| Police Scotland logo | Freedom of Information Response Our reference: FOI 25-1267  Responded to: 16 June 2025 |
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Your recent request for information is replicated below, together with our response.

Tackling domestic abuse is a priority for Police Scotland and we are committed to working with our partners to reduce the harm it causes and ultimately eradicate it.

Domestic abuse is a despicable and debilitating crime which affects all of our communities and has no respect for ability, age, ethnicity, gender, race, religion or sexual orientation.

Police Scotland will not tolerate it.

Police Scotland will proactively target perpetrators and support victims to prevent domestic abuse from damaging the lives of victims and their families.

Police Scotland defines domestic abuse as:

“Any form of physical, verbal, sexual, psychological or financial abuse which might amount to criminal conduct and which takes place within the context of a relationship.

The relationship will be between partners (married, cohabiting, civil partnership or otherwise) or ex-partners. The abuse may be committed in the home or elsewhere including online”

This definition is included in the Joint Protocol between Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), “*In partnership challenging domestic abuse*” which is a public document that can be found on the [Police Scotland](https://www.scotland.police.uk/spa-media/ymzlwhwj/joint-protocol-between-police-scotland-and-copfs-in-partnership-challenging-domestic-abuse.pdf?view=Standard) website or on the [COPFS](http://www.copfs.gov.uk/) website.

**I’m getting in touch to request any communications between officers relating to a decision to investigate Christopher Harkins (22/11/1986). This investigation was carried out by the domestic abuse taskforce in late 2019, and led by DCI Lyndsay Laird and DI Ian Renfrew.**

**I’m specifically seeking information/communications on officers who received a minimum of 11 complaints about Harkins in the years prior to his eventual investigation, dating between 2011 and 2019. I request any communications or information relating to requests by officers to investigate further, and decisions on whether to investigate, refer to COPFS, or seek a conviction against Harkins in the years prior to the investigation by the domestic abuse taskforce in late 2019. I would like to request any information on officers specifically seeking for or flagging the possibility that the domestic abuse taskforce investigate him prior to October 2019.**

**I’d further like to request any information about any reviews, inquiries, or similarly worded retrospective analysis by Police Scotland of the earlier decisions not to investigate Harkins prior to October 2019. I’d also like to request any guidance, training, or internal statements that have been issued to staff or management in the wake of the final investigation into Harkins.**

The information sought is held by Police Scotland, but I am refusing to provide it in terms of section 16(1) of the Act on the basis that the following exemptions apply:

**Section 34(1)(b) - Investigations**  
Information is exempt information if it has at any time been held by Police Scotland for the purposes of an investigation which may lead to a decision to make a report to the Procurator Fiscal to enable it to be determined whether criminal proceedings should be instituted.

**Section 35(1)(a)&(b) - Law Enforcement**

Disclosure would prejudice substantially the prevention or detection of crime and the apprehension or prosecution of offenders. By disclosing specific details of an investigation would publicly provide information on investigative techniques used to detect crime. This in turn would enable in those with hostile intent to use the provided information to avoid justice.

**Section 39 - Health, safety and the environment**

Information is exempt information if its disclosure would or would be likely to endanger the physical or mental health or safety of an individual.

This is a non-absolute exemption and requires the application of the public interest test.

**Public Interest Test**

Public awareness would favour a disclosure as it would contribute to the public debate surrounding the investigations and the police handling of such enquiries.

Nevertheless, it cannot be in the public interest to release information that would prejudice law enforcement or cause distress to victims.  
I appreciate that there is a public interest in relation to police investigations. That said, it is essential that neither investigations nor the potential for further proceedings to be brought against an individual are put at risk.   
Accordingly, in this case it is assessed that the public interest lies firmly in refusing disclosure.

**Section 38(1) (b) - Personal Data**

Personal data is defined in Article 4 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) as:

*‘Information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person (“data subject”); an identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person’*

Section 38(2A) of the Act provides that personal data is exempt from disclosure where disclosure would contravene any of the data protection principles set out at Article 5(1) of the GDPR which states that:

*‘Personal data shall be processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner in relation to the data subject’*

Article 6 of the GDPR goes on to state that processing shall be lawful only if certain conditions are met.

The only potentially applicable condition is set out at Article 6(1)(f) which states: *‘Processing is necessary for the purposes of the legitimate interests pursued by the controller or by a third party, except where such interests are overridden by the interests or fundamental rights and freedoms of the data subject which require protection of personal data.*

Whilst I accept that you may have a legitimate interest with regards the disclosure, I am nonetheless of the view that those interests are overridden by the interests or fundamental rights and freedoms of the data subject(s).

Accordingly, it is my view that disclosure of the requested information would be unlawful.

More generally, in relation to Domestic abuse training that has been implemented since 2019 I can provide the following:

At an operational level, Police Scotland utilises a ‘three tiered approach’ to the policing of domestic abuse: local operational policing, divisional specialist domestic abuse investigation officers and the national Domestic Abuse Task Force. This established ‘three tiered approach’ ensures domestic abuse victims across Scotland receive a police response tailored to the circumstances of their case.

• Tier 1 – Operational Policing.

This is the initial response to reports of domestic abuse and encapsulates almost every report coming into the service. The operational response in Tier 1 will likely include several policing divisions i.e. Contact, Command and Control Division, Local Policing Divisions and Criminal Justice Division.

• Tier 2 – Specialist Domestic Abuse Investigative Officers.

Each Local Policing Division must have specialist officers within the division who support the Tier 1 response. These personnel will ensure effective victim safety planning, maintain an overview of the divisional response, and undertake complex or protracted investigations. They will work cooperatively with the Tier 1 and Tier 3 response.

