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Mr Douglas Ross MSP
Convener, Education, Children and Young
People Committee

By Email: ecyp.committee@parliament.scot

26 June 2025

Dear Convener,

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

Following my letter of 29 April and Ministerial Statement of 15 May, I am writing to update the Committee on our progress in restoring capacity and advancing actions to ensure the long-term sustainability of Scotland's secure accommodation.

Context – secure care capacity

Secure care provides an intensive, trauma-informed environment for a small number of Scotland's children who are in acute need of safety, support and stability to meet their needs.

As the responsible portfolio Minister, I appreciate the challenges secure providers face in delivering this intensive support, and I value the work they do to provide the best possible care to children in the most difficult and complex circumstances.

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:

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- **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.
- **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'](#).

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

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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.
- 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.

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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.

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.

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- **Reforming commissioning and funding** – exploring opportunities to strengthen the secure accommodation funding and commissioning models to ensure transparency and efficiency.

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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