

Standards of Service for Victims and Witnesses Annual Report 2025-26



Crown Office and
Procurator Fiscal
Service

Scottish Courts
and Tribunals Service



Introduction – Setting the Standard

The Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014 was brought in to improve support for victims and witnesses. To make this a reality, the Act called for organisations in the criminal justice system to set clear standards of service.

In this report you'll hear from:

- Police Scotland
- Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service
- Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service
- Scottish Prison Service
- Parole Board for Scotland

Each of these organisations is a key part of the justice system.

If you're a victim or witness of crime, you're likely to come into contact with some of these organisations and different people in the criminal justice system. Some will support you directly, for example with advice or information. Others will be in touch with you because you're involved in a court case.

This is why our standards are so important. We want to make sure you have what you need for your journey through the justice system, and that every organisation or team member you meet treats you fairly.

We also want you to know what your rights are, so you know what should happen and how we should treat you. You can read what your rights are in the [Victims Code for Scotland](#) webpage.

We have a set of common standards we all work to (see page 2). But each organisation sets its own standards of service beyond that. We publish a joint report on how we've met them over the year.

About this report

Each justice partner is responsible for setting their own standards of service and reporting on them. However, we have worked collaboratively from the outset to publish a joint annual report, to explain what each organisation does and has done over the last year to meet their standards in helping victims and witnesses feel supported, safe and informed at every stage of the process. If we've not met a standard, we've explained why.

It shows our commitment to meeting, challenging and reviewing our standards, to make sure they're as effective as possible. It also gives some examples of where we've gone beyond our standards to support victims and witnesses.

The common standards you can expect from us

Each justice organisation has its own standards of service – which you can read about shortly. But we also all follow the same three common standards.

These standards underpin all of our work and help us make sure we give the highest standard of service possible.

We appreciate that having a crime committed against you or witnessing a crime can be an upsetting and difficult experience. We will do the following to make your journey in the justice system as easy as possible:

- We will make sure you have fair and equal access to services, and treat you with dignity and respect at all times, regardless of:
 - age
 - disability
 - marriage and civil partnership
 - pregnancy and maternity
 - race
 - religion or belief
 - sex
 - sexual orientation.
 - transgender identity

If you need it, we'll give you extra support and make reasonable adjustments to make sure you can access the information and support services you need.

- We will work with victim and witness support organisations to make sure you get the best service possible.
- We will follow our respective complaints procedures if you are unhappy with our service, try to put things right and improve things for the future.

Police Scotland



Chief Constable, Jo Farrell KPM

A word from our Chief Constable:

“We recognise that with the right support, victims are more confident engaging with services, can provide their best evidence and are less likely to become repeat victims of crime. We are dedicated to providing a high-quality service to victims and witnesses and our Standards of Service reflect this. We continue to work closely with our justice partners and support agencies to help victims and witnesses feel supported, safe and well-informed throughout their journey. Supporting victims is a core pillar of our 2030 Vision”.

What we do

Police Scotland is responsible for policing across the whole of Scotland. Our purpose is to improve the wellbeing of people, places and communities, focusing on keeping people safe in line with our values of integrity, fairness and respect. We have 13 local policing divisions supported by national divisions – each committed to keeping the communities they serve safe. We also work closely with our criminal justice partners to identify priority areas. This includes improving the rights, support, protection and participation of victims and witnesses in a streamlined and unified criminal justice system.

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As well as our Standards of Service for Victims and Witnesses, we're guided by the [Code of Ethics for Policing in Scotland](#) and [Our Standards of Professional Behaviour](#).

How we met our standards

Victims and witnesses can experience a range of emotions during the criminal justice process. Trying to navigate this system can cause further distress and confusion. We understand victims and witnesses rely on police officers and staff to give them information about their rights – including how to get support if they need it. It's essential we get this right, so the standards we've set ourselves reflect that. In this report, we've summarised our performance against our standards and given details about our ongoing work to improve the experiences of victims and witnesses.

Standard 1

We will discuss with you how you will be kept informed of the progress of your case; we will also explain how we will deal with your case and what we may ask you to do to help us.

What we've done

When we are investigating a crime, we work hard to keep the people affected up to date with any progress and make sure they know what is going to happen. It is the responsibility of each officer and member of staff to give the highest possible standard of service to our communities. This includes explaining to people what is going to happen and what we may ask of them. We will also inform people about their rights including their right to be supported. The importance of this standard is reinforced to our officers and staff in our Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), national guidance, training and internal communications.

Every month, we conduct a 'User Experience Survey for Local Policing' – run by an independent market research agency called Progressive Partnership Ltd. This survey captures the experiences of people who have reported a crime or incident to Police Scotland. In 2025-26, we received 15,003 responses to our Local Policing User Experience Survey.

Within this survey, we ask people to tell us whether they felt they were adequately informed about the progress after their report. This year, 45% said they

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felt they were. The table below provides more details on the areas we measure in the survey.

Question	April 2025 – March 2026	Previous year April 2024-March 2025
How easy or difficult was it to contact Police Scotland? (Easy & Very Easy)	72%	75%
During the initial contact how satisfied are you with the way you were treated by the staff member? (Satisfied & very satisfied)	84%	86%
Did you feel staff properly understood what you needed? (Yes)	86%	88%
Do you feel that the police provided the appropriate response to the incident you reported? (Yes)	63%	66%
How satisfied are you with the way you were treated by the officers who attended the incident? (Satisfied & very satisfied)	82%	83%
Were you adequately informed about the progress of the incident you reported? (Yes)	45%	50%
Based on your overall experience, how satisfied are you with Police Scotland? (Satisfied & Very Satisfied)	69%	71%

*Please note the figures above show a combined % of strongly agree and agree/very satisfied and satisfied responses.

The findings of these figures will inform and enhance our intentions to improve the journey for each and every victim who comes into contact with Police Scotland.

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We are progressing work to enhance our response and drive the required change to end violence against women and girls. In May 2023, we launched a feedback mechanism for domestic abuse and sexual crime which invites victim survivors to provide anonymous feedback on the service they received. We have had 64 further responses between April 2025-March 2026 with 31 responses relating to domestic abuse, 4 relating to rape and 8 relating to any other sexual crime. 30% of respondents felt police were respectful towards their situation and 26% were satisfied with their experience overall.

Following a successful pilot, Summary Case Management (SCM) is now in use across Police Scotland. Working with our criminal justice partners, this will help us to reduce the number of witnesses required to attend court to give evidence in summary criminal cases, minimising the impact on both victims and witnesses. The aim of Summary Case Management (SCM) is to reduce the number of unnecessary hearings at summary level by supporting early disclosure of evidence. This allows early engagement between the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) and defence and supports early resolution of cases, early agreement of evidence and secures a better outcome for victims.

This means that we may ask victims and witnesses of crime to help us by providing this evidence to us sooner, but it has the benefit of being able to update on the outcome much earlier.

As a result, figures recently published by Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service (SCTS) show the number of scheduled trials in Summary Sheriff Courts across Scotland has fallen to 9,000 from over 30,000 during the pandemic. Domestic abuse trials showed an equally marked improvement, falling from a peak of 7,685 to 2,005 (a 74% reduction) and now sitting 30% below the historic baseline of 2,978.

Police Scotland Assistant Chief Constable Mark Sutherland said:

“As criminal justice partners we have a shared objective and responsibility to ensure the interests of victims, witnesses and accused persons are best served. Summary Case Management demonstrates what can be achieved when justice partners work collaboratively to provide an efficient and effective justice system.

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“Disclosure of evidence earlier in the criminal justice process has reduced delays, ensured early resolution, and delivered positive outcomes for all those involved in the criminal justice system. It has also significantly reduced the number of police officers cited for court, meaning officers are not abstracted from front line policing and instead remain within local communities.

“We are grateful for the leadership and collaboration from all partners, and we will continue to work in partnership to ensure the continuous improvement of summary case management in Scotland”.

Our new national crime recording system roll out was completed in November 2023. This means that every crime across Scotland is recorded on the same system. We continue to develop ways to enhance the system to better support our officers in keeping victims and witnesses of crime up to date with the progress of their case.

Our National Conduct Unit within the Professional Standards Department engage directly with victims and witnesses to provide clarity and an overview of the process where the case involves allegations of police misconduct. Where the allegation of misconduct has arisen following a complaint from a member of the public, we will notify you in writing of the outcome of the proceedings.

The importance of keeping victims and witnesses updated on the progress of their case is highlighted during probationer training and through all aspects of continuous professional development.

What we will do

Over the coming year, we'll continue to do our monthly survey and encourage victim survivor feedback. We will also continue to carry out engagement and research programmes with victims and advocate organisations. This is so we can make sure we're keeping people up to date effectively and find out if there's anything else we can do to make sure we give people all the information they need.

Standard 2

If you are a victim or witness, a person who has given a statement in relation to a crime or a family member of a victim who has died as a result of a crime, you can make a

request for information. When we receive your application, we will respond within 40 days.

What we've done

One of the key provisions of the [Victims and Witnesses \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#) is that victims, witnesses or prescribed relatives can ask why we are not investigating a crime or why we stopped an investigation. On receipt of these requests, the enquiry officer involved in the investigation will typically provide a direct update to the requester.

Police Scotland, COPFS, The Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service (SCTS) and Victim Support Scotland (VSS) have developed a joint [Access to Information Protocol - A Guide for Victims and Witnesses](#). The Protocol clearly sets out the information each organisation can supply and aims to avoid duplication and confusion so that we can improve certainty around the court experience.

Between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026, we received 11 information requests in relation to the provisions of the Victims and Witnesses Act.

What we will do

This standard is embedded into practices and procedures and victims and witnesses will be provided with this information as long as it is not restricted.

Standard 3

If you are a victim of either a sexual offence, trafficking for sexual exploitation for prostitution, trafficking for exploitation, domestic abuse or stalking, Honour Based Abuse (HBA), Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) or Forced Marriage, you will have the option to let officers know whether you want a male or female officer to interview you. We will try to meet your request wherever possible.

