

3 March 2025

FOI Ref 17645

Request - You asked us the following:

Could you please provide me with a list of the occasions when armed police units have been sent to hospitals since January 1 2020.

For each occasion could you please give the date, the name of the hospital, the number of officers deployed and, if possible, a brief description of the incident.

We received your request on 05/02/2025 and have processed this under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

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

Staffordshire Police holds the requested information.

- Could you please provide me with a list of the occasions when armed police units have been sent to hospitals since January 1 2020.

For each occasion could you please give the date, the name of the hospital, the number of officers deployed and, if possible, a brief description of the incident. – **Partially disclosed, please see below:**

1. 19/04/2021 - Subject in mental health unit, St Georges Hospital, with a handgun in a bag seen by staff member.
2. 26/07/2021 – Male standing within the Royal Stoke Hospital, A&E Department stating he has a bomb in a black bag.
3. 26/09/2021 - Report of male arriving at Ellsmere House, St Georges Hospital, Stafford with a sword.
4. 02/07/2023 - Report of male subject with a sword at the entrance of the Royal Stoke Hospital.
5. 18/04/2024 - Report of a group of people after the individual with a shotgun at Royal Stoke Hospital. Hoax call, individual suffering mental health breakdown (monkey dust).

Please be advised the number of firearms officers deployed, has been exempt under section 24 and 31.

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 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 24 – National Security

Section 24 is a qualified exemption and as such there is a requirement to articulate the harm and conduct a test of the public interest.

Harm:

Disclosure of information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) is considered to be a release to the world and not only to the person requesting the information. Once information has been released, it is published on the Disclosure Log pages of the Staffordshire Police external website and therefore is available to anyone. Whilst not questioning an applicant's motives for requesting information, due to the information being accessible to all, consideration has to be given to the information being seen by individuals who are involved in criminal activity including terrorism related offences.

Whilst there is a call for openness and transparency, when considering requests under the FOIA, this must be balanced against the harm in disclosure of the information being requested. It is generally recognised, in the current environment, that the international security landscape is increasingly complex and unpredictable. The current UK threat level from international terrorism, based on intelligence, is assessed as 'SUBSTANTIAL'. This means that a terrorist attack is likely. Please see below:-

<https://www.mi5.gov.uk/threat-levels>

The Police Service is charged with enforcing the law, preventing and detecting crime and protecting the communities we serve. In order to achieve these objectives we are allowed to use reasonable force when necessary to do so. In the ultimate circumstance, this can include the use of lethal force, but the rule of thumb is to use the minimum amount necessary to achieve the objective. In reality this equates to the use of the minimum amount of force to overcome the violence used or threatened, by those wishing to cause harm.

As part of this equation, we also have to pay heed to the Human Rights Conventions, particularly Article 2 – The Right to Life. The law and regulations relating to the use of force are detailed within the Authorised Professional Practice (APP) document for Armed Policing, see below link:

<https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/armed-policing/?s>

Providing the requested information would reveal tactical capability and is likely to influence those involved in criminal behaviour who are prepared to resort to the use of extreme force in order to avoid detection and capture. Where police capabilities are known this would allow offenders to be armed to overcome the police response. This would create an 'arms race' to the detriment of those involved in criminal activity, as the use of lethal weapons becomes more and more the only resolution option, thus endangering both the public and officers themselves. This is best evidenced by the fact that the United Kingdom, even in violent times, have been able to maintain a basically unarmed Police Service.

The prevention and detection of crime is the foundation upon which policing is built and the police have a clear responsibility to prevent crime, arrest those responsible for committing crime and those who plan to commit crime. However, there is also a duty of care to the public at large. The UK Police Service has a

positive undertaking to protect the public from harm and that duty of care to all involved, must be the overriding consideration.

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 communications used with operations and during routine policing.

Factors favouring non-disclosure under Section 31(1)(a)(b)

The deployment of Firearms Officers is measured and authorised by Chief Officers, only after careful consideration, in order to protect the public and apprehend individuals who use lethal weapons as part of their criminality. To disclose any details of firearms or firearms officers would identify force vulnerabilities, both locally and national. This would reveal tactical capability and place Staffordshire Police at a tactical disadvantage. In addition, disclosure may also 'create' a fear of crime within the general public relating to armed policing.

The risk to public safety cannot be ignored and Staffordshire Police has a responsibility to ensure the safety of individuals is protected at all times.

Factors favouring disclosure - Section 24(1)

Any information that would increase public knowledge in showing how resources are allocated would favour disclosure. This would also support the fundamental purpose of the Freedom of Information Act, which is to be more open and transparent in the way in which we police Staffordshire, making us more accountable for our actions.

Releasing any details regarding the use of firearms would provide reassurance to the public that Staffordshire Police is appropriately resourced in this area and would be in a position to respond to any National Security threats or incidents. Any information which would allow for more accurate public debate would be a positive factor for disclosure.

Factors favouring non-disclosure - Section 24(1)

The disclosure of the requested information would be to the advantage of individuals, including those involved in terrorism related activity. Disclosure would allow for assessments to be made as to our capabilities where an armed policing response is required. Where information is released on a national basis, this could indicate force areas which may be considered more vulnerable, resulting in those areas being targeted.

All UK police forces have a duty to fulfil their national security functions. The disclosure of this information would increase the risk to the safety of the public. The personal safety of the public is inextricably linked to national security and any information that could identify vulnerabilities would not be disclosed.

Balance test

There is a significant public interest in the transparency of policing resources for specialist departments, and providing assurance that the Police Service is appropriately and effectively allocating resources to Armed Policing. There is also a very strong public interest in ensuring that information is not disclosed which would have a negative impact on our law enforcement capabilities.

Public safety is of paramount importance and any information which would place individuals at risk and compromise the National Security of the UK, no matter how generic, is not in the public interest. The effective delivery of operational law enforcement is crucial.

As much as there is a public interest in knowing that the delivery of law enforcement is appropriate and balanced, this would only be overridden in exceptional circumstances.

Therefore, at this moment in time, it is our opinion that for these reasons, the balance test for disclosure is not made out.

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



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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