

17 September 2026

FOI Ref 23391

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

Please can you provide the official statistics related to the following in your force area:

1 – The number of people who have been formally questioned regarding direct physical or verbal abuse aimed at referees or other match officials in amateur or semi-professional football. In seasons '20/'21 through to '24/'25.

Please break those figures down, season by season.

2 – The number of people who have been charged with an offence relating to direct physical or verbal abuse aimed at referees or other match officials in amateur or semi-professional football. In seasons '20/'21 through to '24/'25.

Please break those figures down season by season.

3 – The number of professional referees or match officials in your force area, operating in the top four men's leagues (Premier League, Championship, Leagues 1 and 2) that have experienced threats at any level which required police action, this includes registering a complaint or concern.

Please provide figures from the '20/'21 season through to '24/'25.

4 - Where a formal complaint was registered. Has any individual been charged, or has any referee or match official been offered police protection? Please break those figures down season by season starting in '20/'21 and ending '24/'25 and differentiate between amateur and professional football.

5 – Has any of the above (1,2 or 3) resulted in a successful prosecution – including online abuse aimed at match officials. If so, what are the detailed statistics behind successful or unsuccessful prosecutions.

Also please state how many cases have been referred to a different force area or body to deal with, for example the National Police Football Unit.

SP received your request on 15/09/2026 and have processed this under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

SP's response to your enquiry is as follows:

In accordance with Section 17(1) of the Freedom of Information Act, this letter represents a refusal notice for this request.

The following exemption has been applied:

- Section 12(1) where the cost of compliance exceeds the appropriate limit.

Section 12(1) does not oblige a public authority to comply with a request for information if the authority estimates that the cost of complying with the request would exceed the prescribed limit'.

The above information has been withheld for the following reasons:

There is no method by which SP can readily retrieve information from local police systems to answer this request. For the period requested, there have been in excess of 198,000 offences that may or may not relate to physical or verbal abuse, or threatening behaviour directed towards referees. To determine this,

each occurrence would need to be manually reviewed to determine whether the victim was a referee, then broken down by the level (amateur/semi-professional or professional) of football the referee was involved with. Further review would also need to be conducted to establish the number of individuals formally questioned, charged or prosecuted in relation to such offences. We would also need to do further manual reviews to see if any occurrences were referred to a different force area or body to deal with. To extract this data would therefore require a very labour-intensive manual trawl through each record.

From dip sampling, it has been estimated that it would take approximately 5-10 minutes to review each record to answer this request, this would equate to between 16,500 and 33,000 hours. To achieve this task would therefore exceed the 18-hour time and cost threshold of the Freedom of Information Act by a considerable margin.

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.

Unfortunately, SP cannot suggest a way in which your request could be simplified or pared down to bring it within the confines of the time and cost threshold.

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 Force's response to the original FOI request.



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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, 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