We know how important it is for victims and witnesses – especially the crimes this standard focuses on – to feel safe and comfortable when we interview them. We know some people prefer to speak to an officer of a certain gender, and they have the right to ask for this in Section 8 of the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014.

What we've done

This standard is part of our day-to-day processes and our person-centred approach to handling cases like this.

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) provides independent scrutiny of both Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority (SPA). The HMICS Thematic Inspection of Domestic Abuse Phase 1 2023/2024, identified that Police Scotland should take further action to ensure it is meeting its standard of service statutory obligations, in offering the gender of interviewing officers to victim survivors of domestic abuse.

To achieve this, we updated our interim Vulnerable Persons Database (iVPD) system to make it easier for officers to identify the offences and behaviours applicable to this right. Since then, work has been ongoing to transfer the recording of this right to our national crime system. The change in recording standard will make it mandatory for officers to offer victims of these prescribed crimes the choice of gender of the interviewing officer and record this choice on the crime system. This will also serve to remove the current practice of recording victims of prescribed crimes on a vulnerability database unless otherwise required.

We will always aim to do our best to arrange the interview in line with the wishes of the victim survivor.

We know training our officers and staff is key to meeting this standard. Our Police Scotland Service Centre (PSSC) staff complete a formalised training and evaluation process covering all aspects of emergency and non-emergency calls. This includes a focus on specialist crime to ensure that all victim survivors receive the best service from first contact. The initial briefing report (IBR) that officers complete when they first respond to people affected by serious sexual crime also includes a section for their preference of interviewing officer.

Through academic research and engagement, we now better understand the barriers preventing a deaf person making a report to the police and the wider challenges specific to domestic violence.

Findings suggest that victims of the offences and behaviours applicable to this right, would benefit from the opportunity to specify the gender of the interpreter.

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We have worked with external partners such as Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities (SCLD) to create a service that reduces obstacles for deaf people to engage with Police Scotland and we will, where practicable, afford victims the opportunity to specify the gender of their interpreter.

Where the crime involves an allegation against a police officer, our Professional Standards Department will use statements taken during the criminal proceedings when carrying out subsequent misconduct enquiries. This is to prevent the victim having to provide the same information and cause further trauma. Where additional information is required and a further statement is needed, the victim will be offered the option to specify the gender of the officer.

What we will do

We'll continue to train our teams to give victims and witnesses affected by these crimes, the chance to tell us if they'd prefer to choose the gender of their interviewing officer.

We'll also continue to make sure our specialist teams have enough interview trained officers of each gender so we can give victims and witnesses the choice, wherever possible.

We will complete the transfer of recording of this right from iVPD to the national crime system.

We will work hard to improve on the progress made so far, ensuring the welfare and support of victim survivors are at the core of everything we do.

Standard 4

To assess your requirements as a witness, we will take a trauma-informed approach and, with our partners, consider your particular needs and try to ensure those needs are met.

We understand that witnessing a crime can be upsetting and stressful. Having to then talk to police and go to court can add to that stress. This standard helps us identify people's needs and focus on supporting each person affected by crime in the best way for them.

What we've done

To give victims and witnesses the right support – and make sure it's consistent – it's important we work with our justice partners. This is particularly true for vulnerable people. Our Divisional Concern Hubs triage, research and assess all reports concerning vulnerable people received through our interim Vulnerable Person Database (iVPD) system. They then share relevant, necessary, justifiable and proportionate information with our justice partners. This is to make sure the person in the report gets the right support, in line with legal requirements, national guidance and General Data Protection Regulations.

We help protect victims of domestic abuse through our role in the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs). These are meetings where agencies talk about the risk of harm to adults affected by domestic abuse and draw up an action plan to help manage that risk. Through the Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination (MATAC) process we identify and tackle serial domestic abusers to reduce their offending and protect people at risk.

To support victims of rape and sexual crime, a walk-around video of the forensic medical facility has been developed to enhance transparency and foster trust. Following on from a successful pilot in Greater Glasgow Division, this visual tool is now available for use across the country. It assists victim survivors in understanding the environment and procedures and seeks to alleviate fears and uncertainties. The video showcases the forensic medical examination facility and process, detailing the expectations of both victims and medical professionals. It supports the trauma-informed principles by empowering victims, ensuring they feel secure and informed about the support options available to them before consenting to the medical examination. This initiative seeks to enhance communication and provide victims with clear and essential information.

Police Scotland have also collaborated with Rape Crisis Scotland and other justice partners to co-create a video that aims to help victims navigate their journey of reporting rape and sexual offences in Scotland.

The video gives an overview of what a victim can expect to experience at each stage of the process. This includes when they seek initial help and report to police, a forensic medical examination process and the justice process if the investigation goes to trial.

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The video has been circulated to all officers and will help ensure that our approach to victims of rape and sexual crime is victim-centred and trauma-informed.

We are supporting the SCTS with vulnerable witness reform and embedding a trauma-informed approach to statement taking from vulnerable witnesses. Since January 2020, the presumption has been that the evidence from all 16/17-year-old witnesses in the most serious high-court cases, will be captured under visually recorded interview conditions. As from 30th March 2026, this also applies to witnesses aged under 16 in sheriff and jury cases for the most serious cases. COPFS may consider using this as evidence in chief thereby reducing the need for the witness to appear in court.

Police Scotland are continuing to train officers as Vulnerable Witness Interviewers to support this ongoing method of evidence gathering.

We have collaborated with groups of people with lived experience to understand how we can improve our approaches and services. Collaborative voices can highlight and promote changes that better meets the needs of victims and witnesses. The lived experience groups have offered valuable insights by discussing both positive and negative interactions with us. This has enabled us to explore more effective methods of empowering victims and witnesses, building trust and embedding best practice.

Scottish Government continues to work on bringing the Icelandic Barnahus Model to Scotland. This model gives children affected by abuse or violence access to trauma-informed recovery, support and justice. This extends to the trauma focused approach of investigative interviews (under the Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act 2021 - police and social work) of children who have caused or are believed to have risked causing significant or serious harm whilst aged under 12.

Healthcare Improvement Scotland and the Care Inspectorate have created a set of standards to introduce this 'Bairn's Hoose' model to Scotland. Police Scotland are members of the local partnerships that are helping to support and develop this work.

Police Scotland is continuing to progress work to integrate trauma-informed practice and deliver a compassionate service which is attuned and responsive to the needs of those who come into contact with the justice system.

Part 2 of the Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform (Scotland) Act 2025 legally defines trauma-informed practice and aims to embed it across the justice system, placing

statutory duties on criminal justice agencies, including Police Scotland. This means that justice partners will have to have regard to trauma-informed practice in carrying out their functions and include specific trauma-informed provisions within their Standards of Service.

In early 2025, Police Scotland introduced a dedicated Trauma-Informed Implementation Team to work towards being an organisation that is informed and responsive to the impact of trauma experienced by all individuals we come into contact with, providing an approach that causes no further harm and supports recovery.

Through training delivery, policy and implementation support, digital developments, and collaboration with individuals with lived experience of trauma, work is progressing to ensure our officers and staff are equipped to integrate trauma-informed practices into their day-to-day work. This will support the delivery of a service which ensures victims and witnesses feel heard, informed and supported.

Police Scotland Assistant Chief Constable Catriona Paton said:

“Police Scotland is committed to being a trauma-informed organisation. Often the police are the first point of contact for those who encounter the justice system, and we recognise the lasting and profound impact of this first impression. The way we treat people and the interactions we have every day with individuals and communities can affect trust and perceptions of our service and justice processes.

In a system that can feel daunting, unpredictable and complicated at times, our ambition is to provide clarity, choice and safety. By adopting a trauma-informed approach, we aim to build trust, minimise risk of re-traumatisation, support recovery and improve the experiences of those we engage with at every stage of the policing process.

We are dedicated to delivering a trauma-informed service which builds trust, offers hope to those who have been impacted by trauma, and recognises that adversity is not your destiny”.

What we will do

We'll carry on working hard – campaigning, assessing and refining our support – to keep vulnerable victims safe and feeling confident we're responding to their needs.

The Domestic Abuse Task Force and the Domestic Abuse Coordination Unit will maintain a rolling programme of divisional reviews to ensure a consistent and robust response to domestic abuse across Scotland. We'll continue to make sure all our officers and staff are well trained and know about the materials and support available to

people affected by crime so they can direct them to appropriate support. We'll also keep working directly with people affected by abuse, encouraging feedback and sharing of lived experience. That way we can improve our services and make sure we're as effective as possible when we support them.

Standard 5

We will ensure you receive a "Your Care Card" if you are a victim of crime. This provides you with the details of the enquiry officer, the crime you have reported and information about how you can access victim support services and Scottish Government's Victims' Code.

Once you have reported a crime, we understand how important it is for you to understand what your rights are and who to contact if you have any questions. This standard helps to ensure we provide the details you need and ensure you can find out about your rights in the Victim's Code.

Your Care Card is available in 20 different languages with options to provide other languages or formats if you need them. If you report a crime over the telephone, then the officer or staff member taking the call will offer to send you this by email or text message or will arrange to get it delivered to you.

What we have done

Through ongoing communication and engagement with key internal stakeholders, we have continued to highlight the importance of the Your Care Card and its content to officers and staff. In partnership with Victim Support Scotland, we have co-delivered awareness sessions to probationary officers and detective teams and continue to look for opportunities to raise awareness of victims' rights and provision of the Your Care Card. This helps ensure everyone across the organisation understands their legal responsibilities and can clearly explain these rights to victims and witnesses.

The People at Heart approach was developed by The First Word communications company in partnership with criminal justice agencies, third sector partners and people with lived experience. Originating from the Victims' Taskforce, the approach aims to place people at the centre of communication, ensuring our messaging is empathetic, empowering, accessible and easy to understand.

