



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Justice Committee

Humza Yousaf MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Justice
Scottish Government

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Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Re-opening of Scotland's courts and tribunals

Thank you for your appearance at the Committee meeting earlier this week. This was helpful in answering some of the Committee's questions relating to the re-opening of Scotland's courts and tribunals, particularly for solemn criminal cases.

During your evidence, you were asked about the timeframes for policy options that the Scottish Government was considering in addition to the more practical measures being considered as part of Lady Dorrian's working group. You said that these options required legislation, such as for smaller jury sizes or to alter sentencing powers of Sheriffs, but that you could not give any substantial detail on the timescales for taking any of these forward. You also helpfully confirmed that you will consult with the Justice Committee before you brought forward these legislative changes, even if they were on an emergency timetable.

It would be helpful therefore if you could provide a bit of detail on what policy options you are exploring that require such changes, where you have got to on your deliberations and when you expect to conclude, even if this is indicative.

Additionally, reference has been made in some of our evidence sessions to joint work between SCTS and Justice Analytical Services and modelling the backlog of cases and court capacity. When will this be finalised and made available? Here, in order for us to fully understand the figures, it would be helpful if your officials could liaise with the Scottish Parliament's research services so that they can have access to the workings behind these figures and thereby brief the Committee.

During the Committee meeting, you were also asked about the possibility of lockdown being eased in the next few weeks. Are there more detailed plans to start addressing the summary backlog? These cases are, of course, important in their own right and it would be helpful if you could provide further detail.

Finally, in your evidence, you made reference to the victim's task force and a virtual victim's task force meeting on 10 June. You said that one of the papers for that meeting is on the impact on victims thus far. Again it would be helpful if you can provide a copy of this as you indicated.

I look forward to an early response.

Best wishes,

Margaret Mitchell MSP
Convener, Justice Committee