

9 July 2026

FOI Ref 23075

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

Please provide the following information regarding criminal cases involving independent civilian online decoy groups (often referred to as "pedophile hunters" or "online vigilante groups").

Requested Information:

1. The total number of criminal prosecutions or scheduled trials related to online child sexual exploitation/grooming that were **discontinued, stayed, thrown out, or resulted in a directed 'not guilty' verdict** due to issues arising from evidence gathered by civilian vigilante groups, for the calendar years 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, and 2026 to date.
2. For each identified case in 2026 only, please provide a brief summary of the reasons for the case's collapse (e.g., breach of evidence continuity, reliability of the witness, entrapment/inducement concerns, or non-disclosure of full chat logs).

SP received your request on 02/07/2026 and have processed this under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

SP's response to your enquiry is as follows:

SP does not hold the requested information.

Please provide the following information regarding criminal cases involving independent civilian online decoy groups (often referred to as "pedophile hunters" or "online vigilante groups").

Requested Information:

1. The total number of criminal prosecutions or scheduled trials related to online child sexual exploitation/grooming that were **discontinued, stayed, thrown out, or resulted in a directed 'not guilty' verdict** due to issues arising from evidence gathered by civilian vigilante groups, for the calendar years 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, and 2026 to date.
2. For each identified case in 2026 only, please provide a brief summary of the reasons for the case's collapse (e.g., breach of evidence continuity, reliability of the witness, entrapment/inducement concerns, or non-disclosure of full chat logs).

Advice and assistance

Section 16 of the Act places an obligation upon the Authority to provide advice and assistance, to comply with this obligation please see below.

Staffordshire Police do not hold conviction or court data. We would advise that you approach the Government HM Courts and Tribunals Service website.

Please find below links to previously disclosed HMCTS data and details upon how to submit a further Freedom of Information request to the Government HM Courts and Tribunals Service for this information.



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[Transparency and freedom of information releases - GOV.UK](#)

[HM Courts & Tribunals Service - GOV.UK](#)

Make a new request by using the details below:

FOI requests
Disclosure Team
Postal Point 10.38, Floor 10
102 Petty France
London SW1H 9AJ
United Kingdom

Email: data.access@justice.gov.uk

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.

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



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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