

27 August 2026

FOI Ref 23250

Request - You asked Staffordshire Police (SP) the following:

1. Policy

Does your force have a policy, procedure or guidance governing the investigation of unexplained or suspicious deaths where domestic abuse may be a factor?

If yes, please provide a copy.

2. Domestic abuse as a line of enquiry

Does your force require investigators to consider domestic abuse, including coercive and controlling behaviour, as a line of enquiry when attending an unexplained death involving a current or former intimate partner?

3. Investigative threshold

Where a current or former intimate partner is:

- the only witness;
- the last known person to have seen the deceased alive; or
- a principal person of interest,

does your force require the death to be treated as suspicious, or investigated as a potential domestic homicide, until reasonable investigative enquiries have been completed?

If not, please explain the threshold applied.

4. Investigative curiosity

Does your force have any policy, guidance or training requiring investigators to preserve all reasonable lines of enquiry until they have been eliminated, rather than reaching an early conclusion regarding the cause or manner of death?

If yes, please provide a copy.

5. Senior Investigating Officer

What is the minimum rank of the Senior Investigating Officer responsible for investigating:

- suspected domestic homicides;
- suspicious deaths where domestic abuse is suspected; and
- unexplained deaths involving a current or former intimate partner?

Please state whether these investigations are ordinarily led by a Detective Inspector, Detective Chief Inspector or another rank.

6. Supervisory oversight

Before an unexplained death involving a current or former intimate partner is concluded to be:

- suicide;
- accidental;
- unexplained; or
- non-suspicious,



is supervisory approval or review required?

If yes, please state:

- the rank responsible;
- whether the Major Crime Team or Homicide Team is consulted; and
- whether there is any mandatory review process.

7. Falls from height

Does your force maintain a recording category, investigative guidance or typology specifically relating to deaths following a fall from height?

If yes, please provide:

- the categories used;
- any investigative guidance;
- whether domestic abuse history is recorded;
- whether current or former partner involvement is recorded; and
- whether the presence of a sole witness is recorded.

8. Recording practices

Does your force routinely record, where relevant:

- previous reports of domestic abuse;
- coercive or controlling behaviour;
- current or former intimate partner involvement;
- sole witness status;
- previous police attendance at the address;
- child witnesses or children ordinarily resident within the household?

9. Reclassified deaths

Since 1 January 2020, how many deaths initially classified as:

- suicide;
- accidental death;
- unexplained death; or
- non-suspicious death

were subsequently reclassified as homicide or manslaughter?

Where recorded, please state how many involved a current or former intimate partner.

10. Organisational learning

Since 1 January 2020, has your force introduced any changes to policy, investigative practice or training relating to suspicious deaths where domestic abuse may be a factor following:

- Domestic Homicide Reviews;
- Independent Office for Police Conduct investigations;
- Coroners' Prevention of Future Death reports;
- homicide investigations; or
- internal learning reviews?

If yes, please provide details.



SP received your request on 11/08/2026 and have processed this under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

SP's response to your enquiry is as follows:

SP holds some of the requested information.

1. Policy

Does your force have a policy, procedure or guidance governing the investigation of unexplained or suspicious deaths where domestic abuse may be a factor?

If yes, please provide a copy.

- No information held.

2. Domestic abuse as a line of enquiry

Does your force require investigators to consider domestic abuse, including coercive and controlling behaviour, as a line of enquiry when attending an unexplained death involving a current or former intimate partner?

- Disclosed: Yes.

3. Investigative threshold

Where a current or former intimate partner is:

- the only witness;
- the last known person to have seen the deceased alive; or
- a principal person of interest,

does your force require the death to be treated as suspicious, or investigated as a potential domestic homicide, until reasonable investigative enquiries have been completed?

If not, please explain the threshold applied.

- Withheld: please see the below listed exemption under Section 31 (1)(a)(b).

4. Investigative curiosity

Does your force have any policy, guidance or training requiring investigators to preserve all reasonable lines of enquiry until they have been eliminated, rather than reaching an early conclusion regarding the cause or manner of death?

If yes, please provide a copy.

- Partially disclosed: Yes. SP has the 'Staffordshire Police Policy for the Investigation of Deaths' and the 'Suspicious Deaths' Guidelines. However, as regards their requested release, please see the below listed exemption under Section 31 (1)(a)(b).

For Guidance and training SP use the 'College of Policing' website. Please see the below listed exemption under Section 21(1).

