

29 May 2026

FOI Ref 22854

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

1. What is the total amount spent by the force on Covert Human Intelligence Sources (CHIS) over the last five financial years? (Please break this down for each year from 2021/2022 up until 2025/2026)
2. For each of those periods, please could you list the number of individuals who have received a payment that is categorised as one made to a CHIS?

SP received your request on 08/05/2026 and have processed this under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

SP's response to your enquiry is as follows:

SP holds the requested information.

- 1. What is the total amount spent by the force on Covert Human Intelligence Sources (CHIS) over the last five financial years? (Please break this down for each year from 2021/2022 up until 2025/2026) – **Partially disclosed, please see the accompanying file entitled 'FOI 22854 Covert Intelligence Data'. With regards to any further information SP can neither confirm nor deny under sections 23(5), 24(2) and 30(3). Please see the below. The data for the years 2021/2022 to 2024/2025 has been withheld, please see section 21 below.**
- 2. For each of those periods, please could you list the number of individuals who have received a payment that is categorised as one made to a CHIS? – **Withheld, please see the below exemptions under sections 30(2), 38(1) and 40(2).**

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 request.

- 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.

- 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 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 30(2)(b):
relates to obtaining information from confidential sources

SP can neither confirm nor deny whether any further information relevant to this request is held, as the duty in Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 does not apply by virtue of the following exemptions:

- Section 23(5): Section 23 is a class based absolute exemption.
Confirming or denying whether any additional CHIS related information is held would reveal information supplied by, or relating to, bodies listed in section 23(3). The Act therefore prohibits confirmation or denial.
- Section 24(2): Section 24 is a prejudice-based exemption.
To confirm or deny the existence of further information would undermine national security by damaging the confidence of CHIS who assist the police and by enabling hostile individuals to draw inferences about the level or nature of covert activity in a force area. This prejudice would arise even where no national security related CHIS are in use.
- Section 30(3): Section 30 is a class based qualified exemption.
Confirming or denying whether additional information is held would provide insight into policing's covert capabilities, allowing offenders to adjust behaviour to avoid detection and undermining investigative and intelligence gathering functions.

Public Interest Test

Harm - Section 24

Confirming or denying the existence of any additional CHIS related information would risk undermining national security by damaging the recruitment, retention and confidence of individuals who assist law enforcement as covert sources. Even the perception that CHIS related information might be inferred from FOI responses can cause reluctance to engage with the police. Confirming or denying whether further material exists would allow individuals, hostile groups or organised criminals to infer whether covert activity is, or is not, taking place in a particular force area. These inferences could then be used to adapt behaviour to evade detection, identify covert tactics, or target individuals suspected of involvement in covert intelligence. This would compromise national security and threaten public safety.

Harm - Section 30(2)(b)

There is longstanding public knowledge that police forces use covert human intelligence sources to assist investigations. Disclosure of the requested information could, in principle, increase public understanding of how intelligence is gathered, how informants contribute to daily policing operations, and how this supports the prevention and detection of crime. Transparency may also help correct misconceptions about the use and management of CHIS and allow the public to consider whether such financial or operational arrangements are appropriate.

However, disclosure of the number of CHIS or the number receiving payment could reveal patterns of covert activity within the force area. Over time, the release of such information would allow individuals to analyse peaks or troughs in CHIS use and draw conclusions about operational priorities or investigative intensity. This would undermine intelligence gathering, hinder the prevention and detection of crime, and prejudice the force's ability to maintain confidential sources. It may also expose individuals, or those suspected of being CHIS, to the risk of harm. Disclosure would damage the confidence of those assisting law enforcement and would impede the force's ability to recruit and retain CHIS in future. While the public has a legitimate interest in transparency around policing, the ability of the police to protect the public, gather intelligence and maintain covert capabilities is of far greater weight. Disclosure that undermines CHIS confidence or reveals operational patterns would jeopardise those essential functions. The balance therefore lies firmly in favour of non disclosure.

Harm (Section 38)

Releasing the highest single annual CHIS payment, even as a standalone figure, could enable individuals to draw inferences about covert activity and potentially identify or suspect someone of being a CHIS. This creates a real risk of intimidation or physical harm to those involved and undermines the safety measures designed to protect sources, staff, and the public.

Factors Favouring Confirmation or Denial (Sections 24 and 30)

There is a public interest in demonstrating that policing is transparent about its use of public funds and its management of covert capabilities. Confirming or denying the existence of further information could help the public understand high-level structures around how CHIS are used and may support informed public debate about the appropriateness and proportionality of covert policing tactics. Public awareness of policing processes can contribute to confidence in the accountability of law enforcement.

Factors Against Confirmation or Denial (Sections 24 and 30)

However, confirming or denying whether additional CHIS-related material exists would reveal whether the force holds covert information of a sensitive nature, enabling individuals to infer operational capability, levels of covert activity, or the presence or absence of CHIS within the force area. Such inferences could be used by offenders or hostile groups to avoid detection, frustrate investigations, or exploit perceived gaps in covert coverage. Confirmation or denial would also undermine the confidence of existing or potential CHIS by suggesting their involvement could be indirectly exposed. This would damage intelligence-gathering and hinder the prevention and detection of crime. In addition, any suggestion of covert arrangements in a specific area could place individuals at risk of harm.

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

Disclosure would promote transparency around public spending and support public confidence that CHIS payments are monitored and used appropriately.

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

CHIS-related information is kept confidential to protect the safety of those who assist police covertly. Release of the highest payment could allow individuals to speculate about CHIS involvement, placing them at increased risk of harm. Protecting life and safety outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

Balance Test (Sections 24, 30 and 38)

Although transparency supports accountability and public confidence, the risks associated with confirming or denying the existence of further CHIS-related information are substantial. Disclosure would prejudice national security by undermining covert capabilities, discouraging CHIS cooperation, and enabling hostile actors to exploit operational sensitivities. The public interest in protecting covert operations, safeguarding individuals and maintaining the effectiveness of intelligence-led policing outweighs the arguments in favour of confirmation or denial. The partial NCND under sections 23(5), 24(2), 30(3) and withheld section 38(1) is therefore upheld.

Please be advised that all Freedom of Information request responses are published on the SP website although personal details are not included.

Advice and assistance

In order 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.

- [Published items - 22594 | Staffordshire Police](#)

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

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