



National Audit Office

The UK's independent public spending watchdog

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Philip Swift
Car Crime UK
Via email to:
carcrimeuk@gmail.com

Reference GF 3845-26
Date 25 June 2026

Dear Mr Swift,

POTENTIAL SYSTEMATIC UNDER-RECORDING OF STOLEN VEHICLES

Thank you for contacting the National Audit Office (NAO) setting out your concerns about the reporting of stolen vehicles. You raised concerns around the practice of “weeding”, whereby lost or stolen (LoS) markers are removed from vehicles when a report is not confirmed within six weeks.

Your correspondence has been passed to me as the NAO Director responsible for the Home Office. The NAO and the Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG), who is head of the NAO, are both independent of government. Our functions are to audit and express an opinion on the accounts of government departments and other central government bodies, and to carry out examinations into the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which government departments and other public sector bodies have used their resources.

I read with interest the information you provided and my team has met with an official at the Home Office to discuss the matter. As you set out, when a vehicle is reported as stolen to a local police force, an LoS marker is registered on the Police National Computer. The LoS marker is initially labelled as unconfirmed, enabling police officers to conduct due diligence before confirming that a theft has occurred. At that point the status is changed to confirmed. Only once an LoS marker is labelled as confirmed is it included in the report available to the DVLA. If the report remains unconfirmed after 6 weeks, it is removed from the PNC – the process known as “weeding”.

The official my team spoke with confirmed that it is this process which leads to the discrepancy between the police and DVLA databases, with the police database including both unconfirmed and confirmed vehicle thefts and the DVLA database holding only the latter.

We asked the Home Office what remedial action it planned to take to address the data gap. You may be aware of the National Law Enforcement Data Service (LEDS), which we previously examined in our 2021 report, [The National Law Enforcement Data Programme](#). This is a national policing system designed to replace the functionality provided by the Police National Computer. The Home Office told my team that it is in discussions with police forces to understand whether it is appropriate to remove the LoS confirmation step from the new functionality being created through LEDS. Should this step be taken, it would remove the data discrepancy caused by “weeding” at the six-week mark. The official confirmed that there was no timetable for making this change.

You may be interested to consider a further source of data on vehicle theft: the Crime Survey for England and Wales. The relevant data for the most recent and other years are here: [Nature of crime: vehicle-related theft - Office for National Statistics](#). These include data on the proportion of vehicles that, once stolen, are returned to their owners. The Office for National Statistics uses the Crime Survey to estimate the changing incidence of

certain crimes over time. The data for vehicle theft, since 1981, are available in tables A1a and A1b here: [Crime in England and Wales: Appendix tables - Office for National Statistics](#).

I do not intend to conduct further work on this matter at this time. However, given the importance of LEDS, it is possible we will consider the programme again in future.

Thank you again for bringing your interesting and informative research to our attention.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tim Phillips', with a large, sweeping flourish underneath.

Dr Tim Phillips,
Director, Home Affairs