Working alongside The First Word, we delivered a webinar, several online training sessions and a communications style guide for officers and staff across the organisation. This equipped them with the skills and understanding needed to communicate effectively, both verbally and in writing, with victims and witnesses of crime.

The First Word also supported us in re-writing several victim-focussed pages on our public website to better align with the People at Heart approach. Wider system improvements have also been made to increase the accessibility of our website content.

What we will do

We are developing an aide memoire to support operational officers to clearly and consistently explain victim's rights, including the right to support. This will help officers to have compassionate conversations with victims and witnesses and promote increased distribution of the Your Care Card.

We will continue working with Scottish Government and other justice agency partners to explore the development of a digital justice platform for victims and witnesses. We will consider ways to include this in our Your Care Card to provide victims and witnesses with access to a central advice and support website to support their own justice journey.

Building on established distribution methods, we will continue to enhance the options for provision of the Your Care Card to make it easier for officers to ensure every victim and witness has equal access to information. This includes a QR code link on our hand held devices and an automated solution embedded into our IT systems.

Going beyond our standards

As well as working to meet our standards, there are several other areas of work we are progressing which are aimed at improving people's experiences of the justice system.

Victim Taskforce

As a key partner of Scottish Government's [Victims' Taskforce](#), Police Scotland collaborates across the justice sector to support Scottish Government's Vision for Justice. The Taskforce is co-chaired by the Justice Secretary and the Lord Advocate, and its primary role is to co-ordinate and drive improvements to the justice system to

support the experiences of victims and witnesses. It brings together senior leaders across a wide range of agencies including direct representation from victims.

To support the work, we actively participate in the Taskforce's three sub-groups (workstreams):

Workstream 1: Victim-centred Approach: Significant work has previously been undertaken resulting in the publication of the [Victim Centred Approach to Justice in Scotland: Scoping and Modelling Project](#). This report provides modelled and costed options for transforming the justice system to place the rights and well-being of individuals at the heart of the justice system.

Workstream 2: Trauma-Informed Workforce: promoting trauma-informed practices across the justice sector aligned to the NHS Education for Scotland (NES) Trauma Informed Justice Knowledge and Skills Framework, helping justice professionals engage safely and effectively with victims.

Workstream 3: Improving Communications: supporting the Scottish Government's People at Heart approach which aims to put people at the heart of communications by being empathetic and empowering, and ensuring that communications are easy to access and understand.

Police Scotland remain committed to supporting actions in all three workstreams through ongoing engagement and collaboration.

Children's rights

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Scotland) Act 2024 came into force in July 2024. The act ensures that children's rights are respected and protected in Scotland and places a duty on all public bodies to actively consider and uphold children's rights in everything that they do.

We have been developing our Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) which will be considered each time we update a policy, procedure or guidance document to make sure any updates or changes are considered through a children's rights lens.

Since late 2024, Police Scotland has employed a dedicated Youth Engagement team comprising of two specialist staff with combined experience in youth work and

participation. Operating at a national level, the team are Police Scotland's primary mechanism for engaging with children and young people, gathering their views and experiences about the issues affecting them and their communities. Insight gathered from this engagement has informed policing responses aiming to enhance children and young people's safety, reduce their involvement in harmful risk-taking behaviours and divert them away from violence. Through building the trust and confidence of children and young people in Police Scotland and showing how their contributions can make meaningful, lasting improvements in policing, the Youth Engagement team's work is supporting the service on its journey to fully embed youth engagement and participation in line with the UNCRC.

Tackling online child sexual abuse and exploitation

We're committed to supporting people affected by online child sexual abuse and exploitation (OCSAE) and preventing this type of crime. We continue to lead a Multi-Agency Preventing OCSAE Group which coordinates and develops learning. We liaise with academia and national agencies such as the National Crime Agency (NCA), Internet Watch Foundation and Ofcom Scotland. We encourage and support each other's campaigns and national investigations. We work together to improve processes and remove harmful content of children from the worldwide web. We've strengthened our approach in dealing with the OCSAE material we gather from offenders to help us protect children and prevent the same thing happening to the same child again. Police Scotland's Victim Identification team (VID) provides specialist support to OCSAE investigations throughout Scotland. They help identify each child shown in imagery and protect them from more harm, where the opportunity exists. They also support local policing through an ongoing education strategy.

Our standards of service for victims and witnesses 2026-2027

Police Scotland will continue to monitor the standards of service we have set ourselves and will make improvements, as required, to ensure they meet the needs of victims and witnesses in the coming year. We will act with fairness, integrity and respect at all times and make every effort to improve experiences of victims and witnesses in the justice system. This will in turn maintain public confidence in policing in Scotland

The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS)



The Lord Advocate, Ruth Charteris KC

The Lord Advocate, head of the systems of criminal prosecution and death investigations, said:

“I am pleased to introduce this year’s Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) Standards of Service report.

I want victims and witnesses to have confidence that the prosecution service will listen to them, recognise their individual needs and support them through what can often be a difficult experience.

A prosecution service must be independent and fair. It must also place compassion at the heart of the public interest. A service which does that, will support people to remain engaged and allow justice to be administered more effectively.

Continuing to strengthen trauma-informed practice is central to those aims and to building trust in the services that COPFS provides.”

What we do

COPFS is Scotland’s independent public prosecution and death investigation authority. We receive reports about crimes from the police and other reporting agencies and decide what action to take, in the public interest, including whether to prosecute. We

also examine deaths that need further explanation and investigate allegations of criminal conduct by police officers.

During the period April 2025 to April 2026, COPFS endeavoured to deliver its priorities as set out in our Strategic Plan 2023-2027 namely:

- improving the experiences of women and children in the justice system;
- improving communication and support for service users; and
- achieving quicker conclusions to criminal and death investigations.

COPFS recognises the significant impact that crime has on individuals and communities. We remain committed to responding fairly, effectively and robustly to all reports of crime while making sure that victims and witnesses receive the support and information that they need as they navigate through the criminal justice system.

We work closely with our partners in the criminal justice system to help make Scotland a safer place to live, work and visit.

The implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) remains a significant area of work. Policies, procedures and guidance relating to children were reviewed and updated, while staff received training on assessing and recording children's rights and best interests within operational decision making.

Below are examples of work carried out in the past year by COPFS in relation to the Standards of Service for victims and witnesses.

Standard 1

We will treat you fairly and with respect, we will listen to you through our Comments and Complaints and Feedback Policy and the review of our decisions, and we will communicate with you clearly and effectively.

What we have done

During 2025-26, we maintained our commitment to provide a more person-centred and trauma-informed service. The Lord Advocate co-chairs the Scottish Government Victims Taskforce, bringing together justice partners, voluntary sector organisations, academics and legal professionals to improve the experiences of victims and witnesses.

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The Taskforce continued to develop a victim-centred approach to justice. Work focused on improving communication, reducing the need for victims to repeat traumatic experiences, enhancing engagement with support services and developing more joined-up approaches across the justice system.

A major development during the reporting period was implementation of the People at Heart approach to communication. Introduced in January 2025, this approach promotes clear, inclusive and trauma-informed communication. Staff attended webinars, workshops and e-learning modules and specialist training was provided to complaints handlers, reviewers and VIA staff. This learning has influenced the design and content of letters issued by COPFS.

In addition, guidance was developed and promoted in relation to autism, ADHD, dyslexia and other neurodiverse conditions. Employees were encouraged to consider accessibility and inclusion throughout casework and service delivery.

Our Response and Information Unit (RIU) deals with complaints and Victims' Right to Review requests, both of which help to identify opportunities for service improvement. Information is now reported more systematically to senior leaders to support organisational learning and improve decision making.

COPFS further strengthened its commitment to trauma-informed practice. The dedicated Lead for Trauma Informed Practice oversees implementation of the Trauma Informed Justice, Knowledge and Skills Framework. This work recognises the impact trauma can have on communication, understanding, memory, trust and participation.

We recognise that people affected by trauma may experience the justice process as difficult and intimidating. COPFS therefore continued to promote approaches based on safety, trust, choice, collaboration and empowerment. In practice, this included reviewing correspondence, providing staff training and redesigning engagement approaches.

COPFS continues to work to implement the 27 recommendations of HM Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland's [report on prosecution of domestic abuse at sheriff summary level](#) (April 2024). This report provided a roadmap for how COPFS should improve handling of such cases, and particularly communication with victims. Our response to this report is a large piece of work involving leaders from Local Court, Policy and Engagement, the Scottish Prosecution College.

It has benefitted from input from victim support and advocacy organisations as well as the teams focused on Becoming Trauma-Informed and national roll-out of Summary Case Management. It has, and will continue to, require cooperation with partner organisations like Police Scotland and the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service (SCTS).

Key work undertaken by COPFS to implement the Report's 27 recommendations include:

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- Roll-out of specialist training for staff working with victims of domestic abuse
- Created a national Domestic Abuse Manual, providing a single source of guidance and information for staff involved in such case
- Updated operational guidance and case marking processes
- Enhanced and earlier engagement between victims and prosecutors
- Expansion of Summary Case Management across additional sheriff courts, including Glasgow
- Strengthened national oversight of domestic abuse case work
- Improved partnership working

Progress has been reported on in the Inspectorate's [Annual Report 2024-25](#). The Inspectorate is now completing a [focused follow-up inspection](#) on COPFS' communication with victims of domestic abuse, which is welcome. Over the last year, we have rolled out a programme of improvements to meeting spaces across several COPFS offices. These changes are designed to better support victims, witnesses and bereaved next of kin, while also providing colleagues with calmer, safer and more supportive rooms.

We recognise the importance of understanding lived experience and using feedback to improve services. Consequently, we continue to receive anonymous feedback through arrangements with Rape Crisis Scotland. Additionally, we are embedding lived experience in training.

