

Capital has highest hate crime rate in the country

Edinburgh now has “the highest rate of hate crimes in Scotland” with 22.1 offences per 10,000 people in a year, according to Police Scotland data.

The number of hate crimes recorded in the capital – 1158 – was up by 20.6% in 12 months.

The definition of hate crime in law is “any crime which is understood by the victim or any other person as being motivated (wholly or partly) by malice or ill will towards a social group”. Certain groups are protected by legislation according to protected characteristics such as age and race.

The city has overtaken Glasgow, which still has the highest volume of hate crimes – 1484 – but only 17.7 per 10k population. The number of hate crimes in Scotland’s largest city fell by 11.5% compared with the previous year.

The Police Scotland performance report for April 2023 to March 2024 reveals this category of crime increased by 1.7% across Scotland from 6274 to 6379.

The fewest number of offences were recorded in the Highlands and Islands with 121 and Dumfries and Galloway with 169.

The report states: “When considering the data at a divisional level the most significant numerical differences are in E Division (Edinburgh) and G Division (Glasgow).

“Although Glasgow has the highest volume of crimes, these decreased by 11.5% whereas crimes in Edinburgh have increased by 20.6%. This also means that Edinburgh has the highest rate of hate crimes per 10k population now.”

It adds: “When considering the aggravator race and religion are increasing in Edinburgh but decreasing in Glasgow.”

Police Scotland point out that an operation aimed at ensuring the safety and security of MSPs was a contributory factor in the spike in Edinburgh.

“It is important to note that in Edinburgh a high volume of crimes in December in relation to Operation SANDBED was recorded. These crimes contributed to 403 hate crimes being recorded in Edinburgh Division in Quarter 3 compared to a five-year mean of 263.2.”

In May, it was reported that hundreds of social media posts sent to MSPs were so abusive and threatening they were passed to Police Scotland.

The findings emerged from a pilot project set up by the Scottish Parliament in the aftermath of the murder of the MP Sir David Amess, who was killed at his constituency surgery in October 2021.

Police Scotland is also continuing to log high numbers of controversial non-crime hate incidents – where no actual crime has been committed.

The performance report reveals the force recorded 7281 non-crime hate incidents (NCHI) in 2023/24, up 0.9% on the previous year. The number exceeds actual hate crimes.

Critics say the practice of tracking NCHIs has led to a database of people whose speech is perceived as motivated by hostility to race, religion, sexual orientation, disability or transgender status.

It has led to claims that the force is spending too much time policing free speech and social media spats and too little time focused on fighting crime.

Police Scotland's recorded detection rate for hate crimes fell 7% from 64.4% in 2022/23 to 57.4% in 2023/24.

Deputy Chief Constable Alan Speirs said: "Police Scotland is a rights-based organisation and officers balance the protections people have under human rights legislation against other laws every day, using their discretion and good sense.

"To support implementation of the new hate crime legislation, Police Scotland developed and delivered a programme of training to support our officers, including an e-learning module which has been completed by more than 91% of officers, as well as a series of in-person and online workshops.

"We've trained a cadre of around 80 hate crime advisors and 450 hate crime champions to support colleagues while Contact, Command and Control (C3), officers and staff also received tailored training.

"This guidance provides additional clarity, direction, and consistency to our response to reports of hate, including hate crime and non-crime hate incidents and aligns closely with the College of Policing guidance."