

Bungling prison guards losing jail cell keys have cost taxpayers £1.8m; If a set of keys goes missing the standard procedure is replace the whole set of locks - which has happened 24 times in a decade

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Body

Bungling jail staff who lose keys have cost the taxpayer £1.8 million over the past decade.

The mammoth sum has been spent replacing locks and keys after security alerts were sparked by the losses.

One single incident this year cost £117k alone.

Keys have been lost 24 times since 2005.

Typically, if a set of keys are lost all locks have to be changed for security reasons.

A source said yesterday: "These are very costly mistakes."

Prisons typically go into lockdown when keys are lost, with prisoners confined to their cells.

Jails where keys vanished include Maidstone, Kent - now exclusively home to foreign offenders - and Highpoint in Suffolk - formerly home to Moors murderer Myra Hindley.

In another case, the private contractor G4S had to foot a £500k bill when keys were lost at HMP Winson Green, Birmingham, run by the firm. The 2011 bungle incurred no cost to the taxpayer.

The overall cost for the lost keys was revealed in a Parliamentary answer by justice minister Andrew Selous last week.

Mr Selous said: "Security is paramount within prisons and it is important that the risk of any potential key compromise is addressed as quickly as possible to protect the public.

"When a key/lock incident is reported an immediate investigation is undertaken to assess the risk and unless it is clear that security has not been compromised, locking mechanisms and keys will be replaced and/or other necessary remedial action will be taken."

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