Over the last year, substantial work has been ongoing to implement the recommendations of the Review of Child Deaths and Non-Accidental Injuries in Children. A Child Deaths and Non-Accidental Injuries Improvement Board has been formed as recommended by the Review. There are 3 multi-agency short life working groups reporting to the Improvement Board. These groups have been focussed on the following aspects:

1. improving and standardising the investigation of non-accidental injury in cases involving children, with a view to ensuring all available evidence and information sharing takes place as early as possible.
2. standardising the approach taken by professionals to child deaths and non-accidental injuries cases across Scotland including best early support to bereaved next of kin;
3. reviewing the police investigative approach to these cases including a review of training and guidance on section 12 of the Children and Young Persons (Scotland) Act 1937.

During the year, we also delivered training and awareness sessions on stalking offences. Guidance published during National Stalking Awareness Week encouraged

prosecutors to consider not only the criminal behaviour involved but also the psychological harm and risk of escalation experienced by victims.

What we will do

We will maintain our commitments to embedding trauma-informed practice across all areas of our work. From 1 October 2026, the provisions in Part 2 of the Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform (Scotland) Act 2025 relating to trauma-informed practice will come into force. These provisions place a statutory duty on criminal justice bodies to have regard to trauma-informed practice in the exercise of their functions, and preparations for implementation are continuing.

We will continue to review communications based on feedback and lived experience, ensuring that letters, guidance and engagement approaches remain accessible and person-centred.

Work is ongoing to strengthen feedback loops arising from complaints, review requests and stakeholder engagement. Learning will be shared across business areas to support continuous improvement. For example, we have created a new post of Head of Customer Care. This role will focus on improving the experience of victims, witnesses and members of the public who interact with COPFS. Their remit is to ensure that services provided to victims, witnesses and the public are consistent, responsive, accessible, compassionate and of a consistent high quality.

There will be ongoing work to support implementation of recommendations arising from formal inspection activity, including work relating to communication with victims of domestic abuse.

Standard 2

We will make sure that you have access to the relevant and appropriate information that you are entitled to and in situations where we cannot provide that information, we will explain the reasons why.

What we have done

Providing timely information is a key organisational priority. The Witness Gateway programme has expanded throughout the reporting period. By 2025 the service had been made available across local court locations and further improvements continued throughout 2025 and early 2026.

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The Witness Gateway allows victims and witnesses to verify their identity securely, update personal details, view court dates, confirm availability and access witness statements where appropriate. The service also provides notifications and updates relating to cases. It also supports better quality evidence by making it easier for witnesses to review statements in advance of attending court.

A pilot was introduced within specialist sexual offences teams and further functionality was developed following user feedback. Improvements included clearer messages, improved reminder notifications and enhanced information management processes. Future functionality plans include the provision of online victim impact statements and witness expenses claims.

The VIA (Victim Information and Advice) Modernisation Programme remained a major area of activity. The programme continues to redesign support arrangements for victims, witnesses and bereaved relatives. A dedicated VIA Workload Application was piloted and expanded.

The application went live in April 2025 and provides visibility of workload at witness and case level. Staff can monitor activity, manage priorities, identify unallocated work and monitor the issuing and return of victim impact statements.

The system also supports collaboration across teams and encourages consistency of practice across Scotland.

COPFS strengthened communication with bereaved families through the establishment of a dedicated Fatal Accident Inquiry (FAI) Team. Introduced during August 2025, the team provides a single point of contact and support for people involved in FAI proceedings.

The team centralises management of hearings, improves consistency across death investigation units and strengthens communication with next of kin and bereaved relatives.

The Family Liaison Charter provides a focus for engagement with bereaved families. COPFS remains committed to providing regular updates and explaining investigative processes whenever possible.

Accessibility remains a key priority. Child-friendly letters developed in consultation with children and external organisations help to support understanding by younger service users.

Website content was further improved, including information relating to sexual offences, support services and adult survivors of institutional child abuse.

Digital forms were introduced and refined for Subject Access Requests (SARs) and Victims' Right to Review (VRR) applications.

Demand for SARs increased significantly during the past year. COPFS received 994 requests during 2025-26 compared with 580 the previous year. Despite this substantial

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increase, service quality and performance were maintained - 97% of requests were completed within agreed timescales.

The organisation recognises that access to information is often important for individuals seeking acknowledgement, compensation, redress or closure following traumatic circumstances.

Interpreting, translation and British Sign Language services are provided on demand, to ensure equal access to information for people where English is not their first language.

Following publication of the HMIP report on our [National Enquiry Point](#), our customer contact centre, work commenced to improve systems, guidance, training and support arrangements.

Digital transformation also progressed through the Defence Agent Service (DAS) and the Digital Evidence Sharing Capability (DESC). These initiatives help improve information sharing, case preparation and efficiency across the justice system.

DAS is a secure digital portal provided by COPFS for defence agents and COPFS staff. It gives defence agents online access to case information, disclosure material and documents served by COPFS, all in one place. DAS allows users to securely view, download and manage witness statements, documentary productions, service documents and digital evidence, while also providing updates on active cases and court dates. It is designed to make the sharing of case information faster, more efficient and more accessible for defence agents across Scotland.

What we will do

We will continue to develop the Witness Gateway by extending functionality available to users.

We will continue expanding VIA modernisation activity and extending use of the VIA Workload Application.

We will implement recommendations arising from inspection activity relating to enquiries and customer service.

Further accessibility improvements will be made to digital content and services.

Standard 3

We will ensure that you are given the help you need to give evidence in court. We will assess your vulnerability, explain the special measures

available to you under the law and apply for you to be supported with the appropriate measures.

What we have done

COPFS understands the physical and emotional effects crime can have on victims and the vital role witnesses play in the criminal justice system. We are committed to meeting their needs, communicating effectively and recognising any equality and inclusion needs they may have.

Some victims and witnesses may be particularly vulnerable because of their circumstances or the nature of the evidence they may be asked to give to the court. Special measures are in place to help a vulnerable witness give their evidence in court.

The role of our VIA Service is to provide information, practical assistance and support throughout the justice process.

Part of their remit is to help victims and witnesses understand court procedures, special measures and make them aware of support services available to them, such as Victim Support Scotland. VIA staff work closely with such partner organisations to ensure that victims receive support tailored to individual circumstances.

COPFS continues to support implementation of Scotland's Bairns' Hoose model. Bairns' Hoose offers holistic, child-centred support to those who have been victims or witness of abuse and to children under the age of criminal responsibility whose behaviour has caused harm. Bairns' Hoose is all about connecting services around the needs of the child by collaborating across agencies and disciplines.

The four rooms approach does this by bringing together child protection, health, justice and recovery services in one setting. It's important to reduce the number of times children are asked to retell their stories as this can be difficult and retraumatising. Instead, trauma-informed practice is prioritised to support the child's recovery in a safe, respectful, friendly, and welcoming environment.

We have local leads across our geographical locations to provide overarching support and guidance to ensure national consistency in the development of the Bairns Hooses and there is an internal working group carrying out this work.

Implementation is taking place on a phased basis, involving a Pathfinder Phase followed by a National Rollout. Partnerships are now in the final year of the Pathfinder phase, until Spring 2027. From Summer 2027 an incremental national rollout of Bairns' Hoose will begin across Scotland.

There are now twenty partnerships at varying stages of delivery and development. Eight Hooses are operational and delivering Bairns' Hoose-type services across Scotland.

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To raise awareness of our role in criminal justice, we have delivered presentations on Scottish Government webinars, joined expert panels at events and provided an 'information pack' to partner organisations.

UNCRC obligations remained embedded throughout policy and operational activity. Over 90% of staff received training and guidance on how to consider children's rights and best interests within decision making.

COPFS continues to improve services for women and girls affected by violence and abuse. Sexual offending remains a significant proportion of High Court business and improving outcomes for victims remains a strategic priority.

The Sexual Offences Review Report was published in April 2025. Significant progress has already been made, particularly in relation to improving communication with victims, strengthening prosecutorial guidance, and updating internal procedures.

The COPFS Sexual Offences Handbook has been updated to support consistent, trauma-informed communication with victims of sexual crime. Changes include:

- Recording and respecting victims' communication preferences throughout the prosecution process.
- Ensuring victims are informed that they can change their communication preferences at any stage and explaining how to do so.
- Providing explanations where it is not possible to follow a victim's communication preferences.
- Avoiding the use of an accused person's details as case identifiers in correspondence with victims.
- Providing guidance for communication with victims when decisions are made to discontinue rape charges while proceeding with other charges.
- Offering victims in serious sexual offence cases the opportunity to meet with the prosecutor before giving evidence, either in person or remotely, where appropriate.
- Recording whether a victim wishes to meet the prosecutor and maintaining an appropriate record of any such meeting.
- Providing training and guidance to prosecutors conducting sexual offence trials on meeting and supporting victims before they give evidence.

These changes implement Recommendations 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 14, 30, 31, 33, 35 and 37 of the Review.

In response to Recommendation 123, the COPFS Prosecution Code has been revised to provide greater clarity on the test for prosecutorial action in sexual offence cases. Prosecutors must now be satisfied that there is a realistic prospect of conviction before

taking prosecutorial action. Supporting guidance and training have been issued, and the Case Marking Instructions and Sexual Offences Handbook are being updated to ensure consistency across all relevant guidance and instructions.

In response to Recommendation 163, COPFS is also reviewing guidance relating to Precognitions and Precognition Reports in sexual offence cases and ensuring that such guidance complies with our trauma informed requirements.

Summary Case Management (SCM) continues to transform summary justice processes. The project was designed to create a more effective system for handling summary cases and deliver better outcomes for everyone involved - especially victims and witnesses.

Through a combination of early disclosure of evidential material, proactive engagement between the Crown and defence and judicial management of cases at an early stage, SCM focusses on resolution of cases, or confirmation of the issues in dispute before a trial is assigned. It aims to reduce both the number of unnecessary trials being assigned and the volume of witness citations that are issued.

