

4 September 2025

FOI Ref 21736

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

I am conducting research into the use of polygraph testing by UK police forces, particularly in the management and monitoring of sex offenders, and wish to better understand the scope, outcomes, and governance of such practices.

Please treat this as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

**Request**

Please provide the following information:

1. Implementation timeline

- a. The month and year in which your force first began using polygraph tests in relation to sex offenders.
- b. Whether usage has expanded since initial implementation, and if so, how and when.

2. Volume of testing

- a. Annual totals of polygraph tests conducted since implementation.
- b. Cumulative total number of tests administered to date.

3. Types of subjects

- a. The number of convicted sex offenders (e.g., under licence, probation, or other) tested each year, versus suspects not yet convicted.
- b. Annual breakdowns where possible.

4. Outcomes of testing

- a. The number of tests leading to further disclosures (e.g., admissions of reoffending, breach of licence conditions, or other risk-related information).
- b. The number of tests resulting in actual action (e.g., changes to licence conditions, recall to custody, initiation of investigations).
- c. Any data on the percentage of tests resulting in significant disclosures or actions.

5. Purpose and procedure

- a. The stated purpose of polygraph testing within your force's sex offender management or investigative processes.
- b. Who conducts the tests (e.g., trained police officers, probation staff, or external examiners).
- c. Whether the tests are voluntary or mandatory, and under what circumstances.
- d. The training, standards, or qualifications required for individuals conducting polygraph examinations.
- e. The oversight mechanisms or quality assurance processes in place to ensure polygraph use is compliant and effective.

6. Legal and oversight considerations

- a. Whether polygraph results are admissible as evidence in court within your force's jurisdiction.



- b. Any legal or practical limitations your force has encountered regarding polygraph use (e.g., accuracy concerns, legal challenges, or statutory restrictions).
- c. Details of any internal or external evaluations, audits, or research into the effectiveness or reliability of polygraph testing in relation to sex offenders, including copies or references to such reports.

7. Policy and guidance

- a. Copies of any policies, procedures, training manuals, or internal guidance documents relating to the use of polygraph tests in relation to sex offenders.
- b. If full copies cannot be provided, the titles, authors, and dates of the documents.

We received your request on 13/08/2025 and have processed this under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

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

**Staffordshire Police holds/does not hold the requested information.**

1. Implementation timeline

- a. The month and year in which your force first began using polygraph tests in relation to sex offenders. – **No information held.**
- b. Whether usage has expanded since initial implementation, and if so, how and when. – **No information held.**

2. Volume of testing

- a. Annual totals of polygraph tests conducted since implementation. – **No information held.**
- b. Cumulative total number of tests administered to date. – **No information held.**

3. Types of subjects

- a. The number of convicted sex offenders (e.g., under licence, probation, or other) tested each year, versus suspects not yet convicted. – **No information held.**
- b. Annual breakdowns where possible. – **No information held.**

4. Outcomes of testing

- a. The number of tests leading to further disclosures (e.g., admissions of reoffending, breach of licence conditions, or other risk-related information). – **No information held.**
- b. The number of tests resulting in actual action (e.g., changes to licence conditions, recall to custody, initiation of investigations). – **No information held.**
- c. Any data on the percentage of tests resulting in significant disclosures or actions. – **No information held.**

5. Purpose and procedure

- a. The stated purpose of polygraph testing within your force's sex offender management or investigative processes. – **No information held.**
- b. Who conducts the tests (e.g., trained police officers, probation staff, or external examiners). – **No information held.**
- c. Whether the tests are voluntary or mandatory, and under what circumstances. – **No information held.**
- d. The training, standards, or qualifications required for individuals conducting polygraph examinations. – **No information held.**
- e. The oversight mechanisms or quality assurance processes in place to ensure polygraph use is compliant and effective. – **No information held.**

