



Criminal Justice Committee
Wednesday 28 October 2026
9th Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Pre-budget Scrutiny

Introduction

It is expected that the Scottish Government will publish its spending plans for 2027-28 in early December 2026.

The Criminal Justice Committee's [website](#) notes that its pre-budget scrutiny for 2027-28 will include an assessment of:

“whether current spending plans support effective collaboration between justice bodies, deliver value for money and provide sufficient investment in prevention and community-based services”.

On 22 October 2026, the Criminal Justice Committee received a [letter](#) from the Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform addressing various issues relating to reform and the criminal justice system. These include a recognition that effective prevention will require work across portfolios:

“Many people who come into contact with justice services have interconnected needs relating to mental health, trauma, housing, substance misuse, poverty or social isolation. These needs cannot be addressed effectively by justice organisations acting alone. Successful reform therefore requires sustained partnership across portfolios, including with local government, health and social care, the third sector, communities and people with lived experience.” (page 2)

In this context, it may be noted that the Criminal Justice Committee took evidence on the policing of non-criminal demands and interagency support at its [meeting](#) on 16 September 2026.

The letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform also highlights that investment may not produce immediate savings:

“The timing of costs and benefits must also be recognised: prevention, digital and estate reforms may require up-front investment and periods of parallel operation before they release capacity, avoid future costs or deliver cash-releasing savings.” (page 4)

An example of this could be in relation to steps being taken to shift some of the use of custody to community alternatives, with the letter noting that:

“Community-based alternatives will only reduce pressure on acute justice services if they are sufficiently available, stable and capable of responding to complex needs.” (page 4)

As things stand, the Scottish Prison Service is facing significant challenges associated with overcrowding and parts of the prison estate which need to be replaced. In relation to the latter, recent increases in capital funding for the Scottish Prison Service reflect the ongoing construction of two new prisons – HMP Highland and HMP Glasgow.

In relation to workforce issues, the Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform’s letter acknowledges that justice organisations are facing workforce pressures (along with a range of other challenges). Whilst referring to the Scottish Government’s “wider ambition to reduce public sector workforce numbers by around 0.5% annually”, it goes on to comment that:

“Workforce reform cannot be applied uniformly across a portfolio containing large operational and frontline services, courts and tribunals, independent bodies, inspectorates and small specialist organisations. The police and fire workforces have both reduced in recent years. Workforce planning should follow the future service and operating model and consider direct reductions, capacity released and redeployed, investment in reform capability, and changes driven by demand or legislation.” (pages 3-4)

This rest of this paper provides background information on justice funding, including relevant parliamentary scrutiny of the current [Scottish Budget 2026-27](#) and the [Scottish Spending Review 2026](#) (both published by the Scottish Government in January 2026).

The Scottish Spending Review 2026 provides an indication of planned Scottish Government funding in the next few years, whilst noting that “plans should be viewed as indicative and subject to substantial change” (page 3).

Comparing funding across years

When comparing funding provided in different years, it is important to bear in mind the impact of inflation. The figures set out in the above documents are not adjusted for inflation. Such figures are sometimes referred to as being expressed in ‘cash terms’, whilst figures which do reflect this impact of inflation are referred to as ‘real terms’ figures. Both are provided in this paper. SPICe has published a [real terms calculator](#) for calculating inflation adjusted figures.

In addition, some changes (especially in relation to capital funding) may reflect payments for specific time-limited projects (e.g. the building of a new prison).

It should also be noted that the amount of funding provided for in the budget as agreed by the Scottish Parliament can change during the year. What is spent (outturn figures) can differ from what was originally proposed. The Scottish Government can seek to make changes as part of autumn and spring budget revisions. See the SPICe blog [Year-to-year comparisons of the Scottish Budget](#) (December 2025) for more information.

Current and past justice funding

The [Scottish Budget 2026-27](#) set out proposed spending for 2026-27, along with figures for the previous two years. Its figures on funding for the following areas are set out in Table 1 below:

- Justice & Home Affairs (Justice) portfolio broken down by budget line
- Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) portfolio
- Criminal Justice Social Work (CJSW) grant to local authorities.

In relation to 2024-25, 'outturn figures' are provided (i.e. figures for what was spent during the year). Whilst in relation to 2025-26, they are budget figures as amended by the autumn budget revisions (ABR) but not including any spring budget revisions.

