



HEADQUARTERS
One Lochside
1 Lochside Avenue
Edinburgh
EH12 9DJ

Our Ref: HQ26206

24 September 2026

Dear

Thank you for your request dated 04 September 2026 under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA).

For reference, you requested:

Please provide the following information regarding visiting individuals who have been caught or intercepted attempting to bring illicit drugs or controlled substances into Scottish prison establishments.

To help keep this request manageable and within the appropriate cost limits, I am requesting data broken down by calendar year for each of the last three complete years (2023, 2024, and 2025), as well as the available year-to-date data for 2026.

Specifically, I would like to request:

RFI 1: Total Number of Incidents: The total number of recorded incidents where a visitor (including social, professional, or official visitors) was caught or intercepted attempting to smuggle or introduce illicit drugs / controlled substances into a Scottish prison.

RFI 2: Breakdown by Establishment: A breakdown of these incidents by individual prison establishment (e.g., HMP Barlinnie, HMP Edinburgh, HMP Grampian, etc.).

RFI 3: Police Referrals: The number of these incidents that resulted in the individual being reported or referred to Police Scotland for further investigation or criminal prosecution, broken down by year or establishment if available.

RFI 4: Visitor Restrictions: The number of visitors who received a temporary or permanent prohibition/ban from entering Scottish Prison Service establishments as a direct result of being caught with illicit drugs.

If this request exceeds the cost or time limit set out in the fees regulations, please advise how I can refine or narrow my request to bring it within the limit. For example, prioritizing questions 1 and 2 for a specific subset of years or establishments.

If any of this information is already publicly available or held in an existing statistical disclosure log, please provide directions or direct links to where I can access it.

We have now completed our search for the information you requested.

RFI 1 and RFI 2 Response: Figures from 1 January 2023 – 1 September 2026.

Establishment	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total
HMP Addiewell	4	5	9	10	28
HMP Barlinnie	7	5	1	4	17
HMP Dumfries	2	0	1	0	3
HMP Edinburgh	9	8	5	7	29
HMP Glenochil	1	1	0	0	2
HMP & YOI Grampian	3	1	1	0	5
HMP Greenock	2	1	1	1	5
HMP Inverness	2	1	0	0	3
HMP Kilmarnock	3	1	5	3	12
HMP Low Moss	7	4	2	3	16
HMP Perth	4	2	2	5	13
HMP & YOI Polmont	1	1	1	0	3
HMP Shotts	3	1	6	5	15
HMP & YOI Stirling	2	0	0	0	2
Total	50	31	34	38	153

Please note that these figures include only incidents recorded as involving a visitor who was caught or intercepted at the relevant time. Where an illicit article or controlled substance was recovered subsequently, after the visitor had left, the incident may have been recorded under a different category and would therefore not be included in these figures.

RFI 3 and RFI 4 Response: The information requested is exempt from disclosure under sections 35(1)(a) and 35(1)(f) of FOISA.

Section 35(1)(a) – Prevention or Detection of Crime

Section 35(1)(a) of FOISA applies where disclosure of information would, or would be likely to, prejudice substantially the prevention or detection of crime.

The requested information would provide a year-on-year and, where available, establishment-level indication of the proportion of detected incidents that resulted in referral to Police Scotland. When considered alongside the incident figures disclosed in response to RFI 1 and RFI 2, this would enable comparisons to be made regarding enforcement outcomes across different periods and establishments. SPS considers that such comparisons could be used by individuals seeking to introduce illicit substances to assess perceived differences in the likelihood of referral or further enforcement action and to adapt their behaviour accordingly. Disclosure would therefore create a real and significant risk of undermining measures intended to prevent and detect the introduction of illicit substances into prisons.

SPS therefore considers that disclosure would be likely to prejudice substantially the prevention or detection of crime, and that section 35(1)(a) of FOISA applies.

Section 35(1)(f) – Security and Good Order in Prisons

Section 35(1)(f) of FOISA applies where disclosure of information would, or would be likely to, prejudice substantially the maintenance of security and good order within prisons.

Illicit substances present a significant risk to the safe, secure and orderly operation of prison establishments. When considered alongside the incident figures disclosed in response to RFI

1 and RFI 2, the requested information would allow comparisons to be made regarding the actions taken following detected incidents across different periods and, where available, individual establishments. SPS considers that this could assist individuals in identifying perceived variations in enforcement outcomes and in adapting attempts to introduce illicit substances accordingly. This would risk undermining the effectiveness of SPS controls, increasing the availability of illicit substances within prisons and adversely affecting the safety, security and orderly operation of establishments.

SPS therefore considers that disclosure would be likely to prejudice substantially the maintenance of security and good order within Scottish prisons, and that section 35(1)(f) of FOISA applies.

Public Interest Test

Sections 35(1)(a) and 35(1)(f) are qualified exemptions and are therefore subject to the public interest test.

SPS recognises that there is a public interest in openness and transparency regarding the management of prisons and the measures taken to address the introduction of illicit substances. Disclosure would contribute to public understanding of this issue and assist in informing discussion regarding prison safety and security.

However, there is also a strong public interest in ensuring that information is not disclosed where doing so would be likely to undermine the prevention and detection of crime or the maintenance of security and good order within prisons. There is a significant public interest in protecting the effectiveness of measures used to combat the introduction of illicit substances and in maintaining the safety of those living and working within the prison estate.

Having considered the competing public interest arguments, SPS has concluded that the public interest in maintaining the exemptions outweighs the public interest in disclosure. While disclosure would promote openness and assist public understanding of the response to illicit substances within prisons, this is outweighed by the significant public interest in avoiding the release of information that could facilitate comparisons of enforcement outcomes, assist attempts to circumvent existing controls and undermine the prevention of crime and the secure and orderly operation of prisons. Accordingly, the information requested in RFI 3 and RFI 4 is withheld under sections 35(1)(a) and 35(1)(f) of FOISA.

This concludes our response to your request.

If you are unhappy with this response to your request, you may ask us to conduct an internal review, by writing to The Chief Executive, One Lochside, 1 Lochside Avenue, Edinburgh, EH12 9DJ. Your request should explain why you wish a review to be conducted and should be made within forty working days of receipt of this letter, and we will reply within twenty working days of receipt. If you are not satisfied with the result of the review, you then have the right to make a formal complaint to the Scottish Information Commissioner.

Yours sincerely

Freedom of Information Adviser