

Criminal Justice Committee
Wednesday 7 October 2026
8th Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Government reform agenda and response to sector perspectives

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 sessions were designed to provide the Committee with an overview of the key priorities it identified during work programme discussions. During these sessions, the Committee heard evidence from witnesses representing a range of areas across the criminal justice sector.
3. That evidence will help inform the Committee's understanding of current pressures and priorities across the justice system.
4. Today's meeting with the Cabinet Secretary and Minister for Victims and Community Safety gives the Committee an opportunity to hear evidence on the Scottish Government's reform agenda and seek responses to the issues raised by stakeholders.

Overview of evidence heard to date

2 September 2026

5. At its meeting on [Wednesday 2 September](#), the Committee heard evidence from the Cabinet Secretary on justice system pressures and priorities, followed by two witness panels on prison operations, and remand and bail.
6. The Cabinet Secretary provided details of the Scottish Government's priorities for criminal justice in Session 7. The Committee raised issues from across its remit, with a focus on prison capacity, penal reform, community justice and policing. The SPICe paper for this session is available on the [Committee's webpage](#). Some of the specific issues raised included:
 - prison population
 - throughcare coordination
 - improving coordination of services through public service reform
 - e-bikes and e-scooters
 - introduction of a new sexual offences court.

7. The Committee then heard evidence from stakeholders on prison operations. The SPICe paper for this panel is available on the [Committee's webpage](#). Evidence provided to the Committee raised a number of issues including:
- prison population, including the impact of this on progress and rehabilitation
 - first night units
 - segregation of prisoners
 - complexity of prisoners' needs
 - staffing levels and the pressures on front-line staff.
8. The Committee's final panel at this meeting examined the role of remand and bail within the wider justice system, with a particular focus on their contribution to current prison population levels. The SPICe paper for this panel is available on the [Committee's webpage](#). The session raised issues such as:
- the complex needs of the remand population
 - impact of remand on housing, income and family stability
 - efficacy and purpose of electronic monitoring and GPS
 - victim perspectives when considering alternatives to custody.

Wednesday 9 September

9. At its meeting on [Wednesday 9 September](#), the Committee heard from two witness panels on court services, case backlogs, workforce challenges and the experiences of court users. The SPICe paper for this meeting is available on the [Committee's webpage](#).
10. The Committee's first panel covered courts, backlogs and workforce. This session raised issues such as:
- justice system-wide pressures
 - rising volume of serious and complex cases
 - limitations of existing digital systems and information sharing
 - early resolution of cases.
11. The second panel gave evidence on support for court users and their experience with the courts. The issues raised included:
- poor communication with victims
 - lack of clarity on court processes

- prolonged trauma caused by court delays
- improvements to trauma-informed practice
- Bairns' Hoose model
- importance of recovery and support services.

Wednesday 16 September

12. At its meeting on [Wednesday 16 September](#), the Committee heard from two witness panels on policing of non-criminal calls and inter-agency support for people in distress. The SPICe paper for this meeting is available on the [Committee's webpage](#).
13. The Committee's first panel focused on frontline policing and non-criminal demands. Issues raised during the session included:
- the role police play in relation to non-criminal demands
 - the role of healthcare providers and support services
 - implementation of HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMICS) recommendations in its [Thematic review of policing mental health in Scotland](#)
 - police being used as the go-to service to respond to crises due to its 24-hour availability
 - police risk aversion when responding to crises.
14. The Committee's second panel provided evidence on the health response and inter-agency support for people in distress. Issues raised during the session included:
- the operation and impact of Distress Brief Intervention (DBI)
 - number of police officers trained in DBI
 - operational collaboration between police and health partners
 - Police Scotland's consideration of the Right Care, Right Person model.

Wednesday 23 September

15. At its meeting on [Wednesday 23 September](#), the Committee heard from two witness panels on domestic abuse. The SPICe paper for this meeting is available on the [Committee's webpage](#).
16. The first panel focused on advocacy and victim experience. Issues raised during the session included:

- waiting lists and varied access to advocacy support
- communication with victims across justice processes
- complexity of coercive control and counter-allegations
- coordination between criminal and civil justice processes.

17. The Committee also heard evidence on the justice system response to domestic abuse, including policing, prosecution, victim communication and risk management. Issues raised during the session included:

- the impact of changes to bail legislation
- Police Scotland's approach to victim contact following bail release
- implementation of recommendations from [HMICS's review of police response to domestic abuse](#) and the [HM Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland report on the prosecution of domestic abuse cases at sheriff summary level](#)
- guidance and protocols for counter-allegations
- outstanding arrest warrants.

Wednesday 30 September

18. At its meeting on [30 September 2026](#), the Committee heard evidence from two witness panels. The first panel focused on custodial and community sentences. The second focused on victims' perspectives across the justice system. The Official Report for this meeting will be published by 6pm on Tuesday 6 October.

19. The Committee's first panel focused on the effectiveness of community sentences and the strategic balance between custodial and community sentences. The SPICe paper for this panel is available on the [Committee's webpage](#). Issues raised during the session included:

- increasing complexity and pressures on community justice caseloads
- barriers to imposing drug treatment and testing orders
- public confidence in community justice
- how success is measured in relation to community justice
- problem solving courts.

20. The Committee heard evidence from the second panel on the experience of victims when they interact with the justice system and community safety concerns. The SPICe paper for this panel is available on the [Committee's webpage](#). Issues raised during the session included:

- declining trust and confidence of victims
- role of advocacy services
- drivers of knife crime
- repeat offending and repeat victims
- use of community disposals for domestic abuse cases.

Today's meeting

21. At today's meeting, the Committee will hear from the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and the Minister for Victims and Community Safety on the Scottish Government's response to the key challenges and priorities identified during the evidence sessions.

Written correspondence

22. 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](#).
23. The Committee has received new correspondence from the Cabinet Secretary for Justice which provides follow-up information that was requested at the Committee's meeting on 2 September. The correspondence has been published on the [Committee's webpage](#).
24. The Committee received written evidence from stakeholders to provide information ahead of relevant evidence sessions and as follow-up correspondence to requests for information:
- Criminal Justice Committee Evidence Session: Courts, Delay and System Reform - [Letter from Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service, 2 September 2026](#)
 - Criminal Justice Committee Evidence Session Health response and inter agency support - [Written submission from Healthcare Improvement Scotland, 8 September 2026](#)
 - 2 September 2026 Evidence Session Follow-up - [Letter from the Scottish Prison Service, 9 September 2026](#)
 - Criminal Justice Committee Evidence Sessions on policing, health and inter-agency responses - [Written submission from Police Scotland, 14 September 2026](#)
 - International comparisons: Follow-up correspondence from Dr Hannah Graham following 2nd September Meeting - [Follow-up correspondence to the Convener from Dr Hannah Graham, 15 September 2026](#)

- 9 September 2026 Evidence Session Follow-up - [Correspondence to the Convener from Malcolm Graham, Chief Executive, Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service, 9 September 2026](#)
- 9 September 2026 Evidence Session Follow-up: Children First - [Correspondence to the Convener from Children First, 18 September 2026](#)
- Criminal Justice Committee Evidence Session: Victim Perspectives Across the Justice System - [Written submission from the Victims' Organisations Collaboration Forum Scotland \(VOCFS\), 24 September 2026](#)

Clerks to the Committee
October 2026