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Our Ref: IM-FOI-2022-1317  
Date: 08 July 2022



## **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (SCOTLAND) ACT 2002**

I refer to your recent request for information which has been handled in accordance with the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

For ease of reference, your request is replicated below together with the response.

**Please can you provide information on what search fields Police Scotland is able to use when searching its crime reports in order to collate information, i.e. location of crime, type of crime etc.**

**Please provide any information you can on how the data within crime reports held by Police Scotland can be analysed in order to yield information that provides greater detail on crimes currently produced as part of Police Scotland's annual publications.**

As you may be aware, Freedom of Information legislation provides a right of access to recorded information only.

There is no requirement to create new information to answer a request and/ or offer comment or explanation in relation to questions posed.

There is no recorded information held that would answer the questions posed in their current format and so section 17 of the Act - information not held - therefore applies.

I can however offer the following explanation in terms of our section 15 duty to advise and assist applicants.

As you may be aware, Police Scotland currently continues to use many of the legacy force crime recording systems and these vary significantly in terms of architecture and functionality.

Police Scotland is however currently in the early stages of rolling out a new national crime recording system and this will be progressed through all thirteen divisions in turn over the coming months.

For data initially populated on the new system, it should therefore be the case that search capabilities become nationally consistent and greatly improved.

In terms of your request, the current 'search fields' will vary not only system by system but also depending on where and how the analysis is being conducted.

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For example, at a 'local' level, all systems are searchable from the various user interfaces.

At a national level however (and this is key in terms of our official statistics, management information and FOI capability) information is drawn from the various legacy systems into a data store that allows information on the nature and progress of individual cases to be treated as anonymised data, validated, analysed and reported.

Police Scotland uses a single data store to ensure that information from the various crime recording systems in use is reported consistently across all divisions.

As information is drawn into the data store from systems that are both structured and operate differently, data produced from the store is also subject to validation checks as part of the analytical process to make sure it is internally consistent.

Crucially, not all information is drawn through to the data store from the crime recording systems and this limits the ability of the Police Scotland to provide bespoke statistical reports other than for our own management and reporting purposes.

Information that is currently not drawn through to the data store includes, for example, personal information about individuals involved in an investigation.

**Does Police Scotland have an estimate of how many crime reports can be opened and analysed within the £600 cost limit placed on providing information under FOI laws? If so, please tell me how many crime reports can be analysed within this cost limit.**

In response to this question I can advise you that no definitive number is held and section 17 of the Act - information not held - therefore applies.

I can however offer the following explanation in terms of our section 15 duty to advise and assist applicants.

Estimates will be provided where relevant on a case by case basis in individual FOI responses and the length of time detailed will very much depend on the nature of the request and also which systems require to be accessed.

In the majority of cases where individual assessment of crime reports is required, the first stage of the process will be a force wide search across all systems by our Analysis and Performance team to produce a list of relevant or potentially relevant crime reports.

That in itself, depending on the complexity of the request, can take some time, not to mention expertise, to complete.

Thereafter, based on a list of crime report reference numbers, each report has to be individually opened (a simple matter of entering the reference number into a search field) and then the content assessed and relevant information extracted and noted etc.

There are many factors that can influence the complexity of that process - including but not limited to:

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- Which crime recording system(s) require to be accessed  
As detailed above, Police Scotland continue to use many of the legacy force crime recording systems and these vary significantly in terms of architecture and functionality. On that basis, any of the following points may be more of an issue in one system than the other.
- Where in the crime report the information is held  
For example, are we able to go to one, consistent field or is the data held as free text in the body of the crime report.  
To illustrate, a request might ask about theft of cars.  
We could conduct a force wide search on the crime classification *theft of a motor vehicle* and start with a list of crime reference numbers.  
One system might have a 'vehicle type' field with a drop down menu and so to scan each report and note that detail would be faster in that system than it would in a system without such a field where the entire report would have to be read for any reference to car/ van/ motorcycle etc. Even where a field exists however, it is important to note that where it is not mandatory (as is often the case for these types of request) it is often still necessary to read the full report.
- The length/ complexity of crime reports  
Where crime reports have to be fully assessed it has to be noted that they vary significantly in complexity.  
An example might be a request for the most common items stolen in housebreakings. Some systems have stolen property fields, others do not - but irrespective in this example, the list of stolen items for such crimes can be literally hundreds of items long - each of which would have to be noted.  
Similarly, requests might ask whether crime reports include a particular word/ phrase. Whilst we can conduct such searches in our national incident recording system, the same is not true for crime reports and each would have to be assessed.
- Whether a calculation has to be performed  
The best example of this is age type requests - how many crimes were committed by under 18s etc.  
None of our systems have an 'age at the time of the offence' type field.  
They have an accused date of birth and a committed date (or range of committed dates) and both would have to be extracted and noted, probably in a spreadsheet, and thereafter a calculation performed.

To date in 2022, Police Scotland have received 1,317 requests and looking at those which reference 'crime stats' in the summary (as per our usual naming conventions) just 92 were refused in full on the basis of excess cost alone.

All of our responses are available to view on our [Disclosure Log](#) and you can also view data regarding our use of the cost exemption (as well as other FOI provisions) on the [OSIC website](#).

It is hoped that following the roll out of our new, national crime recording system, our ability to provide bespoke, detailed data for FOI purposes will be improved.

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Should you require any further assistance please contact Information Management quoting the reference number given.

If you are dissatisfied with the way in which Police Scotland has dealt with your request, you are entitled, in the first instance, to request a review of our actions and decisions.

Your request must specify the matter which gives rise to your dissatisfaction and it must be submitted within 40 working days of receiving this response - either by email to [foi@scotland.pnn.police.uk](mailto:foi@scotland.pnn.police.uk) or by post to Information Management (Disclosure), Police Scotland, Clyde Gateway, 2 French Street, Dalmarnock, G40 4EH.

If you remain dissatisfied following the outcome of that review, you are thereafter entitled to apply to the Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner within six months for a decision. You can apply [online](#), by email to [enquiries@itspublicknowledge.info](mailto:enquiries@itspublicknowledge.info) or by post to Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner, Kinburn Castle, Doubledykes Road, St Andrews, Fife, KY16 9DS.

Should you wish to appeal against the Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner's decision, there is an appeal to the Court of Session on a point of law only.

As part of our commitment to demonstrate openness and transparency in respect of the information we hold, an anonymised version of this response will be posted to the Police Scotland Freedom of Information [Disclosure Log](#) in seven days' time.