

Friday 6 September 2013

## SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

### Crown Office

**Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government how many charges of alleged assault on police officers have been dropped in each year since 2007.

**Holding answer issued: 18 July 2013**

**(S4W-15853)**

**Frank Mulholland:** The following figures reflect the number of charges which have been discontinued in each year since 2007 in relation to section 41(1)(a) of the Police (Scotland) Act 1967. The figures relate to assaults on police officers as opposed to resisting, obstructing, molesting or hindering police officers.

In terms of prosecution policy, there is a strong presumption against accepting pleas of not guilty to charges involving assaults on police officers, however there are limited circumstances in which accepting a plea of not guilty to these charges would be appropriate. No action is taken in cases for a variety of reasons which include there being insufficient admissible evidence.

Prosecutors have recently been reminded of the robust prosecution policy in this area.

2007-08	2,613
2008-09	2,297
2009-10	1,896
2010-11	1,817
2011-12	2,057
2012-13	1,458

The information has been extracted from the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal's Service case management database. The database is a live, operational database used to manage the processing of reports submitted to Procurator Fiscals by the police and other reporting agencies.

### Enterprise and Environment

**John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Independent):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will publish the full business case for the bull stud at its farm at Knocknagael.

**Holding answer issued: 2 August 2013**

**(S4W-16268)**

**Paul Wheelhouse:** Yes, the information is now available on the Scottish Government website:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/Rural/crofting-policy/support-for-crofting/CroftingCattleImprovementScheme>.

**John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Independent):** To ask the Scottish Government how much it has spent on renovating unoccupied farm dwellings that it owns in each year since 1999.

**Holding answer issued: 2 August 2013**

**(S4W-16276)**

**Paul Wheelhouse:** Unfortunately this information is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost by making enquiries with all government departments as to how much each area has spent on renovating unoccupied farm dwellings each year since 1999. Accordingly, it is not possible to confirm the amount spent.

I can confirm that there are no unoccupied farm dwellings within the Scottish Government Lowland Land Settlement Holdings. There is one unoccupied farm cottage at Scottish Government Bull Stud Knocknagael, however there has been no expenditure on renovating this cottage since RPID took over the management of the Scottish Government Bull Stud Knocknagael in autumn of 2011.

**John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Independent):** To ask the Scottish Government how many renovated unoccupied farm dwelling houses that it owns have required subsequent renovations due to frost damage since 1999.

**Holding answer issued: 2 August 2013**

**(S4W-16277)**

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I refer the member to the answer to question S4W-16276 on 6 September 2013. All answers to written parliamentary questions are available on the Parliament's website, the search facility for which can be found at:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx>.

**John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Independent):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with (a) local authorities and (b) housing associations about its vacant farm dwelling houses.

**Holding answer issued: 2 August 2013**

**(S4W-16278)**

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I can confirm that no central records are held of any recent discussions taking place with either local authorities or housing associations concerning any farm dwelling houses falling within the ownership and control of the Scottish Government. However, I can confirm that notification has been provided to the Highland Council that one of the cottages at the Scottish Government Stud Farm at Knocknagael, Inverness is currently unoccupied for council tax purposes.

**John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Independent):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the long-term consequences of the loss of land suitable for food production.

**Holding answer issued: 2 August 2013**

**(S4W-16286)**

**Paul Wheelhouse:** There are a number of different factors influencing the potential for food production in Scotland. This not only includes the area of agricultural land, but also innovation, changing technologies and the impact of climate change. However in relation to the area of agricultural land, statistics highlight that this has remained relatively static in Scotland over the past 20 years at around 6.2 million hectares.

The structure of agricultural holdings and businesses changes from year to year to respond to the changing circumstances farmers face. For example, consolidating smaller holdings or reshaping businesses could result in either an increase or a decrease in agricultural area. Although some agricultural land may be replaced (for example by buildings), it does not necessarily equate to a loss of production for the business, particularly if the development improves efficiency or productivity.

There will always be competing pressures on land use. The Land Use Strategy encourages decision-makers to take account of the value of land highly suitable for food production through one of its ten Principles for Sustainable Land Use - Where land is highly suitable for a primary use this value should be recognised in decision making.

Public bodies are expected to have regard for the principles when making plans and taking significant decisions affecting the use of land. The strategy also encourages individuals, businesses and organisations who have significant land management responsibilities to have regard to the principles.

The Scottish Government also previously undertook a Rural Land Use Study which captured the conflicts and complementarities between different rural land uses and objectives. The various reports from the study can be accessed at the following link:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Research/About/EBAR/RLUS>.

