglary).
 - c. Counterfeit or fake number plates detected in circulation.
3. Vehicle-related fraud and deception:
 - a. Plates used to evade Automated Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems.
 - b. Plates linked to "drive-offs" (e.g., fuel theft) or other crimes involving untraceable vehicles.
 - c. Plates associated with insurance or identity fraud.
4. Organized and environmental crimes:
 - a. Number plates linked to organized vehicle crime syndicates, such as car theft or illegal exportation of cloned vehicles.
 - b. Plates involved in environmental crimes, such as fly-tipping, where unregistered vehicles were used to avoid detection.
5. Enforcement and policy data:
 - a. How the constabulary monitors compliance with vehicle number plate regulations (including ANPR system capabilities for detecting non-compliant plates).
 - b. Any policies, guidelines, or operational procedures related to number plate crimes or compliance enforcement.
 - c. The most common penalties or resolutions (e.g., prosecutions, warnings, or other actions) for offenses involving number plates.

For each category, I would appreciate:

- Annual data for the past five years.
- Summaries or statistical insights into trends, if available.
- Details of the most frequent offenses and any notable cases, where this does not breach privacy or confidentiality.

I understand this request may require effort to compile; however, I believe it is important to provide the public with a clearer understanding of how vehicle number plate-related crimes are being addressed and their implications for road safety, crime prevention, and environmental harm.

If my request is too broad, I am happy to work with you to refine it. If any part of my request cannot be fulfilled, please provide a detailed explanation, including the exemptions under the Act that apply.

We received your request on 29/11/2024 and have processed this under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Staffordshire Police's response to your enquiry is as follows:

In accordance with Section 17(1) of the Freedom of Information Act, this letter represents a refusal notice for this particular request.

The following exemption has been applied:

- Section 12(1) where the cost of compliance exceeds the appropriate limit.
- Section 12(1) does not oblige a public authority to comply with a request for information if the authority estimates that the cost of complying with the request would exceed the prescribed limit'.

The above information has been withheld for the following reasons:

There is no method by which we can readily retrieve information from our systems to answer this request. For the time period requested, there have been in excess of 47,000 incidents that may be linked to crimes relating to number plates which may or may not include non-compliance, criminal use of number plates, vehicle-related fraud, organised crime and environmental crimes, and in excess of 29,000 incidents of theft that may include stolen number plates recorded as other crimes. In order to determine whether these incidents conform to your request, the record for each incident would require manual review. Further review would also need to be undertaken to establish the most common outcomes of these incidents. From dip sampling, it has been estimated that it would take approximately 5-10 minutes to review each record to answer this request, this would equate to between 6,333 and 12,666 hours. To achieve this task would therefore exceed the 18-hour time and cost threshold of the Freedom of Information Act by some considerable margin.

Advice and assistance

Section 16 of the Act places an obligation upon the Authority to provide advice and assistance, in order to comply with this obligation please see below.

Staffordshire Police do hold information relating to question 5 b. 'Any policies, guidelines, or operational procedures related to number plate crimes or compliance enforcement', however, further substantive exemptions may apply.

Freedom of Information Request Appeals Procedure

1. Who Can Ask for a Review

Any person who has requested information from Staffordshire Police, which has been dealt with under the Freedom of Information Act, is entitled to complain and request an internal review, if they are dissatisfied with the response they received.

2. How to Request a Review

Requests for review of a Freedom of Information request must be made in writing within two months of the date of receipt of this email, and should be addressed to:

foi@staffordshire.police.uk

Or by Post to:

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

The reference number, date of the request and details of why the review is being requested must be included. Requests for review should be brought to the attention of the Central Disclosure Unit within two months of the Force's response to the original FOI request.

3. Review Procedure

Receipt of a request for review will be acknowledged in writing. The review will be conducted by another Decision Maker who is independent from the original Decision Maker. The Central Disclosure Unit will set a target date for a response. The response will be made as soon as is practicable with the intention to complete the review within 20 working days. In more complex cases the review may take up to 40 working days.

The independent Decision Maker will conduct a review of the handling of the request for information and of decisions taken, including decisions taken about where the public interest lies in respect of exempt information where applicable. The review enables a re-evaluation of the case, taking into account the matters raised by the complaint.

4. Conclusion of the Appeal

On completion of the review the Independent Decision maker will reply to the complainant with the result of the review. If the complainant is still dissatisfied following the review they should contact the Information Commissioner to make an appeal. The Information Commissioner can be contacted via the following details:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF



STAFFORDSHIRE
POLICE

ICO Website for complaints link: <https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/foi-and-eir-complaints/foi-and-eir-complaints/>

Freedom of Information
Central Disclosure Unit