Cabinet Secretary for Justice
Rùnaire a' Chaibineit airson Ceartas
Neil Gray MSP

T: 0300 244 4000
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

David Linden MSP
Convener
Criminal Justice Committee
Scottish Parliament

criminaljustice.committee@parliament.scot

11 November 2026

Dear Convener,

Thank you for your letter following my appearance before the Committee on 4 November 2026. During the evidence session, members raised a number of additional points on mental health-related demand, police witness attendance at court, and the financial benefits delivered through police reform. I welcome the opportunity to provide the further information requested and have set out responses to each of these areas below.

1. **The proportion of mental health incidents where it will still be appropriate to have a police response once other services have addressed failings in their services**

The Scottish Government, alongside Police Scotland, NHS partners and local public services, is committed to ensuring that individuals experiencing mental health distress receive support from the service best placed to meet their needs.

As I made clear at Committee, the aim of current reform activity is not to remove police involvement from all mental health-related incidents. There will continue to be circumstances where a policing response is required, including where there are concerns about immediate safety, risks to individuals or others, missing persons, vulnerability, criminality, or where police powers are required.

The Committee asked what proportion of incidents would continue to require a police response once these reforms are fully implemented. At present, Police Scotland is not able to reliably quantify this. While data on mental health-related incidents continues to improve, it is not currently possible to determine with confidence what proportion of demand would remain with policing if gaps in wider service provision were addressed.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™ We invest in people Silver
disability confident LEADER

Provisional data from 1 April 2026 to 5 November 2026 indicates that around 16% of mental health-related deployments involved criminality. However, this should be treated with caution. The absence of criminality does not mean there was no legitimate policing purpose, and police attendance may still be required to address immediate risks, safeguard vulnerable individuals, or exercise statutory powers.

Police Scotland has advised that predicting future levels of police demand would require assumptions about how incidents might have been managed by other services and how they may have developed had police not attended. The focus therefore remains on ensuring there is a clear and shared understanding across agencies of their respective responsibilities, reducing inappropriate reliance on policing, and ensuring that police involvement is reserved for those situations where there is a clear policing purpose.

2. Progress in reducing time police witnesses spend in court

As I outlined during the evidence session, a range of measures have already been introduced across the justice system to reduce the amount of police time spent attending court and to minimise disruption to operational policing.

I have already highlighted the increased use of digital and remote evidence arrangements, which allow police officers to provide evidence from police premises rather than travelling to and waiting within court buildings. These arrangements help minimise abstraction from frontline duties while maintaining the integrity of court proceedings.

The Committee also raised concerns about the time officers spend waiting to give evidence, together with wider issues relating to witness citation and court scheduling processes. There is significant work underway across the criminal justice system to address these challenges and improve overall efficiency, with direct benefits for police officers who are required to attend court as witnesses.

For example, guidance has recently been issued to prosecutors on the provisions relating to virtual attendance contained within the Criminal Justice Modernisation and Abusive Domestic Behaviour Reviews (Scotland) Act 2025.

Police Scotland has advised that, in High Court cases, the balance between remote and in-person evidence giving is continuing to shift. Current data indicates that 61% of police witness evidence is now provided remotely, compared with 39% delivered in person. Police Scotland currently operates 47 remote evidence-giving rooms and is considering further expansion of this provision in anticipation of the introduction of four new High Courts next year.

A further significant development has been the introduction of Summary Case Management (SCM), which began national roll-out in January 2025. SCM has enabled more cases to be resolved before a trial diet is assigned through earlier disclosure of evidence, earlier engagement between the Crown and defence, and active judicial case management.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™ We invest in people Silver
disability confident LEADER

The impact has been substantial. As at March 2026, scheduled summary trials had reduced to 36% of pre-pandemic levels, representing the lowest volume of scheduled summary trials recorded. This has resulted in fewer victims, witnesses and police officers being cited to attend court unnecessarily.

It is estimated that more than 100,000 fewer police officers were cited to give evidence during the period of SCM national roll-out. Over the same period, approximately 3,000 fewer child witnesses were cited, representing a reduction of 40%. Police witness citations in summary cases have fallen by 47% since May 2023, while citations in domestic abuse cases have reduced by 41%.

Taken together, this demonstrates that SCM has delivered a substantial and measurable reduction in the number of police officers required to attend summary court proceedings as witnesses.

The Committee may be particularly interested in the 2026 Summary Case Management National Roll-Out Report. The report highlights the practical impact of SCM, noting that:

> "*The reductions in both first citations and re-citations demonstrate the practical impact of SCM. They also reflect increased efficiency within the justice system: fewer police officers are abstracted from frontline duties, fewer victims and witnesses face repeated or unnecessary attendance, and justice partners experience lower administrative burden associated with issuing and serving witness citations and assigning unnecessary trials. These improvements reinforce the sustained operational benefits delivered by SCM and underline its contribution to a more proportionate, efficient and trauma-informed summary justice system."*

Work is also underway to consider how the principles and lessons learned from SCM can be applied to solemn criminal proceedings to deliver similar improvements in case management and court efficiency.

In addition, COPFS officials continue to engage regularly with criminal justice partners on issues relating to bail and court attendance. A Scottish Government-led wrap-around bail support pilot commenced this month and aims to reduce breaches of bail conditions and failures to appear at court. By increasing attendance rates amongst accused persons, the pilot is expected to reduce the number of adjourned or postponed trials and, consequently, the need to re-cite witnesses, including police officers.

Early evidence demonstrates the potential benefits of this approach. Re-citations have fallen by 62% for police witnesses and by 59% for civilian witnesses. These improvements, alongside the wider reforms outlined above, have contributed to a reduction in the overall volume of police officers cited to attend court.

The Committee will also be aware of the joint inspection into witness citation arrangements in the summary courts undertaken by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) and HM Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland (HMIPS). Published in March 2026, the inspection report made 50 recommendations, which COPFS and Police Scotland are currently working to address. The report, *Citing Witnesses in the Sheriff Court*, provides a comprehensive assessment of current citation processes and identifies a range of opportunities to further improve efficiency and reduce unnecessary witness attendance.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™ We invest in people Silver
disability confident LEADER

3. Confirmation of the level of savings from police reform (annual and cumulative)

Police reform has delivered significant benefits since the establishment of a single national police service in 2013, including reducing duplication, enabling national specialist capabilities and improving resilience across Scotland. As a result the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) and Police Scotland have delivered significant savings, in excess of those predicted for police and fire reform.

Audit Scotland's Best Value in Policing report (2026) reports that police reform is delivering an estimated £290 million of annual efficiency savings, compared to the previous structure of policing. In its recent (October 2026) evidence to Criminal Justice Committee the SPA further confirmed this position by reporting that policing is delivering £291 million in annual savings, which is equivalent to cumulative savings of £2.5 billion since the formation of SPA and Police Scotland in 2013.

This is over double the savings target (£1.1 billion) contained in the Outline Business Case for police reform.

I trust this information is helpful to the Committee and provides further assurance of the progress being made across these important areas of reform.

NEIL GRAY

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™ We invest in people Silver
disability confident LEADER