

24 April 2025

FOI Ref 21242

Request - You asked us the following:

This is a request for information about the number of stolen mobile phones that have been recovered by police. I understand that it is impossible to reunite many with their owners because many devices aren't registered stolen or the IMEI numbers are unknown by their owner.

1. How many stolen or suspected stolen mobile phones are currently held by the force having been recovered by officers?
2. How many stolen or suspected stolen phones have been recovered by the force in the past five years? If possible it would be helpful if this data is broken down by year.
3. Of these, how many have successfully been returned to their owners?

I understand that questions 2 and 3 will be harder to answer (I imagine the first one could be answered with a simple inventory check) so if they are impossible to provide a clear response to I will accept an answer to just question one.

Any relevant images of recovered devices would also be very helpful.

Please let me know if you require any further information or clarification from me.

We received your request on 22/04/2025 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. With regard to Q1, Staffordshire Police currently have 16,790 mobile phones boked into our property system but the only way to establish a) whether or not a phone is stolen/suspected stolen or not and b) whether or not the phone was seized/recovered by a police officer or not, would be to carry out a very labour intensive manual trawl through each property record in turn.

Similarly with regard to Q2 and Q3, a manual trawl would have to be carried out to establish how many stolen/suspected stolen phones have been recovered/returned in the last 5 years.

From dip sampling, it has been estimated that it would take approximately 2 minutes to manually review each entry, this would equate to over 559 hours. To achieve this task would therefore exceed the 18-hour time and cost threshold stipulated by the FOI Act by some considerable margin.



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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.

Unfortunately, we cannot suggest a way in which your request could be simplified or pared down in order to bring it within the confines of the time and cost threshold.

Please be advised that all Freedom of Information request responses are published on the Staffordshire Police website although personal details are not included.

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



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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