#### 6. Legal and oversight considerations

- a. Whether polygraph results are admissible as evidence in court within your force's jurisdiction. – **No information held.**
- b. Any legal or practical limitations your force has encountered regarding polygraph use (e.g., accuracy concerns, legal challenges, or statutory restrictions). – **No information held.**
- c. Details of any internal or external evaluations, audits, or research into the effectiveness or reliability of polygraph testing in relation to sex offenders, including copies or references to such reports. – **No information held.**

#### 7. Policy and guidance

- a. Copies of any policies, procedures, training manuals, or internal guidance documents relating to the use of polygraph tests in relation to sex offenders. – **No information held.**
- b. If full copies cannot be provided, the titles, authors, and dates of the documents. – **No information held.**

Staffordshire Police can neither confirm nor deny whether it holds any other information related to the use of polygraph tests as the duty in Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act) does not apply by virtue of the following exemptions:

- Section 23(5) - Information supplied by, or relating to, bodies dealing with security matters
- Section 24(2) – National Security
- Section 30(3) – Criminal Investigations
- Section 31(3) – Law Enforcement

#### Harm:

The FOI Act is 'applicant blind'. This means that we cannot, and do not, ask about the motives of anyone who asks for information. In providing a response to one person, we are expressing a willingness to provide the same response to anyone, including those who might represent a threat to the UK.

It is public knowledge that not all Police forces conduct Polygraph Testing of post-conviction sex offenders, and this extends to the testing of Domestic Abuse (DA) offenders. It is also public knowledge that the 2014 National Policing stance sets out the evidential implications of using Polygraph within the investigation setting:

<https://library.college.police.uk/docs/APPREF/National-Policing-Position-Statement-use-of-Polygraph-May-2014.pdf>

However, modern day policing is intelligence led and this is particularly pertinent with regard to law enforcement, and Counter Terrorism. The public expect police forces to use all powers and tactics available to them to prevent and detect crime or disorder and maintain public safety. As such, confirmation or denial is only possible when doing so would not reveal certain tactics and techniques, the extent to which they may be deployed, and whether information is held that has a bearing on matters of National Security.

The threat from terrorism cannot be ignored. It is generally recognised that the international security landscape is increasingly complex and unpredictable. Since 2006, the UK Government has published the threat level based upon current intelligence, and that threat is currently judged as "SUBSTANTIAL", meaning that an attack on the UK is likely.

It is well established that police forces use tactics and technology to gain intelligence in order to counteract criminal behaviour, and it has been previously documented in the media that many terrorist incidents have been thwarted due to intelligence gained by these means.

To confirm or deny that any other information is held in relation to Polygraph testing in circumstances or scenarios beyond sex offender, or DA offender management at force level, would reveal whether the technique has utility beyond post-conviction sex offender, or DA offender testing within the wider Law Enforcement sphere. Notably, to confirm or deny whether any other information is held relevant to Polygraph testing in a Counter Terrorism setting, whether that is a post-conviction terrorist offender, or someone suspected of being so connected with such activities, would reveal whether such techniques are in use as an investigative, and more so, intelligence gathering tactic.

Confirmation or denial across the Police Service would infer that there are gaps within the intelligence picture nationally which, for certain criminal elements and extremists, may embolden them to focus efforts within areas that they deem to be "soft" targets. Any incident that results from such a disclosure would by default affect National Security.

### **Public Interest Test**

Some of the exemptions in the FOI Act, referred to as 'qualified exemptions', are subject to a public interest test (PIT). This test is used to balance the public interest in disclosure against the public interest in favour of withholding the information, or the considerations for and against the requirement to say whether the

information requested is held or not. We must carry out a PIT where we are considering using any of the qualified exemptions in response to a request for information.

The 'public interest' is not the same as what interests the public. In carrying out a PIT we consider the greater good or benefit to the community as a whole if the information is released or not. The 'right to know' must be balanced against the need to enable effective law enforcement and to serve the best interests of the public.

