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Update on Action to Improve the Experience of Victims of Crime

Dear Convener

I am writing to advise you that this morning (12th December) I published a suite of reports that will play an important role in helping to inform and shape a package of reforms intended to improve the experiences and strengthen the rights of victims of crime, with a specific focus on victims of sexual crime.

The first of these reports is an [independent analysis of responses to the *Improving Victims' Experience of the Justice System Consultation*](#). The Consultation sought the views of the public and stakeholders on a range of different proposals. Several were recommended by the Lady Dorrian Review such as the creation of a specialist sexual offences court and implementing a pilot of single judge rape trials, but these were considered alongside other proposals such as the creation of a Victims' Commissioner for Scotland. The Consultation ran from 12 May to 19 August 2022 during which time it received a total of 69 responses. Of these, 24 were from individuals and 45 from organisations including victim and witness support organisations, legal organisations, local authority groups, public bodies and law enforcement. Independent analysis of the consultation responses was contracted to KSO Research following a tendering process and this has been published alongside responses to the consultation where permission to do so has been given.

As well as the analysis of consultation responses, we have also published the outcomes of work conducted by the Lady Dorrian Review Governance Group in exploring the implementation of specific recommendations made by the Review. As you are aware, the Governance Group was established in December last year to bring partners from across the justice system together to consider the Review's recommendations and to explore how these might be implemented. To support it in delivering against this remit, the Governance Group established working groups to undertake more detailed consideration of the following recommendations:

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- creation of a national, specialist sexual offences court;
- consideration of a time-limited pilot of single judge rape trials; and
- development of a pilot programme for communicating information to juries regarding certain common rape myths and stereotypes.

Each of these working groups have now concluded and their findings reported to and endorsed by the Governance Group. All three working groups have made a significant contribution to the discussion on how these individual recommendations might be implemented and I would like to put on record my thanks to all of the working group members for sharing their time and insights with us. The findings of each of the working groups were published on the Scottish Government's website this morning and links to these can be found below:

- Enhancing the Quality of Jury Involvement Working Group
<https://www.gov.scot/isbn/9781805252382>
- Consideration of a Time-Limited Pilot of Single Judge Rape Trials Working Group Report <https://www.gov.scot/isbn/9781805252405>
- Specialist Sexual Offences Court Working Group - <https://www.gov.scot/isbn/9781805252399>

An evidence briefing exploring alternatives to jury trials in other jurisdictions that was commissioned by the Single Judge Rape Trial Pilot Working Group to support its deliberations will be published early next year.

I will now consider the responses to the consultation in conjunction with the findings of the Lady Dorrian Review Governance Group with a view to informing development of a Criminal Justice Reform Bill that will deliver against our ambition for a person-centred and trauma-informed justice system as set out in our Vision for Justice. I know that the Criminal Justice Committee shares this ambition and will therefore take a keen interest in the findings of both the consultation and the Working Group reports.



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