



Briefing paper for members of the Criminal Justice Committee

*Prepared by Victim Support Scotland on behalf of the
Victim Organisations Collaboration Forum Scotland
ahead of the Committee's evidence session
on Wednesday 30 September 2026.*

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For this evidence session, the Committee has asked for our views on Community Justice, Rehabilitation and Prevention. Please see below, some high-level notes on the material we are preparing for the session.

1.0 Community Justice

When thinking about a victims' perspective on community justice, the underlying principle should be that justice should not only focus on reducing reoffending and rehabilitating people who offend, but also on recognising, addressing, and preventing the harm experienced by victims, families and communities.

Whilst understanding the desire to reduce pressure on the prison population, VOCFS members are supportive of efforts to reduce reoffending as this results in fewer victims. Expansion of community justice, as a response to attempts to reduce the prison population, must be carefully managed to ensure victim safety and public protection are not compromised, and go some way to restore confidence in the justice system.

1.1 Communication for victims

VOCFS members highlight poor communication with victims as a significant issue. Victims often lack clear information about what a community sentence involves, what conditions are in place, who is responsible for supervision, and who to contact if concerns arise. Greater transparency, information-sharing, and consistent approaches across Scotland

would help improve confidence in community justice and support a more trauma-informed approach.

1.2 Capacity

Members are concerned that community justice services are already under significant pressure and may not currently have the capacity to support further expansion. Victims and families often report concerns about their safety when offenders remain in the community, and some perceive community sentences as lacking sufficient accountability for serious offending.

1.3 Breaches of community sentences

A key concern for victims is the management of breaches. Members report that breaches of community orders are not always addressed swiftly or consistently, reducing confidence in community-based measures. While the planned introduction of GPS monitoring is welcomed, members emphasise that monitoring alone cannot prevent harm and must be accompanied by effective enforcement and timely responses to breaches.

1.4 Serious offending

VOCFS members also have concerns about the use of community sentences for serious offences, particularly domestic abuse, sexual offences, stalking, and serious assault. They note that these offences often involve ongoing patterns of coercive control and repeat offending, which can continue despite community-based measures.

1.5 National provision

Additional concerns relate to inconsistencies in the availability of community justice services across Scotland. In some areas, particularly rural communities, court-ordered requirements may not be fully deliverable due to resource constraints, which can undermine both the effectiveness of sentences and victim confidence.

2.0 Rehabilitation

VOCFS members support rehabilitation as an important tool for reducing reoffending and improving victim safety. However, they stress that rehabilitation services require significant investment to ensure they are available consistently across Scotland and accessible to all courts, regardless of where an offender lives.

2.1 Resourcing

Members are concerned that existing services are already under considerable pressure and that increasing demand without additional resources could reduce their effectiveness. They emphasise that rehabilitation must involve meaningful engagement rather than becoming a "tick-box" exercise, as inadequate access to programmes or support may increase risks for victims and families.

2.2 Throughcare

VOCFS members view effective throughcare as essential for supporting successful rehabilitation and helping individuals transition safely from custody back into their community. Throughcare is particularly important in domestic abuse cases, where offenders may return to areas where victims continue to live.

Members highlight the need for coordinated support that focuses on victim safety as well as offender management. They are concerned about declining access to post-custody support, particularly for prisoners serving short sentences, as gaps in throughcare may increase risks and undermine rehabilitation outcomes.

2.3 Open Prisons

VOCFS members recognise the value of open prisons in providing a structured transition between custody and release. They emphasise that preparation for release and reintegration should begin as early as possible during a prison sentence.

Well-managed reintegration can help individuals develop the skills and support networks needed to successfully return to the community, contributing to reduced reoffending and improved outcomes for victims, offenders and communities alike.

3.0 Prevention

Victim support organisations can offer unique insights into what victims and their families have told us they believe should be in place in order to stop repeat offending.

From a victim-centred perspective, prevention is not just about reducing offending. It is about reducing victimisation, preventing repeat harm, and building safer communities. A number of our members deliver prevention and intervention programmes including EmilyTest and Rape Crisis Scotland.

3.1 Using victims' experiences to identify emerging harms

Victim support services often see trends before they appear in official statistics. Victim support organisations can provide unique insight into the causes and impacts of crime through their direct work with victims and survivors.

For example, they may identify:

- New forms of online abuse.
- Emerging frauds and scams.
- Patterns of coercive control.
- Community tensions.
- Vulnerable groups being disproportionately victimised.

This intelligence can inform prevention strategies by police, local authorities, and Community Justice Partnerships.

Members believe lived experience can be a powerful educational tool and should play a greater role in prevention efforts.

Victim organisations can support prevention work across a range of settings, including schools, youth organisations and healthcare environments, helping to raise awareness and challenge harmful behaviours.

3.2 Approach to prevention

VOCFS members advocate for a cross-government approach involving justice, education and health, with greater emphasis on early intervention, public awareness campaigns and education from a young age. This should include consideration of how certain crimes are prosecuted – for example, the current consideration of whether to make Non-Fatal Strangulation a standalone offence.

Members stress that prevention work should address harmful attitudes and behaviours that lead to offending while also empowering victims and potential victims to recognise they are a victim, seek support, and report offending. This includes tackling issues such as misogyny and gender-based violence through education and awareness-raising initiatives.

3.3 Preventing repeat victimisation

Victims of crime are often at higher risk of being targeted again. Victim support organisations are important sources for victims to enable greater protections to be put in place, such as

- Identifying individuals and families at greatest risk.
- Developing safety plans.
- Supporting access to security measures.
- Linking people to housing, financial, health and advocacy services.
- Helping victims recognise and respond to escalating risk.

This is particularly important for domestic abuse, stalking, hate crime, fraud and antisocial behaviour.

Victim support organisations need to be adequately resourced to offer these services and reduce the risk of harm.

4.0 Victims Organisations Collaboration Forum Scotland (VOCFS)

VOCFS is grateful for the opportunity to give evidence to the committee on such important issues.

VOCFS is a collective of victims' and survivors' organisations that champion the voices and experiences of people who have been affected by crime. The group advocates for positive and lasting improvements within the criminal justice system, informed by lived experience.

VOCFS provides a forum of victim support organisations in which:

- Information in relation to legislation that affects victims is shared
- Provides feedback from their specialist view
- Allows for lived experience to feed into legislation, proposals, and plans

The forum is made up of 12 member organisations. Membership areas cover specialist support including victim support, stalking, domestic abuse, non-fatal strangulation, support for children, support for murder and culpable homicide.

Victim Support Scotland leads and convenes VOCFS on a bi-monthly basis.

Membership:

1. Abused Men in Scotland (AMIS)
2. Action Against Stalking
3. Cairn Service
4. Children First
5. EmilyTest
6. The Manda Centre
7. The Moira Anderson Foundation
8. Rape Crisis Scotland
9. Scottish Women's Aid
10. Shakti Women's Aid
11. Thriving Survivors
12. Victim Support Scotland