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Dear Convener

Scotland's Secure Accommodation – Update Following Correspondence and Statement of 15 May

Thank you for your letter of 19 May in response to my letter to Committee on the provision of secure care places in Scotland, and my statement in Parliament on 15 May.

I wanted to combine my response to your letter with an update on our progress in restoring capacity and advancing actions to ensure the long-term sustainability of Scotland's secure accommodation.

Response to your questions

I can confirm that following the commencement of the provisions of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024, which came in to force on 28 August last year, there have been no under 18s detained in a prison or Young Offenders Institution. The legislation ensures that this is no longer legally possible and, therefore, if a period of detention is required then this must be in a child friendly setting, such as secure accommodation.

You have asked about demand for placements and circumstances where the demand outstrips current capacity and plans for that eventuality. The demand for placements is complex and changes on a daily basis, due to the responsibility for the placement of children in secure lying with either Scottish Ministers for those sentenced on indictment, or with the local authorities for all other placements, we do not hold any data around times when placements are required and not met by secure.

In Scotland a total of 82 beds are on the Scotland Excel framework, across 4 independent secure care providers. However, due to the improvement notice previously issued to St Mary's Kenmure, staffing issues and pressures on the other three secure centres, the total

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number of beds available since October last year, has reduced by around 20% to around 67 beds – 12 in St Mary's, reduced from 24 places and 15 in Good Shepherd reduced from 18 places. Kibble and Rossie continue to offer the full 18 beds and 22 beds respectively. Demand fluctuates at least daily.

If capacity in centres is reached then the use of an emergency bed in secure can be utilised, until a place becomes available. Currently, only Kibble and Rossie are able to offer their emergency bed. Should capacity, including the emergency bed, be reached then all appropriate and safe alternatives will be considered by the relevant decision makers, ensuring that any risks are managed appropriately to protect the child and the community. This includes the use of alternative places of safety and bespoke packages of care as determined by the placing authority, until a place is available in secure accommodation.

Your letter enquired about the professional lead based at Social Work Scotland, funded by the Scottish Government for the next 12 months. Once in post, the professional lead will support local authorities, providing advice and connections for local authority social work teams to facilitate the identification of appropriate intensive support for children, alongside the development and expansion of safe, alternative, multi-agency options to secure care, working with Scottish Government officials and other key partners. The role will also include assisting the construction of a national, real-time picture of the population of children requiring support. I understand that an offer has been made to an appointable candidate who will start in post on 28 July.

You have also asked for an update on plans to reform the contractual model for secure. While our immediate focus has been on responding to the immediate challenges, we are aware of the view held by many that the current funding model for secure care is not sustainable longer term. As part of our work underway on 'reimagining secure care' – which I set out in the second part of this letter – we plan to review the current strategic commissioning arrangements for secure. This will require in depth consideration between the Scottish Government and key partners - including COSLA and Social Work Scotland - to explore the various options available. That will form part of our plans for the future of secure care in Scotland between now and 2030, and the period beyond. I would be happy to provide further detail on these specific matters as they develop.

Update on actions underway to restore capacity and build sustainability

As I set out in my letter of 29 April, in recent months, as a result of various factors, we have seen significant pressure and constraints on the availability of secure accommodation in Scotland.

In response to these constraints, a contingency plan was developed in collaboration with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) and Social Work Scotland (SWS). Recent actions – aimed at stabilisation and capacity restoration - include:

- **Up to £8.4 million in funding** to cover the placement of sentenced and remanded children, and up to 16 beds across the secure care estate to maintain capacity in 2025-26 and 2026-27.
- **Up to £2 million in funding** to support contingency actions in 2025-26.
- **Updated practice guidance** on alternatives to secure care published in March 2025.
- **New four-bed national contingency resource** opened in April 2025 to restore lost capacity.

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- **Appointment of a Professional Lead** at Social Work Scotland, fully funded by the Scottish Government, to strengthen local government partnerships and coordinate national communications.

Although efforts are ongoing to stabilise and restore capacity, the availability of secure accommodation beds remains variable and subject to daily fluctuation. This highlights the urgent need for sustained, coordinated planning across all relevant services to ensure that children receive care, protection, and support in the most suitable settings.

St Mary's Kenmure

As I set out in my letter of 29 April, St Mary's Kenmure have been restricted to 12 places for a number of months following enforcement action taken by the Care Inspectorate in October. This has displaced demand for places to the remaining three providers.

As confirmed in my 15 May statement, the centre is redoubling its efforts to enhance staff capacity, with the aim of safely progressing toward a sustainable restoration as soon as possible. The recruitment and selection process for these specialist roles is well underway; however, it is recognised that this will require time to complete. I will provide a further update to Parliament in the Autumn.

'Reimagining secure care'

I am pleased to confirm that the Scottish Government will today publish our response to the ['Reimagining Secure Care: A Vision for the Future'](#). Please see enclosed.

The 'reimagining secure care' report, published by the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) in September 2024, outlined a bold and transformative vision for the future of secure care, and broader children's care, in Scotland.

The 'reimagining secure care' report represents an important stimulus, but we recognise the broader issues that must be addressed first to ensure the resilience and sustainability of secure care services and the wider system. This involves restoring lost capacity within secure accommodation, enhancing preventative approaches and alternatives to reduce pressure on limited secure care resources, and improving the integration of services supporting children.

