



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Criminal Justice Committee

Wednesday 23 April 2025

Session 6



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CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

13th Meeting 2025, Session 6

CONVENER

*Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab)

*Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con)

*Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)

*Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)

*Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Imrie

LOCATION

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)

Scottish Parliament

Criminal Justice Committee

Wednesday 23 April 2025

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Audrey Nicoll): Good morning, and welcome to the 13th meeting in 2025 of the Criminal Justice Committee. We have received apologies from Pauline McNeill, and Liam Kerr joins us remotely.

Our first item of business is a decision on whether to take in private item 4, which is consideration of our work programme. Do we agree to take that item in private?

Members indicated agreement.

Subordinate Legislation

Police Pension Scheme (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2025

10:00

The Convener: Our next item of business is the consideration of a Scottish statutory instrument that is subject to the negative procedure. I refer members to paper 1, which sets out the purpose of the regulations. I declare an interest, which is that I am a former police officer.

Do members wish to make any recommendations in relation to the negative instrument, or are we content that it comes into force?

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): For clarity, convener, I note that I am content with the instrument, but I want to briefly raise an issue under this agenda item, which I have notified you and the clerks about. I accept that it does not relate entirely to this SSI; it is an issue with police pensions more generally.

The issue relates to several constituents of mine who are retired police officers, who have experienced lengthy delays—of years, in some cases—in receiving their remedial service statement or RSS, and who are still waiting. The amount owed is considerable and, as you can imagine, it is having a major impact on my constituents. I am aware that other MSPs have had similar cases.

The main issues are the length of time that is taken to pay out the moneys that are due under the McCloud remedy and constituents' concerns about communication around that delay.

The Scottish Police Authority has advised us that it is working hard to deliver a significant number of RSSs by the statutory deadline and to deliver the bulk of them by 31 May 2025. The SPA says that there are a number of more complex cases that will take longer, but that most eligible police pensioners will receive their RSS by 31 July 2025. It reiterates that not every RSS can be delivered through that process, and that more complex cases will necessarily take longer to complete.

However, as I have said, I have a number of constituents who have not had their pay and, although there is now a July deadline in place, they remain concerned.

I do not know whether other members around the table are receiving similar queries, but I wonder whether the convener would be willing to write to Ivan McKee in his ministerial role about

the issue. If that came from the committee, it might carry more weight, convener.

I wanted to keep my intervention brief but, if required, I can provide you and the clerks with further information from my constituents who have been in touch.

The Convener: Thanks very much for that update. The access to pensions by Police Scotland officers is an issue that the committee has looked at in the past. On the basis of your update, I am more than happy for the committee to write to Ivan McKee, as Minister for Public Finance, on the issues that you have raised.

Before we move on, I want to confirm that members are happy that the SSI comes into force. In particular, I want to confirm that with Liam Kerr, because he is joining us online.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): That is fine—thank you.

The Convener: Super. On that basis, is the committee agreed to make no recommendations on the instrument?

Members indicated agreement.

People's Panel on Tackling Drug Harm and Deaths

10:04

The Convener: Our next item of business is the consideration of a paper on the recommendations of the recent people's panel on drug harm and deaths. I refer members to paper 2.

As members will be aware, a people's panel is a form of public engagement that brings together a randomly selected and broadly representative sample of the population to consider and discuss an issue and make recommendations. The Scottish Parliament held a people's panel on tackling drug deaths and harm over two weekends in October and November 2024. Two additional online sessions were held in November 2024. A summary of the panel process and its outcomes is set out in paper 2.

I invite members to comment on the report that the people's panel has produced. On behalf of members of the committee, I extend my thanks to all the participants who took part in the people's panel, as well as the parliamentary staff who organised it. I know that it involved a great deal of planning and logistics work. Having attended a couple of the panel's sessions, I know that those were great opportunities for the public to come together on an issue that we are well aware of.

Is the committee content to note that the recommendation for an inquiry into drug use in prisons is now being taken forward by us—the Criminal Justice Committee—and that we invite the Parliament's participation and communities team to let the panel participants know that the recommendation is now being implemented?

Members indicated agreement.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): I appreciate that the recommendation applies to our committee, as you have just set out, and I am glad that we will undertake the inquiry. The people's panel as a whole has done a good piece of work that is relevant to my constituency and many others across the country. All the recommendations are of interest and value. As a committee, how will we be kept informed about progress on the other recommendations, given that they are all relevant, either directly or indirectly, to the work of the committee?

The Convener: Thank you for the question. The cross-committee group on drug deaths and drug harm, which you are obviously aware of, has had oversight of the journey of the people's panel, to a certain extent, and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, who currently covers the

drug policy brief, has already attended meetings of the cross-committee group and we have taken evidence from him. Likewise, we have invited a group of panel members to contribute their reflections on the panel process to the cross-committee group.

It is certainly the intention of the cross-committee group to continue tracking progress on the recommendations. As you will know from paper 2, the Government has accepted—either in principle or fully—more or less all the recommendations, with the exception of the recommendation that was made about the point that we are discussing today. Rest assured that there will be continued monitoring on the back of the published report.

Ben Macpherson: It is great to have clarity on that.

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): The Scottish Government's response to the report said:

"the majority of the recommendations are already being undertaken within our ... National Mission and cross-government programmes of work."

It says that those recommendations that are not already being progressed will be incorporated into considerations for the Scottish Government's post-national mission planning.

I wonder what those latter recommendations are and whether there is a list of the action points that are being taken for every recommendation. Some of them are part of the national mission, some are part of cross-Government programmes of work and some are still to be considered. It would be easier for us to see what actions have been taken if we had a list of all actions by recommendation.

The Convener: Thank you for that suggestion. The cabinet secretary provided the cross-committee group with an initial response, which formed part of our scrutiny at the cross-committee group. However, it is a helpful suggestion that we consolidate the Government's position on the recommendations, so I am happy to take that away as an action point. We can come back with a written update on the recommendations, aligned with the work that has already been completed or is already under way—and which the Scottish Government has already provided an update on—along with the outstanding work that you have referenced. I am happy to pull that together for the committee.

Sharon Dowey: Can I just ask for timelines to be included in that, so that we can see progress?

The Convener: Absolutely—thank you for that helpful suggestion.

We have covered some action points, but are there any further action points that members wish to suggest, or are we content with where we are? As there are no further comments, we move into private session.

10:10

Meeting continued in private until 10:39.

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