The [Summary Case Management \(SCM\) evaluation report](#) was released on 26 May 2026. The report highlights the impact of implementing SCM across our summary business. Here are some of the benefits that have been achieved through SCM:

- A 42% reduction in the number of outstanding summary case trials at the end of April 2026 compared to April 2025.
- A reduction of 62% in the number of intermediate diets called in April 2026, compared to April 2025.
- A 47% reduction in first citations during 2025/2026 when compared with pre-pilot citations.
- Comparing pre and post roll-out numbers, there has been a comparative annual reduction of over 100,000 in police officer citations issued.
- 53% reduction in Crown adjournments since August 2022.
- 61% reduction in the volume of crown motions to adjourn trials due to absent witnesses since August 2022, demonstrating the impact on improved communication with victims and more robust management of cases.

These figures give some insight into how much the way we approach our work is changing.

COPFS also supports pre-recorded evidence and evidence by commission. These mechanisms allow vulnerable witnesses to provide evidence in a way that reduces stress and delay.

Evidence by commission has helped reduce waiting times and supports participation by people who may otherwise find traditional courtroom processes particularly difficult.

A revised statement of prosecution policy relating to sexual offending by children was published. Victim communication and appropriate oversight of decisions remain central to the policy.

Work also continued to support victims of human trafficking, exploitation, domestic abuse and stalking. Specialist prosecutors, policy guidance and training support a consistent and informed response to these complex crimes.

In June 2026 COPFS received recognition for work undertaken in the landmark Lee Milne domestic abuse case. The successful prosecution improved public understanding of coercive control and violence against women and girls. The case demonstrated the dedication, expertise and specialist training of COPFS staff, who advanced the application of the law in this complex area.

We will continue to invest in the development of our people, ensuring they have the skills and knowledge to deliver similarly impactful outcomes. We will also continue to share learning and emerging best practice internationally, building on the contribution made by Alex Prentice through the International Association of Prosecutors and strengthening the collective response to violence against women and girls.

What we will do

With the national rollout of SCM complete, we're continuing our work with local teams to embed the model, focussing on resolving cases earlier, focussing trials as early as possible and continuing to improve the service we provide to victims and witnesses. We are continuing to take on feedback about what we can do to make it work better for everyone involved.

Over the next year, we will focus on how we can further improve our engagement with our defence agents, particularly prior to the first appearance, to facilitate earlier resolution and increase the effectiveness of the first appearance.

We continue to improve the design of our VIA services, building on the work of the VIA Modernisation Programme. By implementing trauma-informed service delivery, we aim to ensure that VIA is best equipped to meet the needs of those who require our services.

Standard 4

We will take decisions in cases reported to us in line with our Prosecution Code and continue to review the training needs of our staff to ensure that they have the appropriate skills.

What we have done

Our [Prosecution Code](#) makes clear the need to consider the background and personal circumstances of both the accused and the victim before deciding what action to take in any case. The impact of the offence on the victim must also be considered. Where relevant, this may include consideration of any equality, diversity or inclusion issues.

The Code requires consideration of evidential sufficiency, realistic prospect of conviction and what actions are in the public interest. The public interest test includes consideration of seriousness, vulnerability, equality factors, community safety and the best interests of children.

The Scottish Prosecution College (SPC) continues to deliver extensive learning opportunities for all COPFS staff. The introduction of additional online learning opportunities has improved accessibility and flexibility for staff located across Scotland. This has reduced the time spent travelling to the college, which is based in Glasgow.

Legal training covers advocacy, domestic abuse, stalking, sexual offending, trauma-informed practice, disclosure, body-worn video evidence, expert evidence and leadership. Learning relating to human trafficking reflected evolving exploitation trends including criminal exploitation, county lines activity and online abuse.

Trauma-informed learning remains a significant focus. Building on previous learning, additional training modules have helped staff understand psychological trauma and adapt practice appropriately, especially when engaging directly with victims.

Specialist programmes support prosecutors working in domestic abuse, institutional abuse, child death and human trafficking cases. Learning relating to trafficking reflected evolving exploitation trends including criminal exploitation, county lines activity and online abuse.

Partnership working remains an important feature of learning and development. COPFS worked with police officers, forensic scientists, medical practitioners and other stakeholders to deliver and share expertise.

Timely disclosure of information relevant to the defence continues to be emphasised as a fundamental aspect of fair justice. Staff were reminded of the importance of early and proportionate disclosure and of its role in supporting efficient case progression.

VIA learning resources were expanded through dedicated learning spaces, guidance documents and toolkits. These resources support staff who work directly with victims, witnesses and bereaved relatives.

What we will do

We will continue our work to implement the Trauma Informed Justice Knowledge and Skills Framework in partnership with specialists from NHS Education for Scotland, providing enhanced training for identified roles to improve our service to victims and witnesses.

A full review of our Prosecution Code has taken place and will be launched in Summer 2026.

We will review and develop training in response to recommendations from the Sexual Offences Review and other inspections.

We will continue developing leadership, management and specialist operational training.

We will maintain focus on disclosure, digital transformation and continuous professional development.

The Standards of Service in the coming year

COPFS will continue to place victims and witnesses at the centre of service delivery. Priorities for the coming year include implementation of recommendations from the Sexual Offences Review, continued trauma-informed transformation, further development of digital services, strengthening support for bereaved relatives and continuing partnership working across the justice sector. Through these activities, COPFS aims to improve experiences, support participation and maintain public confidence in the criminal justice system.

The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service (SCTS)



Chief Executive, Malcolm Graham

SCTS Chief Executive Officer, Malcolm Graham, said:

“I am pleased to introduce the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service (SCTS) annual report on our standards of service for 2025-26. This report reflects SCTS’s commitment to continuously improving the experience of victims and witnesses within the justice system and highlights both the progress we have made and our priorities for the future.

The justice system continues to face significant pressures, however through innovation and collaboration with justice partners, we are driving forward meaningful improvements, including those aimed at reducing the need for physical attendance at court and supporting the early resolution of cases.

We continue to engage with organisations that support victims and witnesses to ensure our services are trauma informed and reflect their needs and experiences.”

What we do

The purpose of the [Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service](#) (SCTS) is supporting justice. We fulfil that purpose by providing the people, buildings and services needed to support the judiciary (Judges, Sheriffs, Justices of the Peace and Tribunal Members), the courts, devolved [tribunals](#) and [Office of the Public Guardian \(OPG\)](#).

SCTS also provides the staff and administrative support to the:

- [Scottish Civil Justice Council](#) - which drafts rules of procedure for the civil courts, and advises the Lord President on the development of the civil justice system; and the
- [Scottish Sentencing Council](#) - which is responsible for preparing sentencing guidelines, and for publishing guideline judgments and information about sentences imposed by the courts in Scotland.

Our work focuses on improving access to justice, promoting open justice, reducing delay and cost within the justice system, and reforming our services through technology to improve efficiency and user experience.

Our estate covers 70 buildings made up of courts, vulnerable witness suites, tribunals and offices. We operate from 51 distinct locations across Scotland's six sheriffdoms, together with 24 vulnerable witness remote sites. Tribunals also make use of some 98 further venues across Scotland for hearings.

Our standards of service reflect the key engagement that victims and witnesses may have with the courts, and SCTS, during their journey through the criminal justice system.

This report provides an annual review of our performance against the specified standards, as well as exploring the ongoing efforts being made to improve the experience for victims and witnesses who attend court.

Our Standards of Service

Standard 1

If you are a witness attending one of our locations to give evidence in person or virtually, we will update you once per hour on the progress of the court case while you wait. We will advise when you are no longer required.

Standard 2

We will provide separate waiting rooms for prosecution and defence witnesses, and access to refreshments.

Standard 3

If you are due to give your evidence to the court by live TV link, we will ensure that an explanation of the process for giving your evidence is provided on the day, at the location, if not in advance of that.

Standard 4

We will respond to requests received on behalf of witnesses, for accommodating court familiarisation visits, within 3 working days of receipt.

Standard 5

If you want to know what support is available to you when you arrive at court, we will direct you to Victim Support Scotland or other support services which are present in the court building or otherwise provide information on how to contact such support if they are not present at court.

Going beyond our standards

In addition to working to meet our standards we remain committed to exploring further reforms to our systems to deliver an improved experience for people engaging with our organisation and the justice system. We collaborate closely with justice partners across a range of projects, alongside delivering our own initiatives. The following sections provide an overview of some of the key work that has been progressed this year.

How we have improved services and access to justice

While initiatives such as the roll-out of Summary Case Management have led to significant improvements in the summary courts, SCTS is facing significant business pressures, particularly in the High Court. Here case registrations continue to increase and are in excess of the current capacity available to process them. On average, SCTS received 112 High Court indictments each month in 2025-26 compared to 92 per month in 2024-25 – an increase of 22%. This upward trend looks set to continue, reflecting the impact of time bar extensions granted under the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) Scotland Act 2022 coming to a close; growing volumes of serious sexual offence cases and the impact of the 2023 Court of Appeal judgment on the law of corroboration.

The High Court will require additional capacity to prevent the volume of scheduled trials in these most serious of cases from reaching unacceptable levels, which would have significant and detrimental impacts on victims, witnesses and accused. Such an outcome would run counter to the justice sector's ambition to manage business in a trauma informed way. We will continue to work over the course of this year and beyond to maximise efficiency and utilisation of valuable court resources across all levels.

To strengthen public understanding of our criminal courts and improve access, openness, and transparency we have introduced a number of initiatives including:

- Scotland's first regular criminal court livestream – covering appeals against conviction and Crown sentence appeals;
- Enhanced media access – a Reporter's Guide was published, the media portal has been enhanced, and a central register of contempt of court orders was created to support accurate and timely reporting; and
- The publication of monthly criminal data workbooks and modelling reports, presenting performance, demand and waiting times in a consistent and accessible format.

