

Criminal Justice Committee
Wednesday 30 September 2026
7th Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Custodial and Community Sentences and Victims' Perspectives Across the Justice System

Background

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 series of evidence sessions with key stakeholders to explore current priorities and challenges across the criminal justice sector.
2. The evidence programme is designed to provide the Committee with an overview of the key priorities it identified during work programme discussions. As part of this programme, the Committee heard evidence from the following witnesses:
 - [2 September 2026](#): The Committee took evidence from the Cabinet Secretary on justice system pressures and priorities, followed by two witness panels on prison operations, and remand and bail.
 - [9 September 2026](#): The Committee heard from two witness panels on court services, case backlogs, workforce challenges and the experiences of court users.
 - [16 September 2026](#): The Committee heard from two witness panels on policing, non-criminal demand and inter-agency support.
 - 3. [23 September 2026](#): The Committee heard from two witness panels on domestic abuse, focusing on victim experiences and the justice system response.
4. The evidence from across the programme will help inform the Committee's understanding of current pressures and priorities across the justice system.
5. The programme will conclude with evidence from the Cabinet Secretary on 7 October 2026, focusing on the Scottish Government's response to the key challenges and priorities identified during the evidence sessions.

Today's meeting

6. At today's meeting, the Committee will hear from the following two witness panels on:
 - custodial and community sentences, and
 - victims' perspectives across the justice system.

Overview of evidence sessions

Custodial and community sentences

7. Following earlier evidence on prison capacity, the Committee will focus on the strategic balance between custodial and community sentences, particularly in the context of recent sentencing trends and pressures on the prison estate. The session may consider the effectiveness of community sentences, the support and resources required to deliver them, and the implications for prison capacity, rehabilitation and reducing reoffending.

Victims' perspectives across the justice system

8. The second session will focus on wider issues affecting victims and communities, drawing on evidence from victim support organisations, third-sector partners and community safety organisations. The session may consider how court delays, funding arrangements and communication across the justice system affect victims' experiences, recovery and confidence in the justice system. The Committee may also explore community safety concerns, including responses to youth violence, group-based offending and public disorder, and the role of partnership working in addressing these challenges.

Written correspondence

9. 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](#).

Clerks to the Committee
September 2026