Table 1	2024-25 outturn	2025-26 ABR budget	2026-27 budget
cash terms figures	£m	£m	£m
Justice			
Community Justice	80.0	91.9	102.3
Judiciary	47.6	48.2	49.1
Criminal Injuries Compensation	18.6	22.9	22.9
Legal Aid	186.8	188.1	194.5
Police Central Government	56.9	72.4	88.7
Safer and Stronger Communities	6.6	7.5	7.1
Police and Fire Pensions	638.6	685.8	708.6
Scottish Prison Service	627.8	888.0	1,012.3
Justice Analysis and Digital Transformation	10.4	9.3	10.4
Civil Law and Legal System	12.5	14.3	14.1
Secure Scotland and Veterans	4.3	4.4	4.0
Victims & Witness Support	20.8	23.0	25.9
Scottish Police Authority	1,571.8	1,647.3	1,729.0
Scottish Fire and Rescue Service	387.5	413.8	436.0
Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service	204.7	207.7	211.9
Total	3,874.9	4,324.6	4,616.8
COPFS			
Total	223.7	250.8	259.9
CJSW			
Total	86.3	86.5	86.5

The figures are made up of:

- resource funding to pay for day-to-day running costs (e.g. staff pay)
- capital funding for long-term investments (e.g. physical infrastructure)
- UK funded annually managed expenditure (AME) to cover demand led spending in some devolved areas

- non-cash funding which is there to comply with accounting rules (e.g. in relation to the depreciation of assets) and is not available to organisations as part of the money they can spend during the year.

In relation to the 2026-27 budget figures set out above:

- UK funded annually managed expenditure was limited to the police and fire pensions budget line (£350.0m)
- non-cash funding accounted for £205.8m (4.5%) of Justice funding and £11.3m (4.3%) of COPFS funding.

Table 2 takes the figures in Table 1 and adjusts those for 2024-25 and 2025-26 to reflect inflation, setting out real terms figures at 2026-27 prices.

Table 2	2024-25 outturn	2025-26 ABR budget	2026-27 budget
real terms figures (2026-27 prices)	£m	£m	£m
Justice			
Community Justice	84.4	93.7	102.3
Judiciary	50.2	49.2	49.1
Criminal Injuries Compensation	19.6	23.4	22.9
Legal Aid	197.1	191.9	194.5
Police Central Government	60.0	73.9	88.7
Safer and Stronger Communities	7.0	7.7	7.1
Police and Fire Pensions	673.9	699.6	708.6
Scottish Prison Service	662.5	905.8	1,012.3
Justice Analysis and Digital Transformation	11.0	9.5	10.4
Civil Law and Legal System	13.2	14.6	14.1
Secure Scotland and Veterans	4.5	4.5	4.0
Victims & Witness Support	21.9	23.5	25.9
Scottish Police Authority	1,658.6	1,680.3	1,729.0
Scottish Fire and Rescue Service	408.9	422.1	436.0
Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service	216.0	211.9	211.9
Total	4,088.8	4,411.3	4,616.8
COPFS			
Total	236.0	255.8	259.9
CJSW			
Total	91.1	88.2	86.5

More detailed figures for specific areas of justice funding are provided below. It should be remembered that some figures (given that they are taken from the Scottish Budget 2026-27 published in January 2026) may have changed as a result of in-year budget revisions. Updated figures should be provided in the Scottish budget document for 2027-28.

Police funding

Tables 3 and 4 set out police related funding under two budget lines:

- Scottish Police Authority (SPA) – funding for Police Scotland, the SPA, and SPA Forensics
- Police Central Government – includes funding for emergency services telecommunications systems, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland, the Police Investigation and Review Commissioner, and the Scottish Crime Campus at Gartcosh.¹

A separate budget line covering the pension costs of retired police officers is not included in the information below.

The tables set out both cash and real terms figures, broken down into resource, capital and UK funded annually managed expenditure (AME). Non-cash funding (set out in the budget documents for accounting reasons) is not included.

Table 3 Scottish Police Authority	2024-25 outturn	2025-26 ABR budget	2026-27 budget
	£m	£m	£m

cash terms figures			
Resource	1,421.7	1,507.1	1,566.1
Capital	71.7	70.0	86.3
UK funded AME	6.4	0.2	-

real terms figures (2026-27 prices)			
Resource	1,500.2	1,537.3	1,566.1
Capital	75.7	71.4	86.3
UK funded AME	6.8	0.2	-

Table 4 Police Central Government	2024-25 outturn	2025-26 ABR budget	2026-27 budget
	£m	£m	£m

cash terms figures			
Resource	44.4	56.1	55.7
Capital	9.6	13.2	30.0
UK funded AME	-	-	-

real terms figures (2026-27 prices)			
Resource	46.9	57.2	55.7
Capital	10.1	13.5	30.0
UK funded AME	-	-	-

¹ More detailed figures can be found in [Level 4 Workbooks](#) published by the Scottish Government.

