| Police Scotland logo | Freedom of Information Response Our reference: FOI 24-2950  Responded to: 6 December 2024 |
| --- | --- |

Your recent request for information is replicated below, together with our response.

## Policing numbers in the Highlands and Islands, since 2011, broken down by its 6 command areas.

## I am aware of the quarterly bulletins with numbers down to divisional level: [https://www.scotland.police.uk/about-us/how-we-do-it/police-scotland-officer-numbers/](https://gbr01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.scotland.police.uk%2Fabout-us%2Fhow-we-do-it%2Fpolice-scotland-officer-numbers%2F&data=05%7C02%7CParliamentandGovernmentLiaison%40scotland.police.uk%7C72fa917cc75445e2fe8008dd05785f74%7C6795c5d3c94b497a865c4c343e4cf141%7C0%7C0%7C638672736733686666%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=c3YK0WnWLrp0A1Gwt8FPNQXvz6fnYD4qWMxGHHLd0o8%3D&reserved=0)

In terms of section 16 of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, I am however refusing to provide you with the information broken down by Command area within Highlands & Islands Division. Section 16 requires Police Scotland when refusing to provide such information because it is exempt, to provide you with a notice which:

(a) states that it holds the information,

(b) states that it is claiming an exemption,

(c) specifies the exemption in question and

(d) states, if that would not be otherwise apparent, why the exemption applies.

The following exemptions apply:

**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. If the number of police officers broken down by Command area was disclosed, experience has shown that it would allow those intent on committing crime or causing disorder to gauge the likelihood of detection or to take measures to negate the likelihood of detection. It would allow criminals to plan how best to engage or occupy existing police resources in an effort to maximise their chances of committing serious crime, therefore harming the efficient and effective conduct of the service. This is a non-absolute exemption and requires the application of the public interest test.

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

The disclosure of the information requested may have the potential to increase the number of attacks on operational police officers by those being arrested or who have committed crime or who are involved in disorder. This will be particularly relevant in geographic areas with a lower number of officers. This is a non-absolute exemption and requires the application of the public interest test.

**Public Interest Test**

As you will be aware, the exemptions listed above are non-absolute and require the application of the Public Interest Test.

I would suggest that public accountability would favour disclosure, given that the information concerns the efficient and effective use of resources by the Service. Likewise, disclosure of the information would also inform the public debate on the issue of policing and contribute to the accuracy of that debate.

Furthermore, the applicability of the exemptions listed above, the need to ensure the effective conduct of the service in relation to prevention and detection of crime and, the public safety considerations involved in the delivery of operational policing clearly favour non-disclosure of the information requested.

On balance I would contend that the public interest in disclosing the information is outweighed by that in maintaining the exemptions listed, as, it is doubtful if it can ever be in the public interest to disclose information which would prejudice the prevention or detection of crime or, which would jeopardise the delivery of operational policing and the safety of officers and police staff.

To be of assistance please be advised that Police Officer numbers are publicly available on our website: [Police Scotland Officers Numbers - Police Scotland](https://www.scotland.police.uk/about-us/how-we-do-it/police-scotland-officer-numbers/)

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.