We will continue to work in collaboration with the judiciary to build on these developments by seeking to increase the filming of high profile sentencing statements, exploring how we can enable greater access to remote hearings while protecting the rights of the parties, and upgrading our media portal to support fair and accurate reporting.

In recent years we have built strong foundations for a more resilient, modern and efficient justice system. We have adapted our business model and accelerated key reforms, supported by the innovative use of technology. This has enabled us to continue supporting the delivery of justice and victims and witnesses in their journey to improve their experiences, whether they attend court in person or participate via a live television link from an alternative location.

We continue to develop and expand on alternative options of 'attending' court for victims and witnesses to give evidence. This includes collaborating with justice partners, including [Victim Support Scotland \(VSS\)](#) and [Children 1st](#) to enable the most vulnerable to give their evidence remotely from alternative premises such as VSS sites and Scotland's first Bairns' Hoose where appropriate support is available. These arrangements have delivered a range of benefits and have been positively received by those who no longer require to physically attend court.

Criminal Justice Reform

SCTS remains committed to continuously driving forward initiatives which have emerged from the judicially led [Evidence and Procedure Review \(EPR\)](#) and the then Lord Justice Clerk, Lady Dorrian's cross justice sector [Review in to the Management of Sexual Offence cases](#) (the Sexual Offences Review) which supports children and vulnerable witnesses being able to give the best quality evidence as early as possible, while minimising further trauma.

In the last year, our dedicated team have continued to work with our justice partners in the implementation of the elements of the Sexual Offences Review that don't require legislation, with a particular focus on the creation of additional dedicated evidence giving facilities and a strategy for updating of existing spaces in which witnesses give their evidence. Work has also been progressed on the creation of a new national sexual offences court now that the applicable legislation has been passed (discussed further below).

Sexual Offences Review

[The Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform \(Scotland\) Bill](#) took forward a number of the proposals of the Sexual Offences Review that require changes in the law over and above other transformational changes to the justice system to support victims and witnesses in both the criminal and civil sphere. The Sexual Offences Review proposals being taken forward include:

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- the creation of a national trauma informed court for sexual offences, with a presumption for the pre-recording of all sexual offence complainer evidence as its cornerstone;
- the right for sexual offence complainers not to be named (statutory anonymity);
- and the right to independent legal advice for sexual offence complainers when certain applications are made to court to disclose types of evidence (known as section 275 applications).

The Bill was importantly passed by the Scottish Parliament and the now “Act” received Royal Assent on 30 October 2025. In the next year we will continue to work and collaborate with Scottish Government and our justice partners on the steps, funding and timelines that need to be set to support the realisation of the Sexual Offences Review’s vision and specifically enable the creation of a trauma informed national sexual offences court with pre-recorded evidence and improved user experience at its heart.

The Evidence and Procedure Review (EPR) and the Expansion of Pre-Recorded Evidence

SCTS’s [Evidence and Procedure Review](#) (EPR) recommended the utilisation of pre-recorded evidence to support the most vulnerable to give their evidence alongside the adoption of the international ‘[Barnahus](#)’ model for Scotland back in 2015. *[The model seeks to support the specific needs of children who have been hurt, harmed or witnessed a crime. It brings together justice, health, social work and recovery support for children, traditionally within one location e.g. a house. Its aim was to remove children from the court setting entirely.]* The Scottish Government gave a commitment to developing ‘Bairns’ Hooses’ for all eligible children who are victims of or witnesses to abuse or violence across Scotland. It is testing the approach across ten areas (via a pathfinder and affiliate pathfinder allocation) first before a national rollout, incrementally, from 2027. Steps taken in relation to pre-recorded evidence are discussed further below.

This year, we have continued to work with a number of the 10 test areas, alongside an increasing number of additional Bairns’ Hoose development areas, providing practical guidance and support to help ensure national consistency in the development of the Bairns’ Hooses from a court process perspective. This has included continued work with the North Strathclyde Pathfinder Partnership, in the provision and operation of SCTS’s equipment in the bespoke justice suite within Scotland’s first Bairns’ Hoose, together with the installation of equipment in the Bairns’ Hooses in Aberdeen City and the Outer Hebrides.

In the coming year we look forward to collaborating with and extending such provision to other partnerships across the geographical reach of Scotland. These facilities and equipment will crucially allow a number of children and young people and associated family members to give evidence to court in a more trauma informed and supported

environment, away from the physical court building. We look forward to working and collaborating with Scottish Government, Bairns' Hoose partnerships, justice partners and others in this essential reform and in the further development of the justice aspect of the Bairns' Hoose model in Scotland, including its interaction with the expansion of pre-recorded evidence discussed further below.

Simplified Notification Process

We have worked in collaboration with Scottish Government and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) to introduce a new digitised simplified notifications procedure for some witnesses who are automatically entitled to what are termed 'Standard Special Measures' (use of a live television link either from the court building or from a remote site; use of a screen; and a supporter) when giving their evidence.

New provisions were added to the [Criminal Procedure \(Scotland\) Act 1995](#) in relation to the new simplified procedure. SCTS and COPFS developed the software for the automated transfer process for standard special measures which, following a pilot, was rolled out to all courts in June 2025.

Summary Case Management (SCM)

Summary Case Management (SCM) was introduced across Scotland to improve how summary criminal cases are handled, with a particular focus on reducing unnecessary court attendance and helping cases to be dealt with more quickly and efficiently. Following a successful pilot, SCM was rolled out nationally between January 2025 and January 2026 and is now in place across all sheriff courts.

The changes introduced through SCM are designed to benefit victims and witnesses by ensuring cases are better prepared at an earlier stage, reducing the number of cases that go to trial unnecessarily, and improving the likelihood that trials proceed and conclude on the day they are scheduled. This helps reduce uncertainty, delay and the need for repeated court attendance.

What has changed for victims and witnesses

Since the national rollout, SCM has contributed to measurable improvements across the justice system:

- **Fewer scheduled trials:**
 - The number of scheduled summary trials fell below pre-pandemic levels for the first time in August 2025.
 - By January 2026, scheduled trials had reduced by around 70% from their peak, including a substantial reduction in domestic abuse trials.
 - This has supported earlier resolution of cases and reduced the length of time victims and witnesses wait for outcomes.

- **Reduced witness attendance:**

- First witness citations reduced by almost half during the rollout period.
- From September 2022 to January 2026 monthly witness re-citations reduced by around 59%, from 23,469 to 9,620, meaning fewer victims and witnesses were asked to attend court more than once.
- Police witness re-citations reduced by around 62% over the same period.
- These reductions have helped minimise disruption, uncertainty and stress for victims and civilian witnesses.

- **Improved trial certainty:**

- Fewer trials are now adjourned on the day they are scheduled. At the conclusion of the SCM rollout the percentage of trials adjourned in non-domestic cases reduced from 40% to 27%, and in domestic cases from 40% to 30%.
- At the conclusion of the SCM rollout the percentage of non-domestic trials in which evidence was led increased from 9% to 12%, and in domestic trials from 13% to 16%.
- This means that more trials proceed and conclude as planned, reducing last-minute changes and providing greater certainty for witnesses about when they will be required to attend court.

Overall, the national rollout of Summary Case Management has supported a more victim-centred and witness-focused justice system. By reducing unnecessary court attendance, limiting repeat citations, and improving the timeliness and certainty of proceedings, SCM has helped improve the experience of victims and witnesses and supports a more respectful, proportionate and trauma-informed approach to summary justice.

Improving witnesses' experiences of giving evidence

Expansion of legal presumption in the pre-recording of evidence

Informed in part by the EPR, the Scottish Government introduced primary legislation ([the Vulnerable Witnesses \(Criminal Evidence\) \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#)) which created a legal presumption in favour of the pre-recording of evidence from child witnesses and adult vulnerable witnesses in particular case types. A staged roll out was agreed to help support the most vulnerable and ensure the justice system was not overwhelmed. A revised [implementation timetable](#) was published in April 2024.

Crucially the next stage of the roll out came in to force on 30 March 2026. This stage extended the provision of the presumption of pre-recorded evidence to children under the age of 16 in sheriff and jury cases in a defined list of case types. To support the successful implementation of this essential next step for victims and vulnerable users,

we worked closely with the Judiciary, Scottish Government and Justice Partners to create additional facilities (discussed further below) and further tools and guidance some of which will continue to be advanced in the next year.

In particular we worked closely with and supported the judiciary in the creation and launch of a national Sheriff Court Practice Note (accessible [here](#)) for the evidence by a commissioner process. While adopting but also innovating upon existing practice in the High Court to support the specific needs of sheriff court practice and users, the document sets out clearly the collective judicial expectations for Sheriff Court practitioners and users in these proceedings, embedding good practice to support our users across the country.

To support informed choice for witnesses, while also supporting greater understanding of the evidence by a commissioner process for all users and participants, we secured additional revenue funding from Scottish Government to create educational videos on the topic. The materials have been filmed and we look forward to finalising them and launching them within an improved user centric section of our website in the coming year.

Crucial to supporting the presumption and the EPR's vision, is the provision of bespoke trauma informed multifunctional evidence by a commissioner facilities. The further steps we have taken in the last year to develop more facilities are outlined below.

Dedicated and trauma informed evidence giving facilities

Our bespoke facilities and suites have been designed to:

- provide more trauma informed spaces to make witnesses more comfortable, and
- facilitate the giving of their best evidence in a less traumatic way using the best technology available.

Our evidence by commissioner facilities benefit from specified and specially designed waiting rooms, with our Glasgow and Inverness evidence giving facilities providing bespoke support spaces and sensory equipment to improve the lived experience for all victims and witnesses, and particularly children, attending to give evidence.

For the High Court alone from 01 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 there have been a total of:

- 758 evidence by commissioner applications lodged, and
- 745 evidence by commissioner applications granted.

785 witnesses have given their evidence by way of an evidence by commissioner hearing during this period. These figures include both adults and children.

