

14 November 2025

FOI Ref 22012

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

Please provide the following information for the years 2022, 2023, 2024 and the available information for 2025:

1) The number of police officers that were disciplined for their conduct on WhatsApp and / or other social media sites.

(a) For each disciplined police officer, please describe briefly what happened.

(b) If the police officer was writing offensive messages/posts, please disclose copies of these messages/posts.

(c) If the police officer was sharing offensive posts, please disclose copies of these posts.

2) Please indicate the number of police officers that were dismissed for their conduct on WhatsApp and / or other social media sites.

(a) For each dismissed police officer, please describe briefly what happened.

(b) If the police officer was writing offensive messages/posts, please disclose copies of these messages/posts.

(c) If the police officer was sharing offensive posts, please disclose copies of these posts.

**Clarification received on 05/11/2025:**

Please can you clarify exactly what you would deem as an 'offensive' message/post?

Please consider this to mean: 'if a message/post led to a misconduct case being launched into them'.

We received your request on 24/10/2025 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.**

Please provide the following information for the years 2022, 2023, 2024 and the available information for 2025:

- 1) The number of police officers that were disciplined for their conduct on WhatsApp and / or other social media sites. – **Disclosed, please see the accompanying file titled 'FOI 22012 Social Media Misconduct Data.xlsx'.**
- (a) For each disciplined police officer, please describe briefly what happened. – **Partially disclosed, please see the accompanying file titled 'FOI 22012 Social Media Misconduct Data.xlsx'.**

- (b) If the police officer was writing offensive messages/posts, please disclose copies of these messages/posts. – **Withheld, Section 38 and Section 40.**
- (c) If the police officer was sharing offensive posts, please disclose copies of these posts. – **Withheld, Section 38 and Section 40.**
- 2) Please indicate the number of police officers that were dismissed for their conduct on WhatsApp and / or other social media sites. – **Disclosed, please see the accompanying file titled 'FOI 22012 Social Media Misconduct Data.xlsx'.**
- (a) For each dismissed police officer, please describe briefly what happened. – **Disclosed, please see the accompanying file titled 'FOI 22012 Social Media Misconduct Data.xlsx'**
- (b) If the police officer was writing offensive messages/posts, please disclose copies of these messages/posts. – **Withheld, Section 38 and Section 40.**
- (c) If the police officer was sharing offensive posts, please disclose copies of these posts. – **Withheld, Section 38 and Section 40.**

**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 38 (1) (a) (b) – Health and Safety

Information is exempt information if its disclosure under this Act would, or would be likely to (a) endanger the physical or mental health of any individual, or (b) endanger the safety of any individual. 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.



### **Harm:**

To provide copies of the messages sent or shared by officers that are of an offensive nature would be likely to have a detrimental effect on the mental health of those individuals viewing or reading such messages. The disclosure of such information could make mental illness worse, and cause upset and/or distress. If Staffordshire Police (SP) were to repeat the content of the messages, this would perpetuate the offensive nature of the content to a wider audience, broadcasting offensive material and political views to which SP do not subscribe or condone and which fall below the standards expected.

### **Public Interest Test**

#### **Factors favouring disclosure under Section 38(1)(a)(b)**

In addition to the basic premise of being open and transparent, disclosure of the offensive messages sent and shared by officers employed by SP would inform the public on misconduct matters investigated by the force and inform public debate upon how public funds are being spent.

#### **Factors favouring non-disclosure under Section 38(1)(a)(b)**

Disclosure of the offensive messages sent or shared by officers would affect the mental health of those affected or involved if released into the public domain. The disclosure of this offensive information could subject SP to criticism. Furthermore, the offensive nature of these messages would be likely to have a detrimental effect on the mental health of those who read or view them.

### **Balance Test**

When considering whether disclosure is appropriate, we must weigh the strongest reason for disclosure against the strongest reasons for non-disclosure. In this case, whilst the factors favouring disclosure are important in that it would adhere to the basic principle of being open and transparent, we believe when weighed against the risk of disclosure, 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:

[IAT@staffordshire.police.uk](mailto:IAT@staffordshire.police.uk)



STAFFORDSHIRE  
**POLICE**

Or by Post to:

Information Access Team  
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 Information Access Team 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 a Supervisor who is independent from the original Decision Maker. The Information Access Team 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 Supervisor 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 Supervisor will reply to the appellant with the result of the review. If the appellant 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 link: <https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/foi-and-eir-complaints/foi-and-eir-complaints/>

Freedom of Information  
Information Access Team