



The Scottish Parliament Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Parliamentary Year 1, No. 18, Session 7

Meeting of the Parliament

Thursday 25 June 2026

Note: (DT) signifies a decision taken at Decision Time.

The meeting opened at 1.30 pm.

- 1. Oaths and Affirmations:** James Alexander Adams took his oath of allegiance before the Clerk.
- 2. General Questions:** Questions were answered by Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers.
- 3. First Minister's Questions (Party Leaders):** Questions were answered by the First Minister (John Swinney).
- 4. Achieving a Sustainable Prison Population:** The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Neil Gray) moved S7M-00469—That the Parliament recognises the scale and complexity of the current prison population, which is above the design and operational capacity of the estate and causes significant associated operational and safety risks for prison staff; notes that Scotland has one of the highest prison populations in western Europe; acknowledges the underlying drivers, including the growing number of individuals convicted of serious violent and sexual offences who receive longer sentences, reflecting progress in how the justice system supports victims and holds offenders to account; notes that the cost per prisoner per year to the public purse is £52,000; recognises the importance of effective rehabilitation to reduce re-offending and to benefit the communities that individuals return to; agrees that public safety is paramount and that it is vital that victims are supported and have confidence in the justice system, and agrees, therefore, that a balanced package of measures to increase capacity in the prison estate, expand effective community sentencing, and enact preventative measures to stop people entering or re-entering

the prison system, are necessary to achieve a sustainable prison population now and in the future.

Pauline McNeill moved amendment S7M-00469.2—

As an amendment to motion S7M-00469, in the name of Neil Gray (Achieving a Sustainable Prison Population), insert at end "; is concerned that the current prison population crisis is chronically hampering effective rehabilitation; calls on the Scottish Government to increase its investment in GPS technology and speed up its roll out, and notes that the current approach to rehabilitation, community justice and early release is failing to address the prison population crisis.

After debate, the amendment was agreed to ((DT) by division: For 65, Against 53, Abstentions 0).

Amanda Bland moved amendment S7M-00469.1—

As an amendment to motion S7M-00469, in the name of Neil Gray (Achieving a Sustainable Prison Population), leave out from "acknowledges" to end, and insert "notes that data on prison population published in 2025 show that 63% of current prisoners have been incarcerated before, highlighting the highly cyclical nature of the prison population; expresses concern that the Scottish Government has sought to attribute the unsustainable prison population to external factors, while not fully acknowledging the extent to which failings in both its rehabilitation programme and its approach to tackling the longer term issues have a comparatively much bigger impact; agrees that these failings, combined with the use of early release, put the public at increased risk, and resolves that more intensive support is required to support individuals out of a life of crime and offending, alongside the introduction of minimum sentences for crimes as a stronger deterrent."

After debate, the amendment was disagreed to ((DT) by division: For 26, Against 94, Abstentions 0).

Maggie Chapman moved amendment S7M-00469.3—

As an amendment to S7M-00469, in the name of Neil Gray (Achieving a Sustainable Prison Population), leave out from second "operational" to end and insert "human rights and safety risks for staff and prisoners; further recognises the importance of prioritising harm reduction across the justice system; believes that incarceration should always be the last resort, once all other alternatives have been exhausted; notes that Scotland has one of the highest prison populations in western Europe, including a disproportionate remand population; acknowledges the underlying drivers, including poverty, inequality, homelessness and experience of the care system; notes that the cost per prisoner per year to the public purse is £52,200; recognises the need for effective rehabilitation to reduce offending and re-offending and to benefit the communities that individuals return to; agrees that public safety is paramount and that it is vital that victims and survivors should be at the heart

of the justice system, and must be supported and have confidence in it, and agrees, therefore, that a balanced package of measures to expand effective community sentencing and other alternatives to prison, such as restorative justice, bail supervision and supported accommodation, and to enact preventative measures to stop people entering or re-entering the prison system, including sustained investment in housing, mental health services, youth work, addiction services and community support, as part of a transformative justice approach, are necessary to achieve a sustainable prison population now and in the future."

After debate, the amendment was disagreed to ((DT) by division: For 16, Against 104, Abstentions 0).

Stephen Kerr moved amendment S7M-00469.5—

As an amendment to S7M-00469, in the name of Neil Gray (Achieving a Sustainable Prison Population), leave out from "acknowledges the underlying drivers" to end, and insert "recognises that the current pressures on Scotland's prison estate were repeatedly highlighted by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons and were described as 'not unexpected'; notes that prison overcrowding did not emerge suddenly but follows years of warnings regarding prison capacity, rehabilitation, safety and prisoner welfare; rejects any suggestion that the current situation is unavoidable; notes with concern that more than a quarter of Scotland's prison population is comprised of remand prisoners awaiting the conclusion of court proceedings; believes that persistent court backlogs and delays across the justice system are significant contributors to prison overcrowding and are preventing victims, witnesses and accused individuals from obtaining timely justice; notes that over 1,300 foreign national offenders are currently held within Scotland's prison estate and believes that greater use should be made of appropriate repatriation arrangements; expresses alarm at the record number of deaths in custody, including a record number of suicides; recognises the impact that overcrowding is having on rehabilitation, purposeful activity and public protection; agrees that public safety, justice for victims and confidence in the rule of law must remain paramount; believes that Scottish Ministers must set out the reasons why repeated warnings regarding overcrowding, remand levels, deaths in custody and prison conditions were not acted upon sooner; further believes that achieving a sustainable prison population requires action to reduce court delays, address the high remand population, improve access to rehabilitation and offender programmes, increase the effective repatriation of foreign national offenders where appropriate, and provide sufficient prison capacity to meet operational demand, and believes that the long-term sustainability of Scotland's prison population depends upon addressing the underlying causes of overcrowding rather than relying on the early release of prisoners as a substitute for effective management of the justice system."

