

18 November 2024

FOI Ref 17409

Request - You asked us the following:

Please can you supply me data on how many cases of Femal Genital Mutilation (FGM) were reported to you between 2000 and 2024.

We received your request on 28/10/2024 and have processed this under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

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

Staffordshire Police holds the requested information.

- Please can you supply me data on how many cases of Femal Genital Mutilation (FGM) were reported to you between 2000 and 2024. – **Withheld.**

The following exemptions have been applied:

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

With regards to this request I am citing Section 31(1)(a)(b) - Law Enforcement.

Section 31 is a qualified prejudice-based exemption and is subject to a public interest test.

Harm:

Any disclosure under FOI is a disclosure to the world and not just to the individual making the request. FGM offences, which falls under the umbrella of honour based violence, occurs within communities of specific demographic trends. To disclose a statistic which would reveal specific details of investigative activity into these offences would undermine the smooth delivery of operational law enforcement as there is potential for community unrest to occur, as well as unrest within family members. Furthermore, disclosure may reveal identification or misidentification of victims which could lead to further violent offences occurring as well as the potential for victims being removed from their families and taken abroad against their will.

Public Interest Test

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

In this case disclosure of the information would provide openness and transparency relating to this type of offending.

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

When the current or future law enforcement role of the force may be compromised by the release of information, the effectiveness of the force will be reduced. In this case, for the reasons outlined in the evidenced harm, the effectiveness of dealing with crimes such as FGM would compromise law enforcement.

To disclose data which could cause community unrest would not be in the public interest and would impact on frontline policing, which is often over stretched. Although there is currently a national ongoing major recruitment of police officers, this will not impact on the day to day policing establishment for quite some time.

The personal safety of individuals, including both the general public and police officers and staff, is of paramount importance to the Police Service and must be considered in respect of every release. As stated within the harm a disclosure under Freedom of Information is a release to the world and any disclosure which compromises an individual(s) health and safety is not in the public interest.

Balance Test

As always the Freedom of Information Act has a presumption of disclosure, unless when balancing the competing public interest factors the prejudice to the community outweighs the benefits. In this case, there is an argument for disclosure, inasmuch as the public have a right to know that this type of criminal offending is appropriately dealt with by the Police Service. However, this must be balanced against the negative impact these disclosures can make. Any form of abuse is abhorrent and if disclosing information undermines the apprehension of offenders cannot be in the public interest. The health and safety of any individual is of paramount importance to the Police Service as a whole.

In this case taking into account the negatives identified above, they outweigh any tangible community benefit and therefore the balance does not favour disclosure at this time.

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

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