In March 2026, new functionality was introduced to our criminal case management system to enable more accurate recording of data relating to special measures for

vulnerable witnesses, including evidence by commissioner applications and hearings, across all courts. This enhanced data capability will help to optimise the efficiency and allocation of our resources while ensuring that vulnerable witnesses are effectively supported to give their best evidence.

Paisley evidence suite

This new facility, completed in March 2026, provides two multi-functional, trauma informed, evidence by a commissioner suites to support vulnerable witnesses to give pre-recorded best evidence earlier in proceedings. Acknowledging the importance of informed choice, the facility also has a trauma informed vulnerable witness suite allowing vulnerable witnesses to give evidence by 'live television link' to other court locations and in other court processes. When not utilised for the evidence by a commissioner process the two dedicated suites can change in to additional 'live television link' facilities. This helps us to provide additional space and capacity and further support choice for victims and witnesses.

Hamilton evidence suite

During the reporting year, the works were completed, and this valuable new addition – designed to support users, particularly within the South Strathclyde area – became operational. The facility provides a multi-functional, trauma informed evidence by a commissioner suite with its own dedicated user entrance to support informed choice. As with all of our new facilities, to support choice when not utilised for the evidence by a commissioner process, the suite can change into additional 'live television link' facilities. Work was also undertaken in our existing Aberdeen suite this year to introduce this multifunctionality.



Evidence by Commissioner Hearing Room, Hamilton



Evidence by Commissioner Witness Site with WC, Hamilton

Glasgow

Work was completed at our existing Glasgow site to increase national trauma informed evidence by a commissioner capacity. The works include the creation of a further state of the art recording suite and improved areas for our vulnerable users.

Kilmarnock

Works were commenced this year on the creation of a new multi-functional evidence by a commissioner facility in Kilmarnock. We look forward to announcing its operational launch in the next reporting year.

As a consequence of all of these works we now importantly have at least one dedicated evidence by a commissioner facility within the geographical reach of each of our six sheriffdoms. We remain committed to the further development and expansion of multi-purpose, trauma informed, evidence giving facilities within our estate, where possible, to support those most vulnerable in our society to give their 'best' evidence in a trauma informed way.

How we support professional witnesses to give evidence remotely

In January 2022 we started an initiative which enables police and professional witnesses including medical professionals to give evidence remotely in High Court trials. The significant cross-sector value the model brings includes:

- evidence from police and medical professionals to be given remotely from different locations,
- ensuring that high quality evidence continues to be provided by such witnesses,
- freeing up considerable amounts of time to allow them to continue providing front line services as opposed to travelling to/from court and waiting in court, and
- a reduction in associated costs.

We previously implemented technical enhancements in the High Court including the introduction of a dual screen solution which mimics the physical presence of a witness in court more closely.

This resulted in a continued increase in the proportion of witnesses giving evidence remotely. From 01 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 over 1,109 police and professional witnesses have given evidence remotely to the High Court.

Due to funding constraints, SCTS was unable to expand the use of remote provision of evidence to sheriff solemn or summary courts over the past year. Funding has now been secured for the forthcoming year with consideration being given to a gradual rollout to sheriff solemn courts. It remains an ambition of SCTS to complete the rollout across all of our courts to make the most of new technology whilst helping those who support the system.

Criminal court business programme

SCTS has operated an increased number of criminal courts since September 2021 to address backlogs that were generated by the pandemic. Our goal was to return to a position where the number of scheduled trials across all criminal business levels was below 20,000 – as this represented a manageable workload for the system – and this goal has been achieved.

Within the Sheriff Courts the number of pending solemn trials as at the end of March 2026 had decreased to 1,078 (there were 2,389 pending solemn trials at the end of March 2023). This was mainly due to the introduction of an additional 8 Sheriff solemn trial courts funded through the Scottish Government's Recover, Renew, Transform (RRT) programme.

At the end of March 2026, the number of pending summary trials had decreased to 9,012 (there were 20,064 pending summary trials at the end of March 2023). It is anticipated that the number of pending trials will reduce further in 2026-27.

At the end of March 2026, the number of pending Justice of the Peace (JP) summary trials was 2,140 (there were 4,266 pending JP trials at the end of 2023). The forthcoming introduction of section 54 of the Road Traffic Act is anticipated to further reduce JP court registrations.

Both Sheriff and Justice of the Peace (JP) summary business have now returned to a level below the pre pandemic baseline.

Within the High Court, the number of pending scheduled trials had risen to 1,221 as at the end of March 2026. Recently published [criminal case modelling](#) indicates that solemn business levels are expected to increase further in the coming years, particularly within the High Court.

It has been recognised that, at current capacity levels, High Court backlogs are likely to continue to grow to potentially very serious levels. There is therefore a clear need for the High Court to increase their trial capacity to prevent substantial impact on scheduled trials and associated waiting periods. Work will also continue to maximise efficiency and utilisation of valuable court resources across all levels in order to manage caseloads effectively and minimise the potential impact on victims, witnesses and accused persons.

Providing special measures to support vulnerable witnesses

A range of special measures is available to vulnerable witnesses to give evidence to court including:

- the use of privacy screens,
- having a supporter,

- evidence by commissioner – this is when a nominated person (commissioner) can record you giving evidence at a different time and/or place to the court case, and
- using live television links in court, between courts or from a remote location.

There are currently 24 external remote sites across Scotland for vulnerable witnesses to give evidence via live television link out with our court buildings.

In addition, there are 48 vulnerable witness rooms currently available within 35 of our court buildings for vulnerable witnesses to give their evidence by live television link.

Victims Taskforce

What is the Victims Taskforce

The [Victims Taskforce](#) was established to improve support, advice and information for victims of crime. It is co-chaired by the Justice Secretary and the Lord Advocate, who is head of Scotland's criminal prosecution system.

Its primary role is to co-ordinate and drive action to improve the experiences of victims and witnesses within the criminal justice system, whilst ensuring a fair justice system for those accused of crime.

The Taskforce has brought together senior decision-makers from justice agencies, the legal profession, academia and the voluntary sector, including direct representation of victims.

SCTS continues to be represented on the Taskforce, and also on the dedicated victim centred approach; the trauma informed approach; and the communication work streams. Significant work has previously been undertaken within the victim centred approach workstream, culminating in the publication of the [Victim Centred Approach to Justice in Scotland: Scoping and Modelling Project](#). This report provides modelled and costed options for transforming the justice system to be one which is more victim-centred. We remain committed to supporting the actions set in the work plans for each of these work streams.

Improving our communications with Victims and Witnesses

As mentioned above a dedicated workstream within the Victims Taskforce was created with the intention of improving communications to victims across the justice system. The workstream reports to the Taskforce to ensure its work remains aligned with other Taskforce activities.

The People at Heart: guide to communicating with people affected by crime was commissioned by the Scottish Government from The First Word. The First Word is an organisation specialising in effective communication. The guide provides practical tips for criminal justice organisations on how to make written communication clearer, more inclusive and trauma informed in so far as possible.

We are committed to using the Guide and other user centric tools, to help improve our communications with victims and vulnerable users, where possible. As part of this work we have commenced a review of the information available on the SCTS website for victims and witnesses. First Word provided input on improving accessibility to this information this year, and we will continue to refine and consider the content over the coming year. We are continuing to review, and look at in the next reporting year, how the learning and tools provided by the First Word and the recently public facing People at Heart Guide (accessible [here](#)), can be used to help support all of our colleagues in our commitment to improve communication with our users where possible, and to become a trauma informed organisation.

Trauma-informed Practice and Workforce Capability

We have continued to strengthen SCTS' trauma-informed approach to service delivery, supporting staff to engage respectfully, safely and effectively with victims, witnesses and jurors. This work directly supports our Standards of Service by helping to ensure that those interacting with the justice system are treated with dignity, understanding and compassion.

Significant progress has been made in embedding trauma-informed knowledge and skills across the organisation. Over 90% of all SCTS staff have completed the mandatory Level 1 trauma module, and more than 91% of SCTS staff required to undertake Level 2 training have done so. In addition, a range of general trauma training modules, including learning focused on working with children and young people, are available to all staff on a voluntary basis.

Face-to-face trauma-informed practice training continues to be delivered quarterly across the organisation and has recently been enhanced through collaborative sessions with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and Police Scotland, strengthening a shared understanding of trauma across justice partners. Our Education and Learning Unit (ELU) have added another accredited trainer and Epione Trauma Training and Consultancy Experts have continued to facilitate the accreditation.

Business as Usual

Trauma-informed principles are being embedded into operational practice through Clerk and Court Officer technical training for Sheriff Courts and Justice of the Peace Courts. This includes scenario-based learning and role-play exercises designed to support the practical application of trauma-informed approaches in court settings. We have worked with High Court Depute Clerks to design training tailored for them. Guidance on trauma-informed service design has been issued for staff working in Court Delivery Improvement and the Personal Support Unit, alongside guidance for managers on trauma and wellbeing, highlighting the risks associated with vicarious trauma and setting out available support routes for both managers and staff.

Trauma informed principles are also being embedded in leadership development programmes such as our first line leaders.

Working collaboratively

Workforce systems and development frameworks continue to evolve to reflect SCTS's trauma-informed commitments. The ELU has supported Human Resources in updating recruitment materials to raise awareness among potential recruits of SCTS's trauma-informed approach and the wellbeing support available to staff. The Equality Impact Assessment Toolkit has also been updated to explicitly recognise the impact of trauma alongside other equality considerations. Vicarious Trauma Training was piloted for Higher Executive Officer and Senior Executive Officer operational managers in February and March, delivered in partnership with HR Wellbeing and the [Rivers Centre](#).

Future Initiatives

Throughout 2025, we undertook important steps toward embedding trauma-informed practice across our organisation. It is no longer a new initiative – it is now part of how we work every day.

