

5 February 2025

FOI Ref 17641

Request - You asked us the following:

1. The number of children (17 and under) who were flagged as victims of Child Criminal Exploitation in relation to county lines drug dealing and separately, the number of these children who were recorded as being in care (looked-after child). If possible, with age, gender and ethnicity provided for each sets.

2. The number of children (17 and under) who were charged with drug supply offences related to county lines drug dealing and separately, the number of these children who were recorded as being in care (looked-after child). If possible, with age, gender and ethnicity provided for both sets.

3. Number of missing incidents of children (17 and under) who were missing from care with the following information provided:

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Location reported missing from (local or out of force area)
- Whether the child had been assigned a child criminal exploitation/county lines flag.
- If possible, the type of care setting child was missing from.

Could I please have the above information for the following dates: between 1st January 2022 to 1st January 2025.

We received your request on 08/01/2025 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 easily retrieve information from our systems to answer question 1 of this request. For the time period requested, there have been in excess of 1,777 occurrences with a child exploitation flag, in order to ascertain whether these individuals were a victim of child criminal exploitation in relation to county lines, the record for each flag would require a manual review. To extract this data

would therefore require a very labour-intensive manual trawl through each record. Additionally, to extract further details such as age, gender and ethnicity would require a further review of the records.

From dip sampling, it has been estimated that it would take approximately 15 minutes to review each record to answer this request, this would equate to over 444 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 refine your request data can be provided for question 2 in full and for question 3 including the number of missing incidents of children in care along with age, gender and ethnicity. Please be advised that the location they were reported missing from, whether they had a criminal exploitation flag/county lines flag assigned to them and the type of care setting cannot be provided due to either not being held or due to them not being easily retrievable on the system used to service this request.

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.



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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