

ANNEX A to letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Justice to the Criminal Justice Committee, 24 August 2026

Action being taken by the criminal justice organisations to improve the experience of victims and witnesses.

As noted in the main body of the response, the criminal justice organisations operate independently of the Scottish Government (with the exception of the Scottish Prison Service, generally, as an executive agency). They are carrying out a significant programme of work to address the communication needs of victims in the criminal justice system and to embed the Trauma Informed Justice Knowledge and Skills Framework across their respective organisations. We are grateful to the organisations for enabling us to highlight some of their work, below.

The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) has advised that it will provide a response directly to the Committee.

Actions being taken to improve communication with victims throughout criminal proceedings

Police Scotland

Police Scotland continues to review and update digital systems to enhance communications with victims and witnesses. It is currently looking to add a contact module to its UNIFI crime system to support officer engagement and victim/witness choice. Initial design is currently scheduled for early 2027 with development and testing to follow. Police Scotland will continue to support the development of the collaborative Justice Digital Front Door work being led by the Scottish Government.

Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service

The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service (SCTS) works closely with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), Victim Support Scotland and other justice partners to improve the support available to victims and witnesses. This includes engagement through dedicated victims and witnesses working groups such as the Victims and Witnesses Consultative Group and participation in collaborative initiatives to improve communication and service delivery.

The organisation has adopted the principles of The People at Heart approach (communicating with people affected by crime) and has reviewed key correspondence issued to victims during criminal proceedings to ensure communications are clearer, more accessible and more person-centred.

The SCTS is also taking forward initiatives designed to improve public understanding of court processes and strengthen transparency through:

- Expanded court livestreaming, including criminal appeals.
- Improved public information and media access.
- Increased publication of criminal justice performance information.

Scottish Prison Service

The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) Victim Notification Scheme (VNS) team is continuing its work to rewrite more of the VNS letters, being influenced by the learning and style from the People at Heart training.

Parole Board for Scotland

The Parole Board for Scotland's Victims Team is working with the Scottish Prison Service to review the template for correspondence that goes to victims regarding making representations, to ensure it aligns with a person-centred, trauma-informed approach to communication. The Team also record and have regard to a victim's preferences regarding how they wish to be informed of a decision by the Parole Board. They have also developed an information leaflet for direction to aftercare support.

Measures to reduce delays and the impact of court backlogs on victims and witnesses

Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service

The SCTS is delivering a significant programme of operational and strategic reform aimed at improving the experience of victims and witnesses throughout the justice process. This work is focused on reducing unnecessary court attendance, minimising delays, embedding trauma-informed practice, improving communication and working collaboratively with justice partners to support a more victim-centred justice system.

A key element of this work is the implementation of Summary Case Management (SCM) across Scotland's summary criminal courts. SCM is a collaborative reform involving the judiciary, SCTS, COPFS, Police Scotland, defence agents and other justice partners. The programme promotes active management of cases at an earlier stage, helping to resolve cases sooner and reducing unnecessary hearings.

Following a successful pilot and national rollout completed in January 2026, SCM has delivered significant benefits for victims and witnesses. A [report](#) published May 2026 on SCM national rollout (Jan 2025- Jan 2026) found:

- During the period of national rollout approximately 3,000 fewer child witnesses cited, representing a reduction of around 40%.
- From the pilot commencement in September 2022 to completion of rollout January 2026 a 40% reduction in first witness citations.
- From the pilot commencement in September 2022 to completion of rollout January 2026 a 59% reduction in witness re-citations.
- Fewer unnecessary trials and adjournments, with more cases proceeding on the scheduled trial date.

The SCTS has also worked with government departments and justice partners to improve fines enforcement processes. Enhanced digital access to HMRC information enables Fines Enforcement Officers to take more effective action to secure

compliance with court orders, supporting the recovery of compensation and victim surcharge - payments that benefit victims.

In addition, the SCTS has supported the development of a new fixed penalty process for minor road traffic offences. By reducing demands on court and prosecution resources, this reform will help ensure greater capacity is available to deal with more serious cases, contributing to improved case journey times for victims and witnesses.

Work being undertaken in relation to trauma-informed practice across justice agencies

Police Scotland

Work is ongoing within Police Scotland to embed trauma-informed practices across its service. This includes:

- The development of a trauma-informed implementation plan to guide its organisational approach to becoming informed and responsive to the impact of trauma experienced by all individuals it comes into contact with, including victims, witnesses, accused and its own workforce, providing a service that causes no further harm and supports recovery.
- The development and delivery of training to equip its officers and staff with the required knowledge and skills to adopt a trauma-informed approach.
- Conducting workforce engagement sessions to develop a better understanding of trauma-informed practice within Police Scotland and how supported, confident and equipped colleagues feel in their roles and when dealing with traumatic incidents.
- Exploring opportunities to collaborate with individuals with lived experience of trauma to improve its service in line with people's needs.

Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service

The SCTS is committed to becoming a trauma-informed organisation and has introduced mandatory Trauma-Informed Justice Training for all staff in partnership with NHS Education for Scotland. Content on trauma-informed principles has been included in a new staff corporate induction programme launching August 2026 and are embedded within recruitment materials and processes helping to ensure these approaches are reflected throughout the employee lifecycle.

The organisation has five accredited trauma-informed trainers who facilitate enhanced trauma-informed practice training, with sessions also open to colleagues from Police Scotland and COPFS, supporting a collaborative cross-justice approach. The remit of the *SCTS Trauma-Informed Steering Group* has expanded and is currently reviewing action plans and success measures to identify key priorities and areas for further development. The steering group continues to engage with wider justice sector activity and recently facilitated a session on the broader trauma-informed work taking place across the sector. Group members will also attend an upcoming *Scottish Trauma-Informed Leaders Transformation* session to identify learning that could be applied within the SCTS and to consider opportunities for further internal development.