After debate, the amendment was disagreed to ((DT) by division: For 26, Against 78, Abstentions 15).

Yi-pei Chou Turvey moved amendment S7M-00469.4—

As an amendment to motion S7M-00469 in the name of Neil Gray (Achieving a Sustainable Prison Population), insert " "; further notes the persistently high remand population and the contribution that court delays and wider pressures within the justice system have on overcrowding in the prison estate; believes that public protection, rehabilitation, alternatives to custody and a reduction in reoffending must be pursued together rather than in competition with one another; further believes that investment in addiction treatment, mental health services, supported housing and effective community justice are essential to reducing offending and easing the pressure on prisons, and calls on the Scottish Government to publish a long-term strategy for achieving a sustainable prison population that commands public confidence and adequately supports victims and their rights to information, protection and safety."

After debate, the amendment was agreed to (DT).

The motion, as amended, was agreed to ((DT) by division: For 89, Against 31, Abstentions 0).

Accordingly, the Parliament resolved—

That the Parliament recognises the scale and complexity of the current prison population, which is above the design and operational capacity of the estate and causes significant associated operational and safety risks for prison staff; notes that Scotland has one of the highest prison populations in western Europe; acknowledges the underlying drivers, including the growing number of individuals convicted of serious violent and sexual offences who receive longer sentences, reflecting progress in how the justice system supports victims and holds offenders to account; notes that the cost per prisoner per year to the public purse is £52,000; recognises the importance of effective rehabilitation to reduce re-offending and to benefit the communities that individuals return to; agrees that public safety is paramount and that it is vital that victims are supported and have confidence in the justice system; agrees, therefore, that a balanced package of measures to increase capacity in the prison estate, expand effective community sentencing, and enact preventative measures to stop people entering or re-entering the prison system, are necessary to achieve a sustainable prison population now and in the future; is concerned that the current prison population crisis is chronically hampering effective rehabilitation; calls on the Scottish Government to increase its investment in GPS technology and speed up its roll out, and notes that the current approach to rehabilitation, community justice and early release is failing to address the prison population crisis; further notes the persistently high remand population and the contribution that court delays and wider pressures within the justice system have on overcrowding in the prison estate; believes that public protection, rehabilitation, alternatives to custody and a reduction in reoffending must be pursued together rather than in competition with one another; further believes that investment in addiction treatment, mental health services, supported housing and effective community justice are essential to reducing offending and easing the pressure on prisons, and calls on the Scottish Government to publish a long-term strategy for

achieving a sustainable prison population that commands public confidence and adequately supports victims and their rights to information, protection and safety.

5. Ministerial Statement: The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care (Angela Constance) made a statement and answered questions on NHS Capital Projects.

6. Scottish Commission for Public Audit: Stephen Kerr moved S7M-00455— That the Parliament agrees to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body's proposal to appoint Miles Briggs, Michael Marra, Jenni Minto and Kate Nevens to be members of the Scottish Commission for Public Audit.

The motion was agreed to (DT).

7. Committee Membership: The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Jamie Hepburn), on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, moved S7M-00492—That the Parliament agrees that James Adams be appointed as a member of the Climate Action Committee.

The motion was agreed to (DT).

8. Membership of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe: The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Jamie Hepburn), on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, moved S7M-00505— That the Parliament agrees to nominate Keith Brown as a full member and Jenny Young as an alternate member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

The motion was agreed to (DT).

9. Decision Time: The Parliament took decisions on items 4, 6, 7 and 8 as noted above.

10. Action Mesothelioma Day 2026: The Parliament debated S7M-00343 in the name of Marie McNair—That the Parliament recognises Action Mesothelioma Day 2026, which will be marked on 3 July; understands that this is a national event held each year to raise awareness of mesothelioma and asbestos; notes that mesothelioma is a rare but aggressive form of cancer that is usually caused by exposure to asbestos, with tiny fibres getting into the lungs and damaging them over time; understands that over 2,700 people in the UK are diagnosed with the condition each year, including around 200 in Scotland; notes that the cancer most commonly occurs in the lining of the lung, but can also be found in the lining of both the abdomen and the heart, with symptoms including shortness of breath, chest pain, coughing and tiredness; recognises the importance of grassroots activism to seek justice for victims, including the campaign, Cape Must Pay!, which calls for the former asbestos manufacturer Cape plc, which is now owned by Altrad, to donate £10 million to mesothelioma research; acknowledges with concern what it sees as the time bar injustice for mesothelioma victims and welcomes the Scottish Law Commission report, Report on Damages for Personal Injury; notes the calls for action to be taken to implement the report's findings; welcomes the events taking place across the country and encourages everyone to "Go Blue for Meso" by joining

or organising a Blue Light Walk to raise awareness or fundraise; applauds the longstanding and ongoing work of the Clydebank Asbestos Group, which has provided information and support to people with asbestos-related conditions for over 30 years, and hopes for a successful Action Mesothelioma Day 2026.

The meeting closed at 6.09 pm.

David McGill
Clerk of the Parliament
25 June 2026

Appendix

(Note: this Appendix does not form part of the Minutes)

Legislative Consent Memorandum

The following memorandum was lodged on 25 June 2026—

Neil Gray, Cabinet Secretary for Justice: Legislative Consent Memorandum on the Financial Services and Markets Bill (UK Parliament legislation) (LCM-S7-8)

Other Documents

The following document was laid before the Parliament on 25 June 2026 and is not subject to parliamentary procedure—

Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland: Annual Report 2025-26 (SG/2026/124) laid under Section 18(2) of the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003

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