

26 February 2025

FOI Ref 17696

Request - You asked us the following:

Q.1 How many attempted and successful child abductions occurred in your regional police force area during the years of 2018 and 2019, broken down by month.

Q.2 How many attempted and successful child abductions occurred in your regional police force area during the year of 2024, broken down by month - and during the month of January 2025, to date.

With respect to the 2024 attempted and successful child abductions could you please tell me:

Q.3 Where did these attempted/successful abductions take place?

Q.4 When did they take place?

Q.5 What description of the attempted/successful abductor was made available to the public?

Q.6 What description of the attempted/successful abductor is held on record?

CLARIFICATION RECEIVED ON 22/01/2025

I am really only concerned the non-parental attempted/successful abductions.

We received your request on 20/01/2025 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.

- Q.1 How many attempted and successful child abductions occurred in your regional police force area during the years of 2018 and 2019, broken down by month. – **Withheld, please see the below exemption.**
- Q.2 How many attempted and successful child abductions occurred in your regional police force area during the year of 2024, broken down by month - and during the month of January 2025, to date. – **Withheld, please see the below exemption.**
- With respect to the 2024 attempted and successful child abductions could you please tell me:
- Q.3 Where did these attempted/successful abductions take place? – **Withheld, please see the below exemption.**
- Q.4 When did they take place? – **Withheld, please see the below exemption.**
- Q.5 What description of the attempted/successful abductor was made available to the public? – **No information held.**
- Q.6 What description of the attempted/successful abductor is held on record? - **Withheld, please see the below exemption.**
- CLARIFICATION RECEIVED ON 22/01/2025
- I am really only concerned the non-parental attempted/successful abductions.

Please note that although the data has been exempted, as a good will gesture, outside of the FOI Act, data has been provided for question 1 and 2 in yearly totals. Please see the accompanying file titled 'FOI 17696 Child Abductions Data'.

Please be advised that the data relates to the offences of 'Kidnapping' and 'Abduction of child by other persons'.

Please note that there is one offence in 2024 that is still being investigated so with regard to this case we are citing Section 30(1)(a)(b) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 – Investigations conducted by Public Authorities. This offence has been provided in the overall figure for 2024 but any further information or breakdown has been excluded from the dataset to avoid investigative prejudice and identification.

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 parts of this particular request.

- Section 30(1)(a)(b) - Criminal Investigations

Section 30 is qualified and class based and, as such, we are required to apply the public interest test.

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

Information is exempt from disclosure under S31(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.

- Section 40(2) - Personal Information

Section 40(2) is an absolute exemption which means that there is no need to quantify the harm that may arise from the disclosure; neither is it subject to a public interest test.

To release personal or third-party information held by Staffordshire Police, would breach the data protection principles; namely –

- Data is lawfully and fairly processed.
- Processed in line with an individual's rights.
- Data is secure.

Personal and third-party information cannot be released under the Freedom of Information Act.

Disclosure under Freedom of Information is a release of information to the world in general and not an individual applicant.

Staffordshire Police can neither confirm nor deny that it holds any other information you have requested as it believes the duty in s1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the duty to confirm whether the public authority holds information of the specified description), does not apply, by virtue of the following exemptions:

- Section 23(5) – Information supplied by Security Bodies.

Section 23 is an absolute class-based exemption and as such does not require the application of a Public Interest Test.

Harm – Section 31:

Any disclosure under FOI is a disclosure to the world and not just to the individual making the request. To disclose statistics regarding child abduction offences would reveal specific details of the victims and suspects involved and the investigative activity into these offences. This would undermine the smooth delivery of operational law enforcement as there is potential for unrest and disruption to occur. Furthermore, disclosure may reveal identification or misidentification of victims which could lead to further offences occurring as well as the potential for victims to be targeted.

Public Interest Test**Factors favouring disclosure under Section 30(1)(a)(b)**

Disclosure of the information would improve the public's knowledge and understanding of the investigatory process and, as all police investigations are publicly funded, would show how public funds are being spent.

Factors favouring non-disclosure under Section 30(1)(a)(b)

Disclosure of the requested information would prejudice how investigations are carried out in the future. Staffordshire Police is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve. Any release of information relating to ongoing investigations could prejudice and undermine those investigations. The prevention and detection of such matters could therefore be hindered and therefore risk interference with evidence, which could have detrimental impact on future investigations. In addition, the right to a fair trial could be undermined.

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.

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 child abduction would compromise law enforcement.

To disclose data which could cause 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

Disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act is a release of information to the world in general and not an individual applicant. 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 and if disclosing information undermines the apprehension of offenders then this cannot be in the public interest. The health and safety of any individual is of paramount importance to the Police Service as a whole.

Having considered the public interest factors we are required to determine whether on balance the factors favouring disclosure outweigh those which are against disclosure. It is our view that the factors favouring disclosure do not outweigh those which favour non-disclosure.

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.



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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