

12 August 2025

FOI Ref 21651

Request - You asked us the following:

Thank you for your response to my FOI request regarding mobile phone data extraction in RASSO investigations.

I understand that certain information has been withheld under Section 31 (law enforcement). While I appreciate the need to protect operational capability, I would be grateful if you could:

- Confirm whether a redacted or summary version of the information might be available;
- Consider whether disclosing the type or category of tools used (e.g. whether selective extraction is possible) could be released without disclosing specific product names or technical configurations;
- Confirm whether any details have already been released to the public in previous FOIs or via other transparency channels.

I recognise the need to balance transparency with public safety and appreciate any further clarification or consideration you're able to offer.

Additionally, I understand that some materials were withheld under Section 21 (information accessible by other means) and/or Section 40 (personal information). Where possible, I'd be grateful if you could clarify:

- Whether the materials referenced under Section 21 are force-specific versions of national guidance, or whether only the NPCC national materials are used;
- If redacted versions of any internal policies or forms might be shared, with sensitive or personal data removed;
- Or whether a summary of force-specific processes could be shared instead.

We received your request on 29/07/2025 and have processed this under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

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

Staffordshire Police holds some of the requested information.

- Confirm whether a redacted or summary version of the information might be available;

Please note that the FOI Act 2000 only extends to requests for recorded information. It does not require public authorities to create information to answer questions generally; only if the information is already held in recorded form. The Act does not extend to requests for information about policies or their implementation, or the merits or demerits of any proposal or action - unless, of course, the answer to any such request is already held in recorded form.

- Consider whether disclosing the type or category of tools used (e.g. whether selective extraction is possible) could be released without disclosing specific product names or technical configurations; - **Withheld, section 31.**
- Confirm whether any details have already been released to the public in previous FOIs or via other transparency channels. – **No information held, other than what has previously been disclosed for FOI 21305.**
- I recognise the need to balance transparency with public safety and appreciate any further clarification or consideration you're able to offer.
Additionally, I understand that some materials were withheld under Section 21 (information accessible by other means) and/or Section 40 (personal information). Where possible, I'd be grateful if you could clarify:
- Whether the materials referenced under Section 21 are force-specific versions of national guidance, or whether only the NPCC national materials are used; - **Disclosed, National Forms.**
- If redacted versions of any internal policies or forms might be shared, with sensitive or personal data removed; – **No information held.**
- Or whether a summary of force-specific processes could be shared instead. – **No information held.**

The following exemption has been applied:

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

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

Information is exempt from disclosure under section 31 (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.

Harm:

Releasing information about digital extraction tools about mobile phones would prejudice law enforcement by exposing technical capabilities and potential vulnerabilities. This information could be exploited by criminals to evade detection, manipulate digital evidence, or deploy digital techniques to attack or mitigate the effectiveness of any systems or software disclosed. This knowledge could help the criminal fraternity to refine their methods in order to increase their chances of evading detection. This would have a huge impact on the effective delivery of operational law enforcement as it would leave forces open to cyberattack which could impact computer devices.

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 use of technology in investigations

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 and expose any such systems to attack or allow offenders to research for known deficiencies and use these to mitigate their effectiveness. All of which would inevitably lead to an increased likelihood of criminal activity, decrease the effectiveness of these tools and therefore increase the dangers posed to the public. Any disclosure of information which is likely to undermine the ability to serve the public in preventing and detecting crime can only be considered as being harmful to the public and may encourage targeted cyberattacks against systems..

Balance test

Staffordshire Police is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve. Whilst the factors favouring disclosure are important in that it would adhere to the basic principle of being open and transparent, disclosing details of specific digital extractions tools could pose a clear risk to investigative integrity and expose any such systems to attack or allow offenders to research any known deficiencies and use these to mitigate their effectiveness. 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.

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:



STAFFORDSHIRE
POLICE

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