

24 March 2026

FOI Ref 22688

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

Does the [REDACTED], license plate [REDACTED] belong to staffordshire police?

It followed my brother to his house very closely in the early hours of friday morning, then flashed its blue lights once and drove away.

I'd just like to ensure that this is a legitimate covert car, and not a suspicious vehicle acting like the police.

SP received your request on 23/03/2026 and have processed this under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

SP's response to your enquiry is as follows:

SP holds/does not hold the requested information.

- Does the [REDACTED], license plate [REDACTED] belong to staffordshire police?

It followed my brother to his house very closely in the early hours of friday morning, then flashed its blue lights once and drove away.

I'd just like to ensure that this is a legitimate covert car, and not a suspicious vehicle acting like the police.

– Neither confirm nor deny.

SP can neither confirm nor deny that it holds the information you requested as it believes that the duty under s1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the duty to confirm whether the public authority holds information of the specified description) does not apply.

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 particular request.

- Section 40(5) Personal Information

Section 40(5) 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 that may or may not be held by SP, 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.

- Section 31 (3) Law Enforcement Section 31 is a qualified and prejudice-based exemption and, as such, we are required to evidence the harm in disclosure and apply the public interest test.

Harm:

Confirming or denying whether a specific vehicle is owned or operated by Staffordshire Police would provide information that could be used to undermine law enforcement activities. Disclosure would allow individuals to identify which vehicles are, or are not, associated with the police. This would enable offenders to evade detection, avoid particular vehicles, or target them for malicious purposes. It would also compromise the operational effectiveness of covert policing tactics.

Public Interest Test

Factors in favour of confirming or denying - Section 31(3)

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 against confirming or denying - under Section 31(3)

Confirming or denying the existence of 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 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.

Please be advised that 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



STAFFORDSHIRE
POLICE

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 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