For guidance and training, the PIP2 course has an input from the Major Incident department (MID), which covers Sudden Death/Homicide in depth. Professional/Investigative curiosity is very much highlighted with the need to consider multiple hypotheses rather than rushing to a conclusion based on one hypothesis.

5. Senior Investigating Officer

What is the minimum rank of the Senior Investigating Officer responsible for investigating:

- suspected domestic homicides;
- suspicious deaths where domestic abuse is suspected; and
- unexplained deaths involving a current or former intimate partner?



Please state whether these investigations are ordinarily led by a Detective Inspector, Detective Chief Inspector or another rank.

- **Disclosed: DI/DCI.**

6. Supervisory oversight

Before an unexplained death involving a current or former intimate partner is concluded to be:

- suicide;
- accidental;
- unexplained; or
- non-suspicious,

is supervisory approval or review required?

- **Disclosed: Yes.**

If yes, please state:

- the rank responsible;
- whether the Major Crime Team or Homicide Team is consulted; and
- whether there is any mandatory review process.

- **No information held.**

7. Falls from height

Does your force maintain a recording category, investigative guidance or typology specifically relating to deaths following a fall from height?

If yes, please provide:

- the categories used;
- any investigative guidance;
- whether domestic abuse history is recorded;
- whether current or former partner involvement is recorded; and
- whether the presence of a sole witness is recorded.

- **Disclosed: No information held**

8. Recording practices

Does your force routinely record, where relevant:

- previous reports of domestic abuse;
- coercive or controlling behaviour;
- current or former intimate partner involvement;
- sole witness status;
- previous police attendance at the address;
- child witnesses or children ordinarily resident within the household?

- **Disclosed: Yes. SP routinely records all the above criteria, where relevant.**

9. Reclassified deaths

Since 1 January 2020, how many deaths initially classified as:

- suicide;
- accidental death;
- unexplained death; or
- non-suspicious death

were subsequently reclassified as homicide or manslaughter?

- **Disclosed: 5 deaths.**



Where recorded, please state how many involved a current or former intimate partner.

- Disclosed: 3 deaths.

10. Organisational learning

Since 1 January 2020, has your force introduced any changes to policy, investigative practice or training relating to suspicious deaths where domestic abuse may be a factor following:

- Domestic Homicide Reviews;
- Independent Office for Police Conduct investigations;
- Coroners' Prevention of Future Death reports;
- homicide investigations; or
- internal learning reviews?

If yes, please provide details.

- Disclosed: Yes. Policy and procedure re written in 2025 to reflect relevant changes.

As regards training relating to suspicious deaths where domestic abuse may be a factor, in September 2022, SP introduced new training that all operational officers and staff must complete, which covers;

- **Domestic Homicide**
- **Coercive Control**
- **Domestic Abuse**
- **Stalking**
- **How and why threat and risk may escalate in such cases.**

Training includes accounts from family members who have been bereaved through intimate partner homicide.

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 this 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 be 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.

Harm:

To provide the requested policy, guidance or training documents used to train investigating officers could undermine existing or future investigations, operations and police tactics. It would allow those with ill intent to cause disruption to operational policing and prejudice the prevention and detection of crime. Knowing the lines of enquiry that are required to be followed, as well as the investigative threshold, would allow individuals planning murders, to take precautions to evade detection and/or disrupt investigative methods employed by the police.

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)

Releasing such data would give those individuals with the intent to do so, the intelligence required to disrupt police activity. This knowledge would allow those with ill intent to target their offending more effectively which would inevitably lead to an increased likelihood of criminal activity including, but not limited to, murder and an increased danger to the public. Any disclosure of information which is likely to undermine the ability to serve the public in preventing and detecting crime can only be considered as being harmful to the public.

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 undermining our ability to prevent and detect crime and hindering our ability to protect the public, then non-disclosure takes precedence.

- Section 21(1) - Information reasonably accessible by other means.

Section 21 is an absolute, class-based exemption and as such there is no requirement to quantify the harm that may arise from the disclosure, nor is there a requirement to perform a Public Interest Test.

Advice and assistance

To comply with our obligations under Section 16 of the Act, the obligation to provide advice and assistance, please find below links to the information requested.

<https://www.college.police.uk/app/investigation>

<https://www.college.police.uk/career-learning/courses/investigating-sudden-unexpected-death-childhood>

<https://www.college.police.uk/app/investigation/managing-effective-investigations?highlight=role%20of%20SIO>

All Freedom of Information request responses are published on the SP 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 SP, 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.



STAFFORDSHIRE
POLICE

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

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 SP 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 twenty working days. In more complex cases the review may take up to forty 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, considering 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