• Tier 3 – Domestic Abuse Task Force and Domestic Abuse Coordination Unit.

Tier 3 represents the national resource available as part of the Specialist Crime Division. The Domestic Abuse Task Forces (one based in the north, east and west) are responsible for investigations into serial perpetrators who are identified as posing the greatest threat of risk and harm. The Domestic Abuse Coordination Unit are responsible for all national policies in respect of domestic abuse. Both works cooperatively with Tier 1 and Tier 2 of the policing response.

Effective delivery of the ‘three tiered approach’ is supported by a cadre of bespoke and embedded domestic abuse training to ensure domestic abuse victims across Scotland receive a police response tailored to the particular circumstances of their case. This includes but is not limited to Probationer Training, Operation Command Training for newly promoted sergeants and training for Specialist Domestic Abuse Investigators.

Student officers undertaking Initial Training receive several inputs on domestic abuse. These inputs are delivered once to every new course and take place in classrooms, with content and any associated activities facilitated by a class instructor. This comprises a total of 315 minutes delivered in 7 sessions each lasting 45 minutes. These lessons can also be supplemented by Skill Development Exercises where students will be involved / observe an immersive learning situation where they are expected to apply the learning from the classroom environment.

Police Scotland deliver a Domestic Abuse Investigation Course to specialist officers (Tier 2 and Tier 3 level as defined above). This is a comprehensive course taught over a week at the Scottish Police College aimed at officers who have specifically undertaken the role of a domestic abuse investigator. The aim is to enhance officers’ professional knowledge of key areas surrounding domestic abuse investigations and to further their development of appropriate investigative strategies. Officers within specialist domestic abuse units have further specialist training such as for interviewing children (Joint Investigative Interview trained) or investigating sexual offences (Sexual Offences Liaison Officers).

**Domestic Abuse Matters (Scotland)**

To support officers and staff in the roll out of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 the ‘Domestic Abuse Matters (Scotland)’ (DAMS) training was designed and commenced prior to the Act being enacted on 1st April 2019. It provided guidance on the practical issues like evidence gathering and reporting of coercive and controlling behaviours. Specifically, it advances staff and officers’ knowledge of the dynamics of power and control in abusive relationships and tackles the myths and misconceptions which are common in our communities.

The training was delivered using the following structure:

* Pre-learning – an E-Learning package was developed and hosted on the Moodle platform which was completed by circa 18,000 officers and staff. This gave an overview of the new Act and initial training on coercive controlling behaviours.
* Face-to-Face training - this consisted of one day classroom training for circa 14,000 officers and staff. Each session was co-delivered by a Domestic Abuse Specialist and a Police Officer.
* Post course learning materials – materials and PowerPoint presentation hosted on Police Scotland intranet. Further ‘roadshows’ also held in Local Policing Division’s after the Act came into force to ensure the understanding of the local Domestic Abuse specialist officers.

The training was delivered to officers and staff up to and including the rank of Chief Inspector from:

* Local Policing Division officers.
* Local policing public counter staff.
* Contact, Command and Control Division officers and staff, up to and including the rank of Inspector / equivalent.
* Relevant Custody Division officers and staff.

The training was immersive facilitation inputs using a selection of different media. Inputs were delivered on:

* Dynamics of Domestic Abuse / responding to Domestic Abuse.
* Gender and the stages of coercive control.
* Perpetrator tactics.
* Difficulties of leaving.
* The Domestic Abuse Act 2018 and evidence gathering.

**Continuous Professional Development Modules**

As part of ongoing domestic abuse training, a suite of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) modules developed in collaboration with domestic abuse charity SafeLives Scotland, with contribution from other key partners, were launched internally in Autumn 2024. The following six CPD modules support Police Scotland’s frontline response to domestic abuse to enable officers to update their knowledge and awareness of dealing with domestic abuse

* Domestic Abuse and the Effects of Trauma,
* Diverse Experiences of Domestic Abuse – South Asian Communities,
* The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act - Understanding and Applying the Legislation,
* Multiagency Tools for Keeping People Safe,
* The Use of Technology and Social Media in Domestic Abuse and Domestic Abuse and Children.

The [Domestic Abuse Investigation Standard Operating Procedure](https://www.scotland.police.uk/spa-media/fuaflohy/domestic-abuse-investigation-sop.pdf) defines the expected policing response to, and investigation of domestic abuse. It supports Police Scotland’s [Domestic Abuse Policy](https://www.scotland.police.uk/spa-media/he5ffktq/domestic-abuse-policy.pdf?view=Standard) and the Joint Protocol between Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), ["In Partnership Challenging Domestic Abuse"](https://www.copfs.gov.uk/media/xjtd4i4p/joint-domestic-abuse-protocol.pdf)

If you require any further assistance, please contact us quoting the reference above.

You can request a review of this response within the next 40 working days by [email](mailto:foi@scotland.police.uk) or by letter (Information Management - FOI, Police Scotland, Clyde Gateway, 2 French Street, Dalmarnock, G40 4EH). Requests must include the reason for your dissatisfaction.

If you remain dissatisfied following our review response, you can appeal to the Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner (OSIC) within 6 months - [online](https://www.foi.scot/appeal), by [email](mailto:enquiries@foi.scot) or by letter (OSIC, Kinburn Castle, Doubledykes Road, St Andrews, KY16 9DS).

Following an OSIC appeal, you can appeal to the Court of Session on a point of law only.

This response will be added to our [Disclosure Log](http://www.scotland.police.uk/access-to-information/freedom-of-information/disclosure-log) in seven days' time.

Every effort has been taken to ensure our response is as accessible as possible. If you require this response to be provided in an alternative format, please let us know.