[Courts 'write off' more than £5m in unpaid fines](#)

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More than £5 million in unpaid fines have been effectively written off by the Scottish Courts Service, new research has revealed.

Fines which have been outstanding for longer than three years are "archived" by the organisation, with no realistic expectation they will ever be paid.

And between 2008 and 2013 – the most recent juncture for which a fine can be officially archived – £5,547,358 remains unaccounted for.

That figure does not include unpaid fines accumulated since that date, which the SCS still hopes will be recovered.

In 2012/13 alone, nearly £2 million worth of fines were issued, but have now been written off as more than three years have passed.

The statistics emerged following a Freedom of Information request by the Scottish Conservatives, who said the unpaid penalties were placing additional financial strain on the courts.

The sums are also left out of official unpaid fines statistics, which most recently showed the SCS was waiting for £32.3 million to be paid in penalties, £4.3 million of which was deemed to be "in arrears", from the last three years.

Scottish Conservative Central Scotland MSP Margaret Mitchell, convener of the Scottish Parliament's justice committee, said:

"These figures show courts have effectively written off more than £5 million in unpaid fines.

"That sends a completely wrong message to criminals, and creates an impression that if they evade the law for long enough, they'll get away with it.

"The SNP is increasingly urging courts to turn away from custodial sentences and pursue other options.

"But as it stands, these offenders don't seem to think they have to comply with alternative punishments, and millions of pounds in fines have gone

unpaid.

"This is also having a negative impact on public finances, and amounts to a huge loss of revenue for the UK taxpayer."