Prison funding

Table 5 sets out both cash and real terms figures for Scottish Prison Service funding, broken down into resource, capital and UK funded annually managed expenditure (AME). Non-cash funding is not included.

Table 5 Scottish Prison Service	2024-25 outturn	2025-26 ABR budget	2026-27 budget
	£m	£m	£m

cash terms figures			
Resource	459.7	488.5	509.3
Capital	122.7	355.0	458.5
UK funded AME	2.4	-	-

real terms figures (2026-27 prices)			
Resource	485.1	498.3	509.3
Capital	129.5	362.1	458.5
UK funded AME	2.5	-	-

As noted in the introduction to this paper, recent increases in capital funding reflect the ongoing construction of two new prisons – HMP Highland and HMP Glasgow.

Fire and rescue service funding

Table 6 sets out both cash and real terms figures for Scottish Fire and Rescue Service funding, broken down into resource, capital and UK funded annually managed expenditure (AME). Non-cash funding is not included.

Table 6 Scottish Fire and Rescue Service	2024-25 outturn	2025-26 ABR budget	2026-27 budget
	£m	£m	£m

cash terms figures			
Resource	314.6	333.8	353.6
Capital	43.3	47.0	48.4
UK funded AME	-	-	-

real terms figures (2026-27 prices)			
Resource	332.0	340.5	353.6
Capital	45.7	47.9	48.4
UK funded AME	-	-	-

Courts and tribunals funding

Table 7 sets out both cash and real terms figures for Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service funding, broken down into resource, capital and UK funded annually managed expenditure (AME). Non-cash funding is not included.

Table 7 Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service	2024-25 outturn	2025-26 ABR budget	2026-27 budget
	£m	£m	£m

cash terms figures			
Resource	152.3	153.9	153.5
Capital	19.3	19.6	18.7
UK funded AME	0.5	-	-

real terms figures (2026-27 prices)			
Resource	160.7	157.0	153.5
Capital	20.4	20.0	18.7
UK funded AME	0.5	-	-

Community justice and justice social work funding

Table 8 sets out resource funding under two budget lines:

- Community Justice – funding for relevant third sector bodies and offender services (including additional funding for criminal justice social work)²
- Criminal Justice Social Work (CJSW) – grant to local authorities.

Apart from a small amount of non-cash funding (which is not included), all funding was resource funding.

Table 8 Community Justice and CJSW	2024-25 outturn	2025-26 ABR budget	2026-27 budget
	£m	£m	£m

cash terms figures			
Community Justice	80.0	91.9	102.2
CJSW	86.3	86.5	86.5

real terms figures (2026-27 prices)			
Community Justice	84.4	93.7	102.2
CJSW	91.1	88.2	86.5

² More detailed figures and information can be found in [Level 4 Workbooks](#) published by the Scottish Government.

Justice Analysis and Digital Transformation

As an example of one of the smaller budget lines, funding for justice analysis and digital transformation provides resource funding for:

- justice analytical services (e.g. the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey) – budget figure of £4.3m in 2026-27
- justice transformation (e.g. cross-justice IT projects) – budget figure of £6.1m in 2026-27.

Scottish Spending Review 2026

The [Scottish Spending Review 2026](#) (January 2026) sets out resource and capital spending plans up to 2028-29, with an additional year for capital. It notes that, whilst “based on robust funding assumptions, plans should be viewed as indicative and subject to substantial change” (page 3).

Separate figures for resource and capital are provided at portfolio level only. It does not include UK funded annually managed expenditure or non-cash funding.

In its [Report on the Scottish Budget 2026-27](#) (February 2026), the Finance and Public Administration Committee commented that:

“The Committee welcomes the Scottish Spending Review which should provide a greater level of certainty to portfolios, public bodies and local government on the trajectory of spending they can expect over the next three years. We however agree with witnesses that more detail could have been included, such as level 3 figures split by capital and resource funding throughout.

The Committee therefore recommends that the incoming Scottish Government after the election prioritises updating the SSR as early as possible into the new parliamentary session.” (paras 153-154)

At the time of writing, the recommended update to the Scottish Spending Review has not been provided.

In relation to justice funding, the Scottish Spending Review provides figures for [Justice and Home Affairs](#) (Justice) and the [Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service](#).

Relevant cash terms figures for the budget lines in the Justice portfolio, covering the years 2026-27 to 2028-29, are set out in Table 9 below. The figures are for combined resource and capital.

