

12 March 2025

FOI Ref 17839

**Request - You asked us the following:**

The number of requests for user data made by Staffordshire Police to the following companies since 2015 to date. Please provide separate figures for each company, broken down by calendar year.

- Google / Alphabet
- Apple
- Microsoft
- Facebook / Meta
- Twitter / X
- TikTok
- Snapchat

We received your request on 14/02/2025 and have processed this under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

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

**Staffordshire Police holds some of the requested information.**

- The number of requests for user data made by Staffordshire Police to the following companies since 2015 to date. Please provide separate figures for each company, broken down by calendar year.

- Google / Alphabet
- Apple
- Microsoft
- Facebook / Meta
- Twitter / X
- TikTok
- Snapchat

- **Partially disclosed, please see the accompanying file titled 'FOI 17839 User Data Requests Data'.**

Please be advised that the data is only held in financial years on the system used to service this request.

Please note that this data has been provided to the best of our ability, subject to the limitation of current recording protocols and systems/software. Additional requests may have been recorded during these timescales but are awaiting finalisation and input onto these systems and would not be present within this dataset.

Every effort is made to ensure that the data presented is accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that this has been extracted from multiple sources, developed for specific policing purposes, for which data extraction methods have not been specifically designed to directly correlate with the terminology of this request. Therefore, the data presented is subject to the inaccuracies and idiosyncrasies inherent in any large-scale recording system.

As a consequence, care should be taken in the interpretation and presentation of this data, so as to not misrepresent the whole or any part of the data disclosed.

Please be advised that all Freedom of Information request responses are published on the Staffordshire Police website although personal details are not included.

Staffordshire Police can neither confirm nor deny whether any further information relevant to this request is held, as the duty in Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 does not apply by virtue of the following exemptions:

- Section 24(2) National Security
- Section 31(3) Law enforcement

Sections 24(2) and 31(3) are qualified, prejudice-based exemptions and require evidence of harm and a public interest test to be carried out before they can be relied upon.

### **Harm**

Disclosure under FOIA is considered a release to the public at large. Whilst not questioning the motives of the applicant, confirming or denying that any other information is held regarding the number of requests made during investigations of a covert nature to the companies in question would reveal levels of policing activity at the most serious levels of crime, including terrorism. This could result in identifying whether one or more companies might be more or less used by criminals and therefore the likely focus of police enquiries than others, which would lead to an increase of harm to covert investigations and compromise law enforcement. This would be to the detriment of providing an efficient policing service and a failure in providing a duty of care to all members of the public.

The threat from terrorism cannot be ignored, and it is well established that police forces use covert tactics and surveillance to gain intelligence in order to counteract criminal behaviour. As such, it has been previously documented in the media that many terrorist incidents have been thwarted due to intelligence gained by these means.

Confirming or denying that any other information is held may also suggest the limitations of police capabilities and the success rate of determining which companies will be more or less compliant upon request. Such results, if held, may further encourage criminal/terrorist activity by exposing potential vulnerabilities. This detrimental effect is increased if the request is made to several different law enforcement bodies. This can be useful information to those with mal-intent. It would have the likelihood of identifying location-specific operations which would ultimately compromise police tactics, operations and future prosecutions as criminals could counteract measures that might be used against them, such as altering online behaviour to avoid detection.

Any information identifying the focus of policing activity could be used to the advantage of terrorists or criminal organisations. Information that undermines the operational integrity of these activities will adversely affect public safety and have a negative impact on both national security and law enforcement.

### **Public Interest Test**

#### **Factors favouring Neither Confirming or Denying for Section 24**

Any further information, if held, simply relates to national security and confirming or denying whether it is held would not actually harm it. The public are entitled to know what public funds are spent on and how effective policing and security measures are. By confirming or denying whether any other information is held regarding such requests to these companies for the purposes of covert investigations would lead to a better informed public.

#### **Factors against Neither Confirming or Denying for Section 24**

By confirming or denying whether any other information is held would render Security measures less effective. This would lead to the compromise of ongoing or future operations to protect the security or infrastructure of the UK and increase the risk of harm to the public.

#### **Factors favouring Neither Confirming or Denying for Section 31**

Confirming or denying whether any other information is held relevant to this request would provide an insight into Staffordshire Police. It would greatly assist in the quality and accuracy of public debate, which could otherwise be steeped in rumour and speculation about covert police investigations accessing data from the aforementioned companies. Where public funds are being spent, there is a public interest in accountability and justifying the use of public money.

#### **Factors against Neither Confirming or Denying for Section 31**

Confirming or denying that any other information is held relevant to this request would have the effect of compromising law enforcement tactics and would also hinder any future investigations. In addition, confirming or denying methods used to gather intelligence for an investigation would prejudice that investigation and any possible future proceedings.

It has been recorded that FOIA releases are monitored by criminals and terrorists and so to confirm or deny any other information is held concerning the level of, or lack thereof of covert tactics would lead to law enforcement being undermined. The Police Service is reliant upon all manner of techniques during operations and the public release of any modus operandi employed, if held, would prejudice the ability of the Police Service to conduct similar investigations.

Staffordshire Police would not wish to reveal whether or not any companies relevant to this request have been approached for the purpose of acquiring data covertly as this would clearly undermine the law enforcement and investigative process. This would impact on police resources and more crime and terrorist incidents would be committed, placing individuals at risk. It can be argued that there are significant risks associated with providing information, if held, in relation to any aspect of investigations or of any nation's security arrangements so confirming or denying that any information is held, may reveal the relative vulnerability of what we may be trying to protect.

## **Balance test**

The security of the country is of paramount importance and Staffordshire Police will not divulge whether any other information is or is not held if to do so would place the safety of an individual at risk, undermine National Security or compromise law enforcement.

Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and providing assurance that the police are appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat posed by various groups or individuals, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding the integrity of police investigations and all areas of operations carried out by police forces throughout the UK.

As much as there is public interest in knowing that policing activity is appropriate and balanced this will only be overridden in exceptional circumstances. Acquiring data via any covert capacity is a sensitive issue that would reveal police tactics and therefore it is our opinion that for these issues the balancing test for confirming or denying whether any other information is held for this request, is not made out.

However, this should not be taken as necessarily indicating that any information that would meet any future request exists or does not exist.

## **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](mailto: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



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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/>

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