| Police Scotland logo | Freedom of Information Response Our reference: FOI 24-3036  Responded to: 06 January 2025 |
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Your recent request for information is replicated below, together with our response.

**I am writing to request information under FOI about crimes involving vehicle number plates within your jurisdiction. Specifically, I am seeking data on incidents reported in the last 5 years that involved:**

**1. Non-complaint number plates**

**Plates purchased from suppliers not registered with the Register of Number Plate suppliers (RNPS)  
Plates failing to conform to British Standards (eg BS AU 145e)  
Mis-spaced or tampered plates, including those altered to obscure identification.  
Plates incorporating unauthorised fonts, colours, designs or patterns**

**2. Criminal uses of number plates**

**Plates used on cloned or “ringed” vehicles  
Stolen number plates reported as part of other crimes (eg theft, fraud or burglary)  
Counterfeit or fake number plates detected in circulation**

**3. Vehicle-related fraud and deception**

**Plates used to evade Automated Number Plate Recognition systems (ANPR).  
Plates linked to “drive offs” (eg fuel theft) or other crimes involving untraceable vehicles.  
Plate associated with insurance or identity fraud.**

**4. Organised and environmental crimes**

**Number plates linked to organised vehicle crime syndicates, such as car theft or illegal exportation of cloned vehicles.  
Plates involved in environmental crimes, such as fly tipping, where unregistered vehicles were used to avoid detection.**

The table below details relevant Recorded Crimes for the period 1 January 2019 to 30 November 2024, inclusive:

| **Crime/Offence** | **2019** | **2020** | **2021** | **2022** | **2023** | **2024** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Registration or Identification mark offences - not lighting | 1395 | 1571 | 1291 | 1509 | 1959 | 2014 |
| Construction & use regulations other than lighting | 5992 | 5998 | 5466 | 4804 | 5731 | 6907 |

*All statistics are provisional and should be treated as management information.   
Data was extracted from Police Scotland systems and are correct as at 19/12/2024.  
Data was extracted using the crime's raised date and by using SGJD codes '731800' - Registration or Identification Mark Offences Not Lighting and '732000' - Construction & Use Regulations Other Than Lighting*

As regards any other recorded crimes, there are no markers or searchable fields which would indicate that a crime report for fraud or theft for example, involved a vehicle license plate.

Unfortunately, therefore, I estimate that it would cost well in excess of the current FOI cost threshold of £600 to process your request. I am therefore refusing to provide the information sought in terms of section 12(1) of the Act - Excessive Cost of Compliance.

## 5. Enforcement and policy data

## a. how the constabulary monitors compliance with vehicle number plate regulations (including ANPR system capabilities for detecting non-compliant plates)

The information sought is held by Police Scotland, but I am refusing to provide it in terms of section 16(1) of the Act on the basis that the following exemptions apply:

Section 31(1) - National Security and Defence

Section 35(1)(a)&(b) - Law enforcement

Section 39(1) - Health, safety and the environment

Disclosure of information about ANPR capabilities would undermine national security, on-going investigations and potentially any future investigations, as it would enable targeted individuals/groups to become surveillance aware. This would assist those individuals and groups to avoid detection and inhibit the prevention and detection of crime.

Disclosure would confirm to those involved in criminality or terrorism that they are or have been the subject of such activity, allowing them to gauge the frequency of and capability of ANPR use and to take measures to circumvent its use. Any compromise of, or reduction in technical capability would substantially prejudice the ability of the Service to police its areas, which would lead to a greater risk to the public. This detrimental effect is further increased if the request is made to several national law enforcement bodies. In addition to the local criminal fraternity being better informed, those intent on organised crime throughout the UK will be able to ‘map’ where the use of certain tactics are deployed across the country.

It should also be recognised that the international security landscape is increasingly complex and unpredictable. The UK faces a serious and sustained threat from violent extremists and this threat is greater in scale and ambition than any of the terrorist threats in the past.

Information that undermines the operational integrity of our capabilities will adversely affect public safety and have a negative impact on both national security and law enforcement. This would limit operational capabilities as criminals/ terrorists would gain a greater understanding of the Services methods and techniques, enabling them to take steps to counter them and provide an indication to any individual who may be undertaking criminal/terrorist activities that Police Scotland may be aware of their presence and taking counter terrorist measures.

**Public Interest Test**

The security of the country is of paramount importance and Police Scotland will not divulge any information which could undermine National Security or compromise Law Enforcement.

Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations and capability, there is a very strong public interest in safeguarding both national security and the integrity of law enforcement generally.

As much as there is public interest in knowing that policing activity, is appropriate and balanced in matters of national security, this will only be overridden in exceptional circumstances.

In this case there is also no requirement to satisfy any public interest over the capability of ANPR and the tactics we employ or the tolerances of this system.

Security measures are put in place to protect the community that we serve. To reveal the information requested would provide individuals intent on carrying out criminal behaviour, details of policing activity. This would ultimately increase the risk of harm to the general public and significantly undermine any ongoing or future operations to protect the security or infrastructure of the United Kingdom and increase the risk of harm to the public.

On balance, it is my view that the public interest lies in favour of non-disclosure.

To be of some assistance, the [Automatic Number Plate Recognition](https://www.scotland.police.uk/about-us/how-we-do-it/automatic-number-plate-recognition-anpr/) page of our website contains some additional information on the topic.

## b. any policies, guidelines, or operational procedures related to number plate crimes or compliance enforcement

In terms of section 17 of the Act, I can confirm that the information sought is not held by Police Scotland.

## c. the most common penalties or resolutions (eg prosecutions, warning or other actions) for offenses involving number plates

## for each category I would appreciate annual data for previous 5 years summaries or statistical data insights into trends, if available

Police Scotland does not hold criminal conviction/ prosecution data and section 17 of the Act therefore applies. You may wish to contact the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) and/ or the Scottish Courts Service.

## details of the most frequent offenses and any notable cases, where this does not breach privacy or confidentiality

As outlined above, there are two crime classifications of potential relevance to your request.

We do not record cases as ‘notable’ and, in terms of frequency, you will see that the numbers involved run into the thousands for ‘Registration or Identification mark offences - not lighting’ alone.

Without further clarity, we can only interpret your request as seeking further details of the cases referred to above and, on that basis, I estimate that it would cost well in excess of the current FOI cost threshold of £600 to process your request.

I am therefore refusing to provide the information sought in terms of section 12(1) - Excessive Cost of Compliance.

You may wish to consider a refined request - for example, you might be interested in the recorded Modus Operandi (MO) details for the last 20 cases in 2024 etc.

I would caution that numbers will be a factor as redaction will likely be required and so bear that in mind when selecting a time period.

If you require any further assistance, please contact us quoting the reference above.

You can request a review of this response within the next 40 working days by [email](mailto:foi@scotland.police.uk) or by letter (Information Management - FOI, Police Scotland, Clyde Gateway, 2 French Street, Dalmarnock, G40 4EH). Requests must include the reason for your dissatisfaction.

If you remain dissatisfied following our review response, you can appeal to the Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner (OSIC) within 6 months - [online](http://www.itspublicknowledge.info/Appeal), by [email](mailto:enquiries@itspublicknowledge.info) or by letter (OSIC, Kinburn Castle, Doubledykes Road, St Andrews, KY16 9DS).

Following an OSIC appeal, you can appeal to the Court of Session on a point of law only.

This response will be added to our [Disclosure Log](http://www.scotland.police.uk/access-to-information/freedom-of-information/disclosure-log) in seven days' time.

Every effort has been taken to ensure our response is as accessible as possible. If you require this response to be provided in an alternative format, please let us know.