#### **Considerations in favour of confirming or denying the information is held – Section 24(2)**

The public are entitled to know how public funds are spent and confirm or deny the requested information is held would allow the public to see where money is being spent and know that forces are doing as much as possible to combat terrorism.

#### **Considerations in favour of neither confirming or denying the information is held – Section 24(2)**

To confirm or deny information is held would render security measures less effective. Any information shared between law enforcement partners (i.e. intelligence) has the potential to cover all aspects of criminal activity, be it threats to life, or intelligence relating to terrorist activity. Confirmation or denial could highlight to those intent on criminality, whether or not information has been shared. Confirming such would dramatically weaken the effectiveness of intelligence led policing. The public entrust the Police Service to make appropriate decisions with regard to their safety and protection and the only way of reducing risk is to be cautious with any information, no matter how generic that is.

#### **Considerations in favour of confirming or denying the information is held – Section 30(3)**

There is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and providing assurance that Staffordshire Police is appropriately and effectively dealing with Counter Terrorism. Confirming or denying whether any other information is held would allow the public to make informed decisions about these matters.

#### **Considerations in favour of neither confirming or denying the information is held – Section 30(3)**

Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and providing assurance that Staffordshire Police is appropriately and effectively dealing with the threat of Terrorism, there is a strong public interest in safeguarding the integrity of police investigations and operations and in maintaining confidence in the Police Service. Any ongoing or future investigations, or operations to protect the security and infrastructure of the UK would be compromised as terrorists could map the level of Counter-Terrorist activity and intelligence sharing across the country, providing them with the knowledge of individual force capability as well as valuable knowledge concerning the vulnerability of individual force areas.

#### **Considerations in favour of confirming or denying the information is held – Section 31(3)**

Staffordshire Police has a responsibility to conduct its business in an open and transparent manner. Confirmation or denial of all circumstances related to the use of Polygraph testing would assure the public that the police is committed to combating crime and terrorism. It would also ensure the public that the



activities of certain individuals are being monitored by law enforcement so that individuals are aware of the investigative techniques used in order to protect the public, thus leading to better public awareness.

### **Considerations in favour of neither confirming or denying the information is held – Section 31(3)**

Disclosure of the information, if held, would mean releasing sensitive information into the public domain, which could compromise law enforcement tactics, which could in turn hinder the prevention and detection of crime. To disclose whether information is held in relation to Polygraph Testing, whether by the force itself, or through the provision of information from other Law Enforcement partners in relation to Counter Terrorism would:

- a) allow criminals and extremists to evade prosecution or detection if they believe such practices are not in use for the purpose of seeking intelligence, or;
- b) cause criminals and extremists to alter their behaviour if they become aware of the tactics and techniques the police might employ, and to what extent.

Therefore confirming or denying whether any other information is held could compromise the prevention and detection of crime, which includes Terrorism.

### **Balance Test**

As evidenced within the harm above, confirming or denying any other information is held relevant to this request would start to indicate levels of specific policing activity at force level, and more broadly from a national perspective in relation to Counter Terrorism matters.

The Police Service will not divulge information if to do so would place the safety of an individual at risk or undermine Law Enforcement. Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations, and in this case providing assurance that Staffordshire Police is appropriately and effectively engaging with the threat posed by criminal and terrorist activity (either at force level or through the provision of assistance to, or from partners) there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding law enforcement, which by extension includes National Security.

As much as there is public interest in knowing that policing activity is appropriate and balanced about such matters, this will only ever be overridden in exceptional circumstances. Matters in relation to crime and terrorism are sensitive issues of intelligence value to those who would do harm, and therefore it is our opinion that for these issues the balancing test for confirming or denying whether any other information is held in relation to Polygraph tests and Counter Terrorism would not be in the public interest.

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](mailto:foi@staffordshire.police.uk)

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.

### **1. 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.

### **2. 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