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

26 Dec 2018



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.”

Jackson Carlaw’s Christmas message

24 Dec 2018



Below is a Christmas message from Scottish Conservative interim leader Jackson Carlaw.

“On behalf of the Scottish Conservative party, may I wish everyone a very happy Christmas.

“For most of the last 30 years, my own Christmas tradition has been to host a large family get together at home. However, the bustle, organized chaos and enjoyment of our family festivities has always made me appreciate that for some Christmas can be both lonely and financially stressful.

“So, however we each keep Christmas this year, it is worth looking out for those who are on their own and to donate what we can to support those who will appreciate the difference it can make.

“I also want to pay a special tribute to the staff in the NHS working over Christmas. 2018 has been the year when we marked 70 years of the NHS since its founding in 1948, and whole generations have now been cared for by this unique institution.

“Once again this Christmas, doctors, nurses, porters, cooks, cleaners and volunteers will be at work looking after those of us who are unfortunate enough to be kept in over the festive period.

“As a country, we may have felt divided for much of 2018 – it is the collective effort of our NHS staff, working together, who have shown us the country at its best.

“For those lucky enough not to be working, I hope you too get some much needed rest and time away from the frontline – ready to come back refreshed for the new year.”

Overtime payments to paramedics reach new high

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24 Dec 2018



The Scottish Ambulance Service was forced to pay record amounts in overtime costs to paramedics last year, new figures have revealed.

A shortage of staff meant more than £6.3 million was spent paying paramedics to work extra shifts as pressure intensifies on ambulance workers.

That's an increase of £670,000 in the space of a year, and is the highest figure in the last five years.

Overall in 2017 – including managers, support staff and technicians – the organisation spent almost £11.8 million in overtime – the equivalent of £32,000 a day.

Overtime payments made to ambulance drivers have also doubled since 2013, reaching £38,000 last year.

The rise comes as the Scottish Ambulance Service finds itself under more pressure dealing with an increasing and ageing population, and worsening “turnaround” times at Scotland’s major emergency departments.

Staff sickness absence levels remain considerably higher than the national average, while paramedics face constant anti-social behaviour while attending 999 calls.

In the summer, more than 2500 addresses across the country were “red-flagged” – a policy where ambulance staff aren’t allowed to attend without a police presence.

The figures were obtained by the Scottish Conservatives through Freedom of Information.

In its response, the Scottish Ambulance Service said it was in the process of training an additional 1000 paramedics over the next five years “to ensure we can continue to provide safe, effective care”.

Scottish Conservative public health spokeswoman Annie Wells said:

“Ambulance staff are under huge pressure, and that is increasing according to these figures.

“The fact more than £6 million was spent on overtime just for paramedics last year goes to show just how short-staffed the organisation must be.

“Many staff will be willing to do these additional shifts, but from a health and safety perspective, it’s not ideal to be relying on this so heavily.

“It’s welcome that the Scottish Ambulance Service is now training so many extra paramedics.

“But clearly years of under-funding and shambolic workforce planning by the SNP government has contributed to this current unacceptable situation.”

[Police Scotland set for record number of cop retirements](#)

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23 Dec 2018



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.”

[NHS buying oversized mortuary fridges to cope with obesity crisis](#)

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22 Dec 2018



Health boards have been forced to install oversized mortuary fridges to cope with Scotland’s obesity crisis, it has emerged.

Research by the Scottish Conservatives has revealed there have been 41 installations across the country of fridges with additional capacity to cope with larger corpses.

It’s the latest indication of increased costs to the NHS thanks to rising levels of obesity.

The Freedom of Information responses show NHS Grampian has installed 25 spaces for “semi-obese” people and a further three marked as “obese” at its facility at the Foresterhill Health Campus.

The organisation said this was “required to meet demand”.

NHS Lanarkshire said it had created six new spaces for larger patients since 2013, while NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde put in three.

In the Lothians, the health board said two obese fridges were installed last year, while work was currently underway on the refrigerated body store at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary “which will increase capacity for bariatric deceased patients”.

NHS Dumfries and Galloway confirmed it has also introduced two over-sized fridges.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

“Obesity is fast-becoming Scotland’s number one health crisis.

“This is a problem across all age groups and all sections of society.

“It means people’s lives are being needlessly cut short and the cost to the NHS is rising.

“This research shows the situation is even forcing health boards to invest in bigger mortuary fridges to cater for those obese patients who have passed away.

“Far more work is needed across the board to help get Scotland’s population fitter and healthier.”