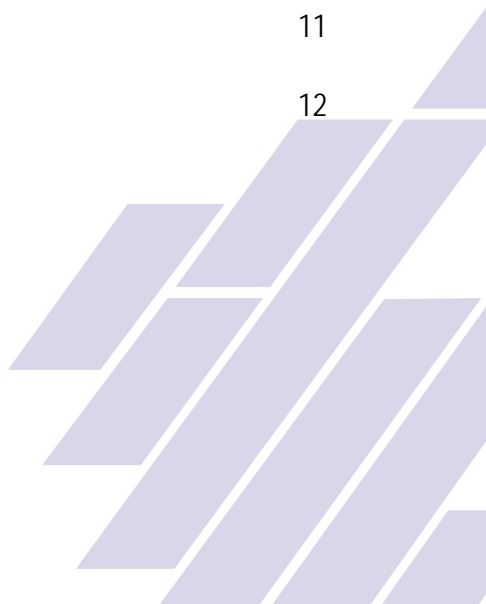


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“The Scottish Court Service recognises the important role victims have in the criminal justice system. We are committed to treating victims with compassion and respect for their dignity, and to improving the services we provide to victims, including bereaved next of kin.”

Scottish Strategy for Victims
Scottish Court Service Action Plan

Who are we?

We are an Executive Agency of the Scottish Executive Justice Department. Our main function is to support the judges and sheriffs in the Supreme and Sheriff Courts in Scotland.

Our staff are properly trained to carry out the technical, administrative and organisational services needed for our courts to run smoothly, while giving an efficient and courteous service to court users. We also provide and maintain court buildings.

Who is this standard of service for?

This standard of service is for:

- any person who has been the victim of any type of crime;
- the family (or anyone in a family-like position) of a victim of crime who has died or been incapacitated by that crime;
- any family member coming to court with the victim to provide support and assistance.

We appreciate that attending court can be a worrying experience and we want to reduce any anxiety by:

- keeping you informed,
- providing adequate, secure and comfortable accommodation,
- minimising the contact you have with the accused, and
- making provision for particularly vulnerable witnesses.

Keeping you informed


This booklet is part of our Victims Information Pack. It tells you about our services for victims and witnesses in criminal cases. The other booklets in the pack are:

- A guide to attending a criminal court,
- Crown Office, Procurator Fiscal Service, and Scottish Court Service joint statement on Crown witnesses,
- Sources of help and advice for victims,
- Court users charter, and
- How to make a complaint.

If you attend court as a victim of crime or a Crown witness we will:

- provide a clearly marked reception or information point,
- provide clear signs to help you get around the court building,
- inform you of the progress of your case, at least once every two hours,
- let you leave as soon as possible if you are no longer needed to give evidence, and
- let you know what has happened in your case.

You can also get advice and assistance at any time from members of the Witness Service. This service, which is provided by Victim Support Scotland, is available in all Sheriff Courts from summer 2002. The Witness Service Office will be clearly signposted in the courthouse, and members of the Witness Service are identifiable by their name



badges. Any of the court staff will be able to put you in touch with them.

The Witness Service

The Witness Service exists to help people through the judicial process by providing practical and emotional support. It is confidential and provided by trained volunteers.

The service is free and available to all witnesses attending court, whatever their age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability or social class. It will support:

- victims and witnesses who are called to court to give evidence;
- victims and witnesses who are not called to court; and
- family and friends of victims and witnesses.

The Witness Service offers:

- practical help, such as with expense forms;
- information on court procedures;
- a pre-court visit;
- to listen to concerns and anxieties and give emotional support;
- to be available after you have given evidence;
- to put you in touch with people who can answer specific questions about your case;
- to give you advice about further support from other agencies if you need it;
- someone to talk to in confidence; and
- trained volunteers to help you during your time at court.

Interpretation services

If English is not your first language, or if you are deaf or hard of hearing, you can have an interpreter to help you in the courtroom.


This service is free of charge, but you must ask for it well before your court date. If you want to use this service please contact the Procurator Fiscal's Office or the Victims Information and Advice Office.

We are registered with Typetalk and Text Direct, which are services provided by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People and British Telecom. These services allow people who are deaf or hard of hearing to have telephone access to court offices.

We are also registered with Languageline. If English is not your first language, this service can help you speak to court staff, whether in person or by telephone.

Providing adequate, secure and comfortable accommodation

- We will make sure that all witness accommodation in court buildings is clean, adequate, and comfortable and has recent reading materials.
- We will provide public telephones and sufficient clean toilets.
- We will provide refreshment facilities for all or part of the day and toys for children, in all but the smallest courts.
- We will monitor witness accommodation, either by CCTV or regular inspection, to reduce opportunities for intimidation. If,



during your attendance at court, you have any cause for concern about your safety or any other matter, you should speak to court staff immediately.

- We will work with the police to keep you safe. If you feel you are at serious risk, you should contact the police to arrange special protection.

Minimising contact with the accused

We are working towards providing separate entrances and waiting areas for victims and Crown witnesses and those accused of the crime. However, in many of our court buildings this will mean substantial structural alteration and will take some time to achieve. In the meantime, if you are concerned about coming face to face with the accused, we can make special arrangements for you to have:

- separate access to the court building, and
- a separate waiting room and toilet.

To do this you should speak to the Procurator Fiscal's Office, the Victim Information and Advice Office or the Clerk of Court before the court date.

We can also reserve seating for you in the courtroom if you want to stay after giving your evidence. To do this contact the Victim Information and Advice Office, Witness Service or Clerk of Court in advance of the court date.

Special provisions for vulnerable witnesses

The law defines "vulnerable witnesses" as witnesses:

- under the age of 16;
- over the age of 16 and suffering from a mental disorder; or
- over the age of 16 and suffering from significant impairment of intelligence and social functioning.

Witnesses in one of these categories can give their evidence from behind a screen in the courtroom or through a video link from another room. Even though the accused can still see the witness, the witness cannot see the accused. This can help reduce anxieties and concerns.

If you want to give your evidence like this, you should talk to the Procurator Fiscal's Office or the Victim Information and Advice Office at least three weeks before the court date.

Finding out more

You will find information booklets on a range of our services and court procedures in reception areas, public offices and waiting rooms. Most are also available on our website.

If you need more information on any of our services, contact your local Sheriff Clerk's Office, or the appropriate department in the Supreme Courts. You can also write to:

Operations and Policy Unit
Scottish Court Service
23 Lauriston Street
Edinburgh
EH3 9DQ

phone: 0131 229 9200

email: enquiries@scotcourts.gov.uk

website: www.scotcourts.gov.uk

Find out about your government at: www.open.gov.uk

Maintaining our standards

To ensure that high standards are set and maintained, we train our staff and monitor our service delivery.

We welcome your views on our services and your suggestions for improvement.

This booklet is available on audiotape, in large print, Braille, and a number of minority languages.