



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Criminal Justice Committee

Neil Gray MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Justice

Kirsten Oswald MSP
Minister for Victims and Community Safety

Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
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Dear Cabinet Secretary and Minister,

As Convener of the Criminal Justice Committee, I am writing following the Committee's initial discussions on priorities for Session 7.

Members have had a constructive exchange of views, informed by the Committee's Session 6 legacy report, on the principal challenges facing Scotland's justice system. While there was no expectation that the Committee would reach conclusions at this early stage, there was a significant degree of common ground around a number of issues which Members are keen to explore further with the Scottish Government.

The Committee intends to invite you both to attend an evidence session shortly after the summer recess. To assist Members in preparing for that discussion and considering the Committee's future work programme, I would be grateful if you could provide a written update on the following matters.

Prison population, remand and alternatives to custody

The prison population remains one of the most significant pressures facing the justice system. The Committee's Session 6 legacy report highlighted concerns regarding prison capacity, conditions and the sustainability of current arrangements.

Members would welcome information on:

- the Scottish Government's assessment of the principal drivers of current prison population levels;
- current projections for the prison population over the course of Session 7;
- the Government's assessment of the impact of recent reforms relating to bail, release and sentencing;
- actions being taken to reduce the remand population;
- plans to expand or strengthen community-based alternatives to custody;
- the role envisaged for justice social work in supporting alternatives to imprisonment;
- how success will be measured in reducing reoffending and supporting rehabilitation;
- any further reforms under consideration in relation to sentencing, remand or imprisonment; and
- progress in the rollout and use of electronic monitoring technologies, including GPS tagging, and the Scottish Government's assessment of their effectiveness in supporting compliance, reducing reoffending and providing robust alternatives to custody.

Victims and witnesses

Members expressed a strong interest in understanding how the justice system can better support victims and witnesses and ensure that their experiences remain central to the operation of the system.

The Committee would welcome information on:

- priorities for implementation of the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Act;
- actions being taken to improve communication with victims throughout criminal proceedings;
- measures to reduce delays and the impact of court backlogs on victims and witnesses;
- work being undertaken in relation to trauma-informed practice across justice agencies;
- how victims' experiences and outcomes are being measured; and

- whether further policy or operational changes are anticipated beyond those already provided for in legislation.

Policing and public confidence

Members discussed a range of issues relating to policing, including police capacity, community policing, public confidence and the growing demands placed upon officers by pressures elsewhere in the public sector.

The Committee would welcome information on:

- the Government's assessment of current policing priorities;
- work underway to reduce police time spent responding to mental health crises, attending hospital settings or waiting for court proceedings which do not proceed;
- progress in implementing recommendations arising from recent work on mental health and policing;
- the Government's assessment of capacity to tackle fraud, cybercrime and serious organised crime;
- challenges associated with rural crime and policing in remote communities; and
- any work underway to review operational demand on frontline officers.

Violence against women and girls, domestic abuse and child protection

Members also highlighted ongoing concerns regarding domestic abuse, violence against women and girls, and the interaction between different parts of the justice system when dealing with vulnerable victims and children.

The Committee would welcome information on:

- current priorities in relation to violence against women and girls;
- measures being taken to improve outcomes for survivors of domestic abuse;
- any work underway regarding the interaction between criminal and family justice systems in cases involving domestic abuse and coercive control;
- how the Government assesses the effectiveness of the current legislative framework in this area; and
- whether further reforms are anticipated.

Post-legislative scrutiny and implementation

A recurring theme in Members' discussions was the importance of understanding not only whether legislation has been passed, but whether it has delivered the outcomes intended.

The Committee would therefore welcome the Government's assessment of the implementation and operation of key Session 6 justice legislation, including:

- the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Act 2023;
- the Fireworks and Pyrotechnic Articles (Scotland) Act 2022;
- the Police (Ethics, Conduct and Scrutiny) (Scotland) Act 2024;
- the Criminal Justice Modernisation and Abusive Domestic Behaviour Reviews (Scotland) Act 2024;
- the Prisoners (Early Release) (Scotland) Act 2025; and
- the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Act 2025.

In particular, Members are interested in understanding how the Scottish Government determines whether legislative intervention is required in a particular policy area and how it assesses whether operational or administrative reforms may provide a more effective solution.

Public service reform

Finally, Members noted the scale of the Scottish Government's wider public service reform agenda and its likely implications for justice services.

The Committee would welcome information on:

- the role justice services are expected to play within the public service reform programme;
- how reform of justice services is expected to contribute to improved outcomes and prevention;
- how justice agencies are working with health, social work and local government partners to address shared challenges; and
- any significant structural or service reforms currently under consideration.

The Committee would be grateful for a response by Friday 21 August 2026. The Committee looks forward to hearing from you on these matters and to discussing them further when you appear before us after the summer recess.

Yours sincerely

Alyn Smith MSP
Convener
Criminal Justice Committee