| Police Scotland logo | Freedom of Information Response Our reference: FOI 25-0700  Responded to: 17 June 2025 |
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Your recent request for information is replicated below, together with our response.

## Regarding police inviting sheriffs to attend football matches and related disorder ([Sheriffs to witness football violence first-hand as police seek tougher sentences](https://www.thetimes.com/uk/scotland/article/police-scotland-seek-tougher-sentences-for-football-thugs-bsc79d7vk#:~:text=Police%20have%20brought%20sheriffs%20to,identical%20clothes%20to%20evade%20detection.)), please provide details of which matches sheriffs attended and which sheriffdom they were from (or their name if possible).

I can advise that Sheriffs were at the following football fixtures.

Motherwell v Celtic 27/10/2024

Dundee United v Rangers 26/01/2025

Hearts v Rangers 16/02/2025

Sheriffdoms include Tayside, Central & Fife and Lothian & Borders.

## Please also provide as much information as possible on what the sheriffs did at these matches, I.e. were they in the stands with officers, if so which stand, among which supporters, or were they pitch-side, again, if so, in front of which supporters. Please advise if they witnessed arrests or disorder of any kind in or outside the stadium (please specify).

The information sought is not held by Police Scotland and section 17 of the Act therefore applies.

To explain, Sheriffs were there to see a policing operation first hand, attend police/club safety officer briefings with staff and observe fan behaviour and crowd dynamics. Where the Sheriffs are situated within the stadium is the decision of the Club Safety Officer. I cannot advise what the Sheriffs did or did not see.

## Please provide details of the costs, if any, incurred by police in bringing sheriffs to these matches.

The information sought is not held by Police Scotland and section 17 of the Act therefore applies.

Refreshment packs are provided on some occasions by Police Scotland. If not, the football club provide refreshments.

## Please provide copies of police match reports from each of the games sheriffs attended.

## Please provide copies of any documented rules or guidance for police about dealing with football supporters in or around stadiums.

With regards to providing you with a copy of The Football Policing Policy 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 section 25(1) exemption applies:

“Information which the applicant can reasonably obtain other than by requesting it […] is exempt information”.

The information sought is publicly available:

[football-policy.pdf](https://www.scotland.police.uk/spa-media/3d3bi45v/football-policy.pdf?view=Standard)

I have provided separately to this response copies of match reports and guidance documents requested.

Some information has been redacted which I am refusing to provide it in terms of section 16(1) of the Act on the basis that the following exemptions apply:

**Section 30(c) - Prejudice to the Effective Conduct of Public Affairs**

Information is exempt information if its disclosure under the Act would otherwise prejudice substantially, or be likely to prejudice substantially, the effective conduct of public affairs.

In this instance telephone numbers and e-mail addresses cannot be disclosed. To release these details publicly through FOI legislation could negatively impact on the operational effectiveness of the service and partner agencies. The phone numbers and email addresses are used for operational/business purposes and this information has been removed in order to ensure that internal processes are protected.

This is a non-absolute exemption which requires the application of the Public Interest Test.

**Section 35 (1)(a)&(b) - Law Enforcement**

The information requested is exempt, as its disclosure would or would be likely to prejudice substantially the prevention or detection of crime and apprehension or prosecution of offenders.

Release of the redacted information would adversely impact on the operational effectiveness of the Service. Being aware of details and planned actions would allow persons or groups intent on committing offences or causing disorder with the means to make a reasonable assessment of future football matches and other similar events. This in turn would allow those individuals or groups to make an accurate assessment of the capacity of the Service to deal with incidents at specific matches, compromising any tactical advantage the police may have over such persons or groups when dealing with any crime or disorder.

This is a non-absolute exemption and requires the application of the Public Interest Test.

**Section 38(1)(b) – Personal Information**

Personal data is defined in Article 4 of GDPR as: *‘Information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person […] who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person’*Personal data is exempt from disclosure where disclosure would contravene any of the data protection principles set out at Article 5(1) of the GDPR.  
Article 6 of the GDPR goes on to state that processing shall be lawful only if certain conditions are met.  
The only potentially applicable condition is set out at Article 6(1)(f) which states:

*‘Processing is necessary for the purposes of the legitimate interests pursued by the controller or by a third party, except where such interests are overridden by the interests or fundamental rights and freedoms of the data subject which require protection of personal data.*Whilst I accept that you may have a legitimate interest with regards the disclosure of the report, I am nonetheless of the view that those interests are overridden by the interests or fundamental rights and freedoms of the data subject(s). On that basis, it is my view that disclosure of the information sought would be unlawful.

**Public Interest Test**

Two of the exemptions detailed above are non-absolute and require the application of the public interest test.

It is accepted that there is a public interest in the disclosure of the information on the basis that it could lead to greater transparency and public debate.

The withheld material contains information relating to how events/ future events are policed, ultimately revealing specific operational strategies. Any such release would either compromise or significantly weaken police tactics and would also undermine any on-going investigations and potentially any future investigations, enabling targeted individuals or groups to become aware of such strategies and find ways to circumvent them.

Taking the above into consideration, I believe the public interest in withholding the redacted material outweighs that for disclosure.

## Please provide information on any rules or guidance for officers about the wearing of face coverings (by police officers) attending matches.

## CLARIFICATION

## Before we progress further could you clarify what you mean by

## *Please provide information on any rules or guidance for officers about the wearing of face coverings (by police officers) attending matches*.

## I am seeking to establish if officers are permitted or encouraged to wear such face coverings in the context of policing at football matches. (picture provided)

There are no rules or guidance for officers regarding the wearing of face coverings relating to the image sent, this is done at the discretion of the Police Officer.

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](https://www.foi.scot/appeal), by [email](mailto:enquiries@foi.scot) 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.