

15 August 2025

FOI Ref 21685

Request - You asked us the following:

I am writing to request the following information under the Freedom of Information Act.

Q1) For the past 10 years, please share the number of reports received by the police where a victim suspects hidden spyware, AKA stalkerware, has been installed on their device by someone else, in order to track their location or monitor their activity.

Please include search results for any of the following phrases:
'stalkerware', 'spyware', 'mSpy', and 'tracking app'.

- a) 2015
- b) 2016
- c) 2017
- d) 2018
- e) 2019
- f) 2020
- g) 2021
- h) 2022
- i) 2023
- j) 2024
- k) 2025 – latest available data

Q2) Of the reports in Q1, how many of the victims were aged under 25?

- a) 2015
- b) 2016
- c) 2017
- d) 2018
- e) 2019
- f) 2020
- g) 2021
- h) 2022
- i) 2023
- j) 2024

We received your request on 05/08/2025 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. For this first week in January 2025 alone there have been in excess of 4,870 occurrences. Manual review of each occurrence would be required in order to determine whether each related to a victim suspecting hidden spyware or stalkerware installed on their device and whether the victim was under 25. To extract this data would therefore require a very labour-intensive manual trawl through each record. From dip sampling, it has been estimated that it would take approximately 4 minutes to review each record to answer this request, this would equate to over 324 hours. To achieve this task would therefore exceed the 18-hour time and cost threshold of the FOI 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.

In order to assist in refining your request. Data could be provided from a free text search of our incident reporting for incidents containing the words 'stalkerware', 'spyware', 'mSpy', and 'tracking app'; this could be broken down by year.

However, please note: this would be a contextless free text search of our incident recording system and would only include incidents containing the words searched, plural or singular versions of the words would not be returned unless also specified within the search parameters.

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