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Criminals can embark on illegal activity knowing they have an equal chance of not getting caught after clear-up rates dropped to 50 per cent, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Official statistics were released today on recorded crime, which also revealed an increase in violent crime and sex offences.

They showed that last year Police Scotland only solved 50 per cent of all crimes, compared to 51.6 per cent in 2015.

The statistics indicated a general decrease in crime, but left out thousands of offences from the official recording, including some categories of assault.

Despite that, violent crime was up six per cent, while an increase in sex offences was attributed to a rise in online offending.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said:

“The fall in clear-up rates will be immensely concerning to people right across the country.

“We’re now in a situation where criminals know they literally have a 50/50 chance of getting away with their illegal activity.

“Much more needs to be done by the Scottish Government to help police increase these clear-up rates.

“What these figures also show is crime is changing, particularly when it comes to sexual offences and the internet.

“That’s why a balance has to be struck between properly resourcing those who tackle cyber-crime, while not decimating the frontline at the same time.

“The SNP will no doubt boast about record low levels of crime, but everyone knows this has to be taken with a pinch of salt, particularly given some serious offences aren’t included in these figures.

“The reality is we have a police force in crisis, and that’s doing a

disservice to the hardworking officers on the frontline the length and breadth of the country.”