

Criminal Justice Committee
Wednesday 2 September 2026
3rd Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Criminal justice sector priorities

Introduction

1. At its meeting on [24 June 2026](#), the Committee agreed to invite the Cabinet Secretary for Justice to give evidence, and to hold a number of evidence sessions with key stakeholders to explore current priorities and challenges across the criminal justice sector. The evidence programme has been developed following the Committee's consideration of priorities for Session 7.
2. At today's meeting, the Committee will hear from the following three witness panels:
 - A ministerial session with the Cabinet Secretary for Justice
 - A panel focusing on prison operations
 - A panel focusing on remand and bail
3. Together, these sessions are intended to explore both strategic and operational challenges facing Scotland's justice system, with a particular focus on current prison population pressures and the factors contributing to them.
4. The Cabinet Secretary's appearance today is the first of two sessions with the Committee. The Committee will undertake its wider programme of evidence-gathering with stakeholders throughout September and early October culminating in a final session with the Cabinet Secretary.

Overview of evidence sessions

Ministerial session

5. During this opening session, the Committee will take evidence from the Cabinet Secretary on the Scottish Government's priorities for the justice portfolio. The session will explore the main challenges facing the justice system, current areas of focus, and the Government's approach to balancing immediate operational pressures with longer-term reform.

Prison operations

6. The second session will focus on the operational impact of current prison population pressures across Scotland's prison estate, including implications for safety, regime delivery, staffing and prisoner wellbeing. The session will build on evidence previously received from His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, the Committee's recent visit to HMP Low Moss, and subsequent correspondence received from the Scottish Prison Service regarding prison population pressures and operational challenges.

Remand and bail

7. The Committee's final session will examine the role of remand and bail within the wider justice system, with a particular focus on their contribution to current prison population levels. The session will consider the operation of the existing legal framework, factors influencing decision-making, and potential opportunities to reduce unnecessary use of remand while maintaining public confidence and safety.

Written correspondence

8. Prior to the summer recess, the Committee wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and the Minister for Victims and Community Safety seeking information on issues raised during the Committee's initial discussions on Session 7 priorities. The response has been published on the Committee's [webpage](#).
9. In response to the Committee's request, the Scottish Government invited the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service to provide further detail on specific issues arising from the Session 7 priorities discussions that fall within its remit. The response has been published on the Committee's [webpage](#).
10. Following its meeting on 24 June 2026, the Committee wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice seeking further information on current prison population pressures and their impact across Scotland's prison estate. The Cabinet Secretary's response, which provides an update on prison population trends and the actions being taken to manage ongoing pressures, has been published on the Committee's [webpage](#).
11. Following evidence from His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland on 24 June 2026, the Committee wrote to the Scottish Prison Service seeking further information on issues relating to prison population pressures, prison performance and the wellbeing of people in custody. The Scottish Prison Service's response has been published on the Committee's [webpage](#).
12. The Committee has also received a briefing from the Chair of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland's Prison Expert Group providing background information on the Group's role in advising HMIPS and contributing lived experience perspectives to prison inspection and monitoring activity. The briefing has been published on the Committee's [webpage](#).
13. Members may wish to draw on the information contained in this correspondence when questioning witnesses during today's evidence sessions.

Clerks to the Committee August 2026