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Police Scotland is on course for a record number of officer retirements, official figures have shown.

In the first six months of this year, 325 policemen and women left the force after reaching the required number of years served or for medical reasons.

If that trend continues, the single force will have lost 650 police officers by the end of 2018/19.

That's significantly more than the 561 who left last year, and eclipses the high point of 2014/15 when 613 retired.

The Freedom of Information request from the Scottish Conservatives also revealed other Police Scotland staff are likely to leave in record numbers.

Up to September 30, there were 73 retirements, which will reach 146 by the end of the year if trends continue.

That's an increase from 111 last year, which was in itself a Police Scotland record high.

Scottish Conservative legal affairs spokesman Gordon Lindhurst said the record number of departures would place the organisation under even more strain, and could pose new safety risks to communities across the country.

It means, in the past five years, a total of 2631 police officers have retired from duty in Scotland, along with 419 other staff.

Scottish Conservative legal affairs spokesman Gordon Lindhurst said:

"This isn't just a large number – with those hundreds of departures will go decades of knowledge and experience.

"That's a priceless commodity for a police force which is finding itself under increasing pressure.

"The SNP government needs to ensure that Police Scotland is not significantly damaged by this loss, and that policing is fit for the challenges we face.

“Under the nationalists there have been cuts to police stations and to vital administration staff, while frontline officers have been dragged off the beat to fill the spaces left.

“We need assurances that there will be enough bobbies on the beat to ensure communities right across the country are safe, and that criminals can be brought to justice swiftly and effectively.”