We are already in the early chapters of this journey. The work to respond to acute capacity challenges in Scotland's secure accommodation is now evolving into a proactive element of our broader future vision.

Change must also reflect broader policy and legislative reforms. To deliver the highest standard of care for our most vulnerable children, those working within the system must be equipped with the necessary capacity and confidence. Therefore, a phased approach to implementation is essential. This includes:

- Giving services and professionals resources and space needed to adapt effectively.
- Developing and embedding the right statutory and regulatory framework.
- Enabling practice change through targeted training, clear guidance, and capacity building.

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- Creating space for meaningful engagement with children, families, communities, and practitioners.

Transforming Scotland's secure care system requires immediate stabilisation activity while laying the groundwork for sustainable and meaningful reform:

- Phase 1 (2025-26 – 2027-28): Capacity restoration and reinforcement
- Phase 2 (2028-29 – 2029-30): Road-testing / readiness for 'reimagining'

Phase 1 – capacity restoration and reinforcement (2025-26 – 2027-28)

Phase 1 will focus on responding to immediate pressures facing secure care, ensuring no child is left without appropriate, safe and trauma-informed care. Actions will set the foundations for change, and will include:

Restoring secure care capacity (2025-26)

The Promise Scotland has emphasised the importance of striking a careful balance between ensuring sufficient secure care capacity and avoiding overprovision. The Scottish Government remains focused on restoring capacity to meet the current and projected needs of Scotland's children. There is an urgent requirement to stabilise existing services through robust contingency planning that not only restores capacity but also ensures service continuity and strengthens long-term resilience. Future reform must not compromise the ability to respond to immediate and pressing needs.

Subject to the necessary approval and registration, actions currently being explored include:

- The establishment of a further 4-bedded national contingency resource to restore lost capacity across the secure estate.
- The construction of 2-3 future-proofed 4-bedded houses at Kibble to restore capacity and support a pathway to meeting the asks of the Promise.
- Establishment of a new fully-funded emergency contingency resource providing intensive, wrap-around support when secure accommodation is unavailable.

We will also continue discussions with secure providers and partners to consider and explore other capacity restoration actions. This will include opportunities to strengthen preventative measures, alternatives to secure care and transitions back to communities.

Joint action plan – Scottish Government and COSLA (Autumn 2025)

To underpin our response to the RSC report, the Scottish Government will develop a joint action plan with COSLA. This will be delivered in concert with the new Social Work Scotland Professional Lead, starting in post next month.

Capital funding (2025-26)

The Scottish Government is backing the response to 'reimagining secure care' with £1.5 million capital funding for secure providers in 2025-26.

This will support secure providers to prepare for further care and justice reforms, and to future proof their services and campuses to prepare for a 'reimagined' secure care system.

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Consultation (2025-26)

The Scottish Government recognises that ‘reimagining’ secure care goes beyond policy changes or upgrades to existing campuses - it requires a deep shift in culture and systems to better support Scotland’s most vulnerable children. To achieve this, listening and consultation must be at the heart of our approach.

We will therefore launch a consultation by the end of 2025 focused on:

- The future purpose and function of secure care, including routes into and transitions from secure care.
- Secure care funding and commissioning models.
- The proposed “flex secure” model, and how it could be tailored to Scotland’s unique context.
- The role of community-based alternatives to secure accommodation and how they could interface with secure settings.
- The development of aftercare, transitions, and reintegration support for children leaving secure care.

National placement co-ordination function (2025-28)

The Scottish Government will work in partnership with secure providers and commissioning authorities to explore the potential for the National Social Work Agency’s remit to include a new national secure accommodation placement and co-ordination function. Consideration will be given to resource, remit, functions and costs.

As well as providing a more robust and permanent oversight and monitoring service, this approach could potentially address some longstanding issues relating to data, regional practice and service availability disparities, co-ordination and resource efficiency.

Actions in phase 1 also focus on:

- **Improving data and enhancing system integration** – delivering co-ordinated support across health, education, justice, and social care, and a commitment to improving data.
- **Ensuring a holistic approach** focused on early intervention, preventative measures and effective transitions.
- **Testing and evaluating change** – exploring and piloting new approaches where evidence and consultation are currently limited.
- **Supporting the sustainability and retention** of the secure accommodation workforce.
- **Reforming commissioning and funding** – exploring opportunities to strengthen the secure accommodation funding and commissioning models to ensure transparency and efficiency.

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Phase 2: road-testing / readiness for 'reimagining' secure care (2028-30, and beyond)

Phase 2 will focus on implementing changes which come as a result of the consultation and scoping undertaken during phase 1, including:

- Implementing the future funding commissioning model – following the scoping and consultation undertaken in phase 1.
- Developing a roadmap for beyond 2030 – setting out the future of secure care beyond 2030.

Parliamentary engagement

I intend to provide an update to Parliament in the Autumn.

Meantime, I hope this update offers clarity on the immediate and longer-term actions underway to restore capacity and strengthen resilience in secure accommodation.

Yours sincerely,



Natalie Don-Innes MSP
Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise

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