

Police race to over-stretched courts dozens of times each month

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Police are forced to attend Scottish courts dozens of times each month to attend a range of 999 calls, new figures have shown.

In the past three years, the force has received 2228 emergency calls from sheriff courts right across the country.

According to the statistics obtained by the Scottish Conservatives through Freedom of Information, there were 885 calls in 2016, 823 last year, and 520 for the first 10 months of 2018.

A variety of crimes were detected at each call-out, including 162 reports of drug-taking and 138 assaults.

Shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said the figures showed Scotland's courts service to be under huge pressure dealing with increasing numbers of cases, particularly after the SNP government began embarking on a courts-closure scheme.

Some bizarre incidents were also contained in the statistics, including reports of an "animals" related incident in Ayr in 2016; a public demonstration in Dumbarton; and a person consuming alcohol in a courtroom in Glasgow.

Last year, Selkirk Sheriff Court was at the centre of two unusual incidents; reports of a "planned shoot/pest control" incident, and a 999 call in relation to "weather".

The true overall figure is likely to be higher as data was not available for all sheriff courts.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said:

"This just shows the kind of pressure our sheriff courts system is under.

"They are constantly being asked to do more with less, and now it emerges these facilities are at the centre of hundreds of 999 calls each year.

"It underlines what a brave job people working at sheriff courts do, and the importance of the system more generally.

“The vast majority of these aren’t minor incidents, and put the safety of those in the court building at risk.

“It’s vital that both our courts service and police force don’t have to continue cutting back so they can do the important job of delivering justice swiftly and safely.”