Table 9	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
cash terms figures – resource plus capital	£m	£m	£m
Justice			
Community Justice	102.2	102.2	102.2
Judiciary	49.1	49.1	49.1
Criminal Injuries Compensation	22.9	22.9	22.9
Legal Aid	187.0	186.8	186.8
Police Central Government	85.7	95.1	98.5
Safer and Stronger Communities	7.1	7.1	7.1
Police and Fire Pensions	358.6	358.6	358.6
Scottish Prison Service	967.7	773.4	579.5
Justice Analysis and Digital Transformation	10.4	10.4	10.4
Civil Law and Legal System	13.9	13.9	13.9
Secure Scotland and Veterans	4.0	4.0	4.0
Victims & Witness Support	25.9	26.6	26.6
Scottish Police Authority	1,652.4	1,651.1	1,644.1
Scottish Fire and Rescue Service	402.0	406.6	404.6
Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service	172.2	183.1	172.2
Total	4,061.0	3,890.8	3,680.4

Table 10 sets out Justice figures at the portfolio level – providing separate figures for resource and capital (including an additional year for capital).

Table 10	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30
cash terms figures	£m	£m	£m	£m
Justice				
Resource	3,417.7	3,414.6	3,414.6	n/a
Capital	643.3	476.2	265.8	221.8
Total	3,417.7	3,890.8	3,680.4	-
Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service				
Resource	237.6	233.6	231.1	n/a
Capital	11.0	13.2	14.2	13.2
Total	248.6	246.8	245.3	-

In relation to the funding generally, the Scottish Spending Review refers to a challenging outlook. This is reflected in the above figures which, for the most part, point to future funding which is more-or-less static or falling (even without considering the impact of inflation).

Of note are the planned funding figures for:

- Scottish Prison Service (resource plus capital) – falling by £388.2m between 2026-27 and 2028-29
- Justice capital – falling by £377.5m between 2026-27 and 2028-29.

It seems that at least part of the explanation for both may be the increase in capital funding which the Scottish Prison Service received up to 2026-27 for HMP Highland and HMP Glasgow, along with a planned drop in such funding as those projects move to completion. The following exchange took place when the Session 6 Criminal

Justice Committee took evidence from the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) on [11 February 2026](#) (col 14):

Pauline McNeill MSP: “There looks to be a bleaker outlook in relation to the proposed funding that is set out in the spending review for the years 2027-28 and 2028-29. We understand that funding is set to decline significantly compared to 2026-27. Is it your understanding that that reflects expected changes in planned capital spending? If so, would the proposed funding allow for the completion of the new prisons? I think that you have said that it would, but what are the implications for the SPS of that proposed funding in the later years of the spending review?”

Teresa Medhurst (Scottish Prison Service): “On the capital side, the Scottish Government is aware of the full costs of both contracts. Highland will be completed in the next financial year, anyway, and Glasgow will be concluded in 2028. My understanding at the moment is that, because we are in contract, those full costs will be met. There are potential issues and difficulties around the additional capital for the general infrastructure projects.”

Scrutiny by previous Criminal Justice Committee

Following last year’s pre-budget scrutiny, the Session 6 Criminal Justice Committee published its [pre-budget scrutiny report](#) in December 2025. The conclusions and recommendations of the report included the following:

“We recognise and acknowledge that there are no easy answers to the provision of budget allocations to the justice sector which would address all of the issues which have been raised during our pre-budget scrutiny this year. However, the evidence we received is gravely concerning to the Committee. While it is obvious that our justice sector organisations have made every effort possible to deliver the highest possible service to the Scottish people whilst making savings, it is clear to us that a crucial limit has now been reached in terms of funding and resources.

We acknowledge the Scottish Government, and the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs, is committed to providing a budget settlement which meets the most pressing needs of the justice sector. However, the high level of efficiency savings which have been achieved from across the sector in the last 10 to 15 years must now start to be reinvested in the justice portfolio.” (page 36)

The Session 6 Committee took further evidence following publication of the Scottish Budget 2026-27 and Scottish Spending Review 2026 in January 2026:

- from Scottish Prison Service, Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service, and Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service at its [meeting on 11 February 2026](#)
- from Police Scotland at its [meeting on 4 March 2026](#).

In its [legacy report](#) (March 2026), the Session 6 Committee commented that:

“Each autumn, the Committee undertook pre-budget scrutiny in advance of the publication of the Scottish Government's budget. During this scrutiny, our focus was primarily on the financial pressures facing organisations in the criminal justice sector and the main priorities for the sector.

Of particular interest to the Committee has been the pressure on capital budgets and investment in policing, the fire and rescue services, prisons, courts, community justice, criminal social work and the third sector.

In the final year of the parliamentary session, we found it particularly useful to invite in key organisations within the remit to discuss the implications to them of the actual budget settlement they received.” (page 9)

Frazer McCallum

Criminal Justice Researcher

22 October 2026