CJ/S7/26/10/1

Criminal Justice Committee
Wednesday 4 November 2026
10th Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Pre-budget scrutiny 2027-28

Background

1. Pre-budget scrutiny is a key part of the Budget process, allowing committees to influence the Scottish Budget as it is being developed by the Scottish Government rather than commenting after it is published.

2. As part of pre-budget scrutiny, committees gather written and oral evidence to inform an evidence session with the relevant Cabinet Secretary and publication of a report. The Scottish Government must then respond, setting out how it has taken account of committees' recommendations in developing the Budget.

3. The Finance and Public Administration Committee produces an annual guidance document to support subject committees' scrutiny of the Scottish Budget, including pre-budget scrutiny. That Committee published the latest Budget Process 2027-28: Guidance for Committees on 18 June 2026.

Criminal Justice Committee scrutiny

4. The Criminal Justice Committee agreed to undertake pre-budget scrutiny of the Scottish Budget 2027-28 at its meeting on 9 September 2026.

5. The Committee agreed that its scrutiny would consider the impact of spending decisions across the justice portfolio, including on frontline services, prevention and rehabilitation, community justice, public service reform, the implementation of recent legislation and capital investment pressures. In addition to hearing from organisations with oversight of justice services and spending, the Committee agreed that its scrutiny should be informed by frontline practitioners and organisations delivering services across the justice system. This reflects the Committee's interest in understanding how financial decisions made at a national level are experienced in practice and how they influence service delivery, reform and prevention efforts across the justice sector.

6. The Committee held a roundtable discussion on 28 October 2026. Discussion focused on financial pressures across the justice system, workforce and capacity challenges, preventative spending, and the impact of budget decisions on service delivery and reform ambitions. Participants emphasised the importance of long-term funding certainty and effective cross-portfolio working.

7. The Committee's scrutiny has included written evidence from stakeholders across the justice sector, evidence from witness panels on 28 October 2026, and evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform. The Committee will conclude its evidence gathering with a session involving Neil Gray MSP,

Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Ivan McKee MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform, on 4 November 2026.

Written evidence received

8. To inform its scrutiny, the Committee sought written evidence from a range of organisations and stakeholders across the justice sector.

9. The Committee received 26 written submissions, including one not for publication. The public submissions are available on the Committee's Citizen Space webpage and links are provided below.

- Apex Scotland
- Association of Scottish Police Superintendents
- Community Justice Scotland
- COSLA
- Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Forum
- Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service
- Faculty of Advocates
- Fire Brigades Union (Scotland)
- His Majesty's Fire Service inspectorate in Scotland
- HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland
- HM Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland
- Police Investigations and Review Commissioner
- Police Scotland
- Procurators Fiscal Section of the FDA
- Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
- Sacro
- Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service
- Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
- Scottish Police Authority
- Scottish Police Federation

- Scottish Sentencing Council
- Social Work Scotland
- Simon Ernest Peers
- The Wise Group
- UNISON Police Staff Scotland
- Victim Support Scotland

10. At its meeting on 7 October 2026, the Committee also agreed to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform seeking a written overview of the Scottish Government's Public Service Reform programme as it relates to the criminal justice system.

11. The Committee received a response on 22 October 2026, which is available on the Committee's webpage.

Evidence received on 28 October 2026

12. At its meeting on 28 October 2026, the Committee took evidence from two panels of witnesses representing a range of organisations from across the justice sector.

13. A number of common themes emerged from the evidence, including:

- financial pressures across justice services;
- workforce recruitment and retention challenges;
- increasing demand for services;
- the importance of prevention and early intervention;
- pressures associated with implementation of policy and legislative change; and
- the need for sustainable and long-term funding arrangements.

14. Members may wish to draw on evidence received from these panels during today's discussion with Ministers.

15. Members' attention is also drawn to the SPICe briefing prepared for the Committee's roundtable discussion on 28 October 2026, which provides additional background and analysis on justice spending, budget trends and the key issues raised during the Committee's pre-budget scrutiny.

Today's meeting

16. At the meeting, the Committee will take evidence from Neil Gray MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Ivan McKee MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform, as part of its pre-budget scrutiny.

17. The session provides an opportunity for members to explore issues arising from the written evidence received by the Committee and the evidence heard from stakeholders on 28 October 2026. In particular, members may wish to examine the role of prevention, public service reform and cross-portfolio working in addressing demand pressures across the justice system.

18. Given the Committee's focus on prevention, public service reform and the impact of spending decisions outside the justice portfolio on criminal justice outcomes, the session provides an opportunity to explore the contribution of health, employability and wider public service reform programmes to reducing demand on the justice system.

Next steps

19. Following the session, the Committee will then consider agreement of a draft report or letter setting out its conclusions and recommendations to the Scottish Government.

Clerks to the Committee
October 2026