The organisation continues to work with the Scottish Government, Bairns' Hoose partnerships and other stakeholders to support development of the justice elements of Scotland's Bairns' Hoose model which provide safe, trauma informed spaces that allow children to participate in criminal court proceedings. The SCTS is working with over 8 partnerships who wish to create such spaces in financial year 2026/2027.

A major area of activity is the continued implementation of Evidence by a Commissioner (EBC) arrangements, to support the continued expansion of provisions on the presumption of pre-recorded evidence (introduced through the Vulnerable Witnesses (Criminal Evidence) (Scotland) Act 2019). The SCTS has continued to expand its provision of dedicated trauma-informed evidence facilities that enable vulnerable witnesses to pre-record their evidence in advance of trial in a safe, trauma informed, and supportive environment. Crucially by late summer 2026 the SCTS will have created 11 facilities in 8 locations, meaning that there is at least one facility within the geographical reach of each of its 6 Sheriffdoms.

Acknowledging the importance of the trauma informed principle of choice, SCTS's latest facilities have incorporated multifunctionality into the technology installed. e.g. when not utilised for the evidence by a commissioner process the dedicated areas can change into 'live television link' facilities. This helps SCTS to provide additional space and capacity and further support choice for witnesses.

The SCTS has also supported the senior shrieval judiciary in the creation and launch of a National [Practice Note](#) for Evidence by a Commissioner proceedings in the Sheriff Court. The Practice Note sets out clearly the collective judicial expectations for Sheriff Court practitioners and users in these proceedings while embedding good practice across the country. It is underpinned by a collective commitment to a trauma informed approach and furthers the objective of ensuring that all participants in court proceedings are treated fairly and sensitively.

To further support witnesses to understand and make an informed choice on the method they give their evidence by, the SCTS is in the final stages of the creation of a public education/awareness video on the process of evidence by a commissioner. The SCTS hope to launch it later this year. This project has been supported via some Scottish Government funding.

Evidence by a Commissioner hearings reduce the need for vulnerable witnesses to attend court and help minimise the risk of re-traumatisation. During [2024-25](#), approximately 1,000 witnesses are estimated to have given evidence through EBC. The equipment used and the environment in which a witness gives their evidence by the special measure of link of live tv link is a crucially important element in supporting witnesses to give their best evidence. The SCTS has just commenced a review of the locations and equipment it provides with a view to improving these for the better.

Scottish Prison Service

SPS continues to engage and collaborate with the Scottish Government on policy development to improve the Victim Notification Scheme (VNS) in Scotland. SPS' VNS team is live to the changes being brought forward by the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Act 2025.

Members of SPS' VNS team have undertaken e-learning modules and awareness sessions related to understanding the impact of trauma and responding in a trauma-informed way. Last year managers from the team also attended the short course 'Working with trauma' at Glasgow University. SPS is committed to embedding trauma-informed practice.

Parole Board for Scotland

Through its Safe Space initiative, the Parole Board for Scotland's Victims Team has developed a network of venues that victims of crime can meet with the Team. These spaces provide a safe and secure environment, local to the victim, in which they can make representations to the Parole Board and (remotely) observe parole hearings. The network has allowed the victims team to safely facilitate over 295 hearings, across all 32 local authorities, achieved through partnership working with local authorities and organisations such as the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

The Victims Team has received training in Trauma Informed and Skilled Practice and are now looking to develop this to an enhanced level in partnership with Epione.

How victims' experiences and outcomes are being measured

Police Scotland

Police Scotland undertakes a number of different engagement activities with the public to understand their views of policing and to gain feedback on our services. It has three large-scale national surveys:

- Your Police Survey – Police Scotland uses the feedback to understand public confidence and views of policing in their local area, as well as areas in their community where people may feel less safe.
- Trust Index – Police Scotland uses this to increase its understanding of public trust in policing in Scotland and the factors influencing this.
- User Experience Survey (and follow-up survey) – this is used to measure people's experience of contacting Police Scotland. (This will include experiences of victims and witnesses).
- Specialist Surveys – Police Scotland also undertakes surveys seeking feedback on some of its more specialist areas, including its Domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime feedback survey, its Hate Crime Survey, and its Custody User Experience Survey.

Police Scotland recognises that online surveys are not the best method to reach certain audiences. Children and young people are one of these audiences, so it has established a dedicated Youth Engagement Team who undertake hands-on in-person and tailored engagement with young people, in their own communities, at times most suitable for them.

Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service

The SCTS uses a range of measures to assess the effectiveness of its work in supporting victims and witnesses, including:

- Summary Case Management performance data.
- Annual reporting against the jointly agreed Standards of Service for Victims and Witnesses.

The organisation is also reviewing its Standards of Service for Victims and Witnesses in consultation with justice partners and stakeholder organisations to ensure they remain effective, realistic and responsive to the needs of service users.

Parole Board for Scotland

The Victims Team has developed a mechanism - using QR codes on leaflets, and outcome correspondence etc. - to empower victims to provide feedback on their experience at a time most suitable to them. The information gathered facilitates continuous improvement within the organisation.

Whether further policy or operational changes are anticipated beyond those already provided for in legislation

Police Scotland

Police Scotland's Victims and Witnesses team is currently in the process of refreshing its Victims and Witnesses National Care Guidance.