### **Governance and Communities**

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Scottish Green Party):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of its target to eradicate fuel poverty, what discussions it has had with the UK Government regarding the cost of the Energy Company Obligation on people in Scotland.

**(S4W-16699)**

**Margaret Burgess:** At the joint energy summit with the UK Government on 23 January 2013 I raised six key demands, including "That the UK Government ensures that the costs of the Energy

Company Obligation initiative are passed onto consumers in a way which best protects the poorest and most vulnerable households.”

The Scottish Government is making available £79 million of funding to establish the Home Energy Efficiency Programmes for Scotland (HEEPS). This will deliver on the Fuel Poverty Forum’s recommendations for area based schemes to tackle areas of high fuel poverty alongside national schemes to provide support for the most vulnerable households wherever they live. Our spending will aim to help lever in around £120 million investment from energy companies through the Energy Company Obligation creating an annual fund of around £200 million to support energy efficiency in Scotland.

### Learning and Justice

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):** To ask the Scottish Government when it plans to take forward the recommendations in *Adapting for Change: Final Report of the Adaptations Working Group*.

(S4W-16683)

**Margaret Burgess:** We are aware of the importance of taking forward the recommendations from the Adaptations Working Group’s final report. The Scottish Government’s response to the Group’s report can be found on our website at

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing/access/ROOPH/ADWG/sgresponse>.

The work to take forward the recommendations has already commenced.

### Strategy and External Affairs

**Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government for what reason the issues raised by the Chief Executive of Aberdeen City Council with the Permanent Secretary on 1 July 2013 were answered in a letter from the First Minister dated 6 August 2013.

(S4W-16676)

**Joe FitzPatrick:** The Permanent Secretary responded to the Chief Executive of Aberdeen City Council on 6 August. The First Minister had also received letters from the Chief Executive on the issues raised by the Council and also responded on 6 August. The First Minister replied on the points raised in the letters to him and the Permanent Secretary’s reply referred to that letter, explaining the First Minister’s reply set out the facts and background on these issues. The Permanent Secretary’s letter dealt with the business of government during by-elections.

**Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of its publication, *Scottish Parliament By-Election, Aberdeen Donside, 20 June 2013: Guidance on conduct for Scottish Government civil servants*, which referred to “the period of sensitivity preceding Scottish Government by-elections”, for what reason the First Minister’s letter to the Chief Executive of Aberdeen City Council dated 6 August 2013 stated that “there is no such thing as a ‘purdah’ rule for by-elections.”

(S4W-16677)

**Joe FitzPatrick:** When the Scottish Parliament is dissolved in the lead-up to general elections there is a recognised pre-election period (commonly referred to as ‘purdah’) when restrictions on the conduct of government business apply. In by-elections, the Parliament is not dissolved. Accordingly, the First Minister’s reference to the absence of “a ‘purdah’ rule for by-elections” explains that normal government business continues during the lead-up to such by-elections, subject to consideration of its impact in the constituency where the by-election is occurring.

The First Minister also makes clear in his letter that the *Guidance on conduct for Scottish Government civil servants*, published on 21 May 2013 at the start of the period of sensitivity, states that “the business of the Scottish Government continues, and national (i.e. Scotland-wide) announcements and events, including regional announcements and events, should continue as normal,” during a by-election campaign.

A copy of the Scottish Government’s guidance is available at:

[www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/Elections/guidance/ElectionsGuidanceCS](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/Elections/guidance/ElectionsGuidanceCS).

**Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Scottish Labour):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it considers that the First Minister's comment in his letter to the Chief Executive of Aberdeen City Council dated 6 August 2013 that his visit to Bramble Brae Primary School was "impromptu" is consistent with reports that the SNP press office issued a calling notice to the local media in advance of the visit.

**(S4W-16678)**

**Joe FitzPatrick:** The description of the visit to Bramble Brae School as "impromptu" was first made by the Chief Executive of Aberdeen City Council in a letter to the First Minister of 20 June 2013. This followed an 18 June report by the Headmaster of the school to Aberdeen City Council about the visit. This report released under the Freedom of Information Act on 21 August 2013 – confirms the fact that the First Minister was unaccompanied by press or political colleagues and that the visit was indeed impromptu and in response to an invitation. An engagement immediately prior to the visit took place outwith the school premises, and was a political engagement for which a calling notice had been issued to the media.

*The following question received a holding answer:*

S4W-16686