Looking ahead, trauma-informed sessions on vicarious trauma, compassionate leadership and face-to-face Level 2 training will continue as part of the business-as-usual learning schedule, aligned to organisational need. This ongoing programme of activity will support SCTS to continue meeting and strengthening its Standards of Service for victims and witnesses through a confident, skilled and compassionate workforce.

How we met our standards

Our standards reflect the key engagement that victims and witnesses may have with SCTS on their journey through the justice system.

In this section, we've reviewed our performance against these standards. We have included details about our ongoing work to improve the experience for victims and witnesses.

Standard 1

If you are a witness attending one of our locations to give evidence in person or virtually, we will update you once per hour on the progress of the court case while you wait. We will advise when you are no longer required.

What we have done

Court officers, macers and clerks of court continue to liaise with the prosecutor to update witnesses and updates are provided in all locations. Occasionally this hasn't been possible when the court officer or macer has required to remain in court helping to manage productions or assisting jurors. A member of court staff will always ensure that witnesses are updated as often as possible. They will advise witnesses when they can

leave and provide them with as much information as they have been given, even if there is no specific information on their case yet. Specific case information may be available upon request. Arrangements are also in place to provide updates to witnesses who are giving evidence from remote sites or from other court locations.

In the majority of courts hourly updates are provided and in some, for example in Glasgow Sheriff Court, real time updates are provided to witness muster areas and staff then update witnesses.

In some court buildings, information around location and progress of cases is also visible to witnesses on wall mounted display screens.

What we will do

We will continue to engage with COPFS locally and when permitted we will obtain case information to allow us to update witnesses on progress of cases.

We have already outlined the initiative to facilitate the remote provision of evidence by police and professional witnesses in High Court trials and hope to begin extending this to Sheriff and Jury cases. We continue to work with COPFS to agree the most effective method and frequency for updating police and professional witnesses. At present, professional witnesses receive updates via messaging facilities within the Cisco WebEx meeting platform and this remains subject to review as we look at ways to communicate more efficiently.

Standard 2

We will provide separate waiting rooms for prosecution and defence witnesses, and access to refreshments.

What we have done

Across the wider estate, separate waiting areas and witness rooms continue to be provided for prosecution and defence witnesses where they are required to attend court.

Access to fresh drinking water for witnesses continues to be available at all courts. Provision of additional refreshments within the court buildings varies by location and may be limited. In some courts witnesses have access to the canteen or cafeteria if it is for public use, while others offer tea bars and vending machines. A number of courts are currently exploring options to introduce cafés or vending machine facilities in the future.

What we will do

We will continue to make the best use of available space within court buildings and, as noted earlier, we will support and develop further initiatives such as the remote provision of expert evidence and remote hearings. These measures help to reduce footfall in our courts and support those vulnerable witnesses requiring to attend our

buildings. It is important to recognise that, in some instances, the protected status of certain buildings may limit the extent to which physical alterations can be made.

Standard 3

If you are due to give your evidence to the court by live TV link, we will ensure that an explanation of the process for giving your evidence is provided on the day, at the location, if not in advance of that.

What we have done

We continued to provide facilities for vulnerable witnesses to give their evidence to court via live TV link. This can be from within court buildings, from court to court or from remote sites.

We have 24 remote sites which are open and available to all courts for use. In addition, there are 48 vulnerable witness rooms currently available within 35 of our court buildings for vulnerable witnesses to give their evidence by live TV link. All applications for giving evidence by live TV link continue to be accommodated by courts.

We continue to work in partnership with VSS to support the provision of trauma informed remote venues for live TV link evidence, located within their offices. By providing witnesses with the option of attending a hearing from a VSS office, they can access the organisation's support services in a setting that is more familiar to them.

Whilst court staff are available on the day to explain the process for giving evidence in court, most courts have reported that Victim Support Services often facilitate this prior to the courts informing the witness (either prior to attending court or on the day of attending court).

What we will do

We will continue to monitor the use of remote sites and where appropriate we will attempt to source additional sites to enable vulnerable witnesses to give their evidence to court via live TV link.

We will continue to work with VSS volunteers across court locations to ensure that witnesses giving evidence to court, by any means, are prepared and able to give their best evidence.

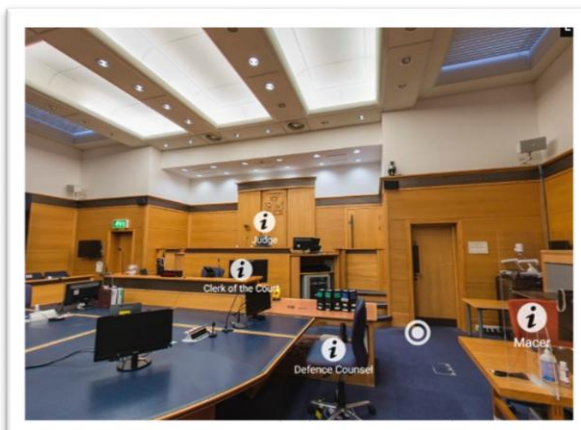
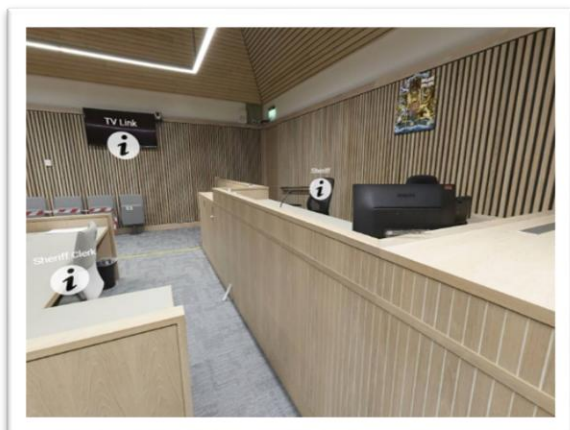
Standard 4

We will respond to requests received on behalf of witnesses, for accommodating court familiarisation visits, within 3 working days of receipt.

What we have done

To help people through the court process we facilitate court familiarisation visits. These visits allow victims and witnesses who need to come to court to have a look around the

location before a trial. They are available to all witnesses including children and vulnerable witnesses who intend to give evidence at a remote site or evidence suite. Requests include allowing access to courtrooms and vulnerable witness facilities in advance of the case calling for trial. The requests are typically made to and facilitated by Victim Information and Advice Service (VIA) or Victim Support Services (VSS). All courts report that they will work together with VIA and VSS and make every effort to provide a courtroom for a familiarisation visit where requested.



The opportunity to visit our facilities can help to: -

- alleviate concerns for witnesses and assist them in gaining a better understanding of the court process as a whole,
- provide an opportunity for witnesses to ask questions about what will happen when they attend court, and;
- help to alleviate anxiety as it provides an opportunity for those individuals to familiarise themselves with the facilities available.

In recent years, we have worked with VSS to support the development of [virtual courtroom tours](#), enabling victims and witnesses to view a range of courtrooms across Scotland through the VSS website. Interactive information buttons are included to help users understand what they are seeing on the screen, including who sits where and what may happen when attending court as a witness.

In April 2023, VSS launched a virtual court experience allowing victims and witnesses to use virtual reality headsets to familiarise themselves with giving evidence in court. VSS supporters will still support the victim or witness when they are wearing the headset to answer any questions they may have. The virtual experience will be an additional tool

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for court familiarisation visits and will not replace physical court familiarisation visits which will remain available to witnesses who want them, thus providing choices to victims and witnesses on how and when they wish to view courts.

What we will do

SCTS will continue to work closely with VIA and VSS to enable requests for court familiarisation visits to be dealt with and accommodated timeously.

Standard 5

If you want to know what support is available to you when you arrive at court, we will direct you to Victim Support Scotland or other support services which are present in the court building or otherwise provide information on how to contact such support if they are not present at court.

What we have done

A member of SCTS staff is available to greet witnesses and signpost them to the available support services within the building, if requested from the witness. Court officers, macers and reception staff have local knowledge of the support services available within their respective court buildings and continue to act as a key point of contact. In locations where support services have no permanent presence on site or support services are not available daily, arrangements are in place for court staff to provide relevant contact details should they be required.

We recognise the importance of equipping our staff with the skills and knowledge to assist and support our service users in a trauma informed way. We remain committed to providing a high standard of service to victims and witnesses with work ongoing to become a trauma informed organisation.

What we will do

We will maintain contact with support services to ensure we have up to date information as to which services can be provided within court buildings and we will continue to direct witnesses, who are required to be physically present in our courts, to appropriate support services if and when available.

We will continue to support VSS by allowing them access to courts for training new volunteers to ensure essential support services can be maintained for victims and witnesses.

Our standards of service for victims and witnesses 2026-27

During the 2025-26 reporting year, SCTS commenced a comprehensive review of its Standards of Service to ensure they remain realistic, effective, and supportive. As part of this process, we will be working closely with SCTS staff and we will consult justice partners and organisations that support victims and witnesses. The review is expected

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to continue over the course of the coming reporting year with a further update to be included in the next annual report.

SCTS will continue to monitor the effectiveness of its current Standards of Service over the coming year and will make improvements where necessary to ensure they continue to meet the needs of victims and witnesses during their time at court.

Scottish Prison Service



Chief Executive, Linda Pollock

SPS' Chief Executive, Linda Pollock, said:

"The Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Act 2025 which received Royal Assent on 30 October 2025, brings forward positive changes for victims in Scotland. We, in the Scottish Prison Service, are supportive of the changes and are committed to becoming a more trauma-informed organisation. We believe these reforms will deliver meaningful improvements for victims, and we are committed to working with partners to achieve this.

SPS' VNS Team are committed to improving our delivery of the aspects of the Victim Notification Scheme (VNS) that we administer. Over the past year, the team have attended training and awareness sessions to embed a trauma-informed ethos and have continued to be involved in the wider improvement work surrounding the VNS.

I am pleased to provide this year's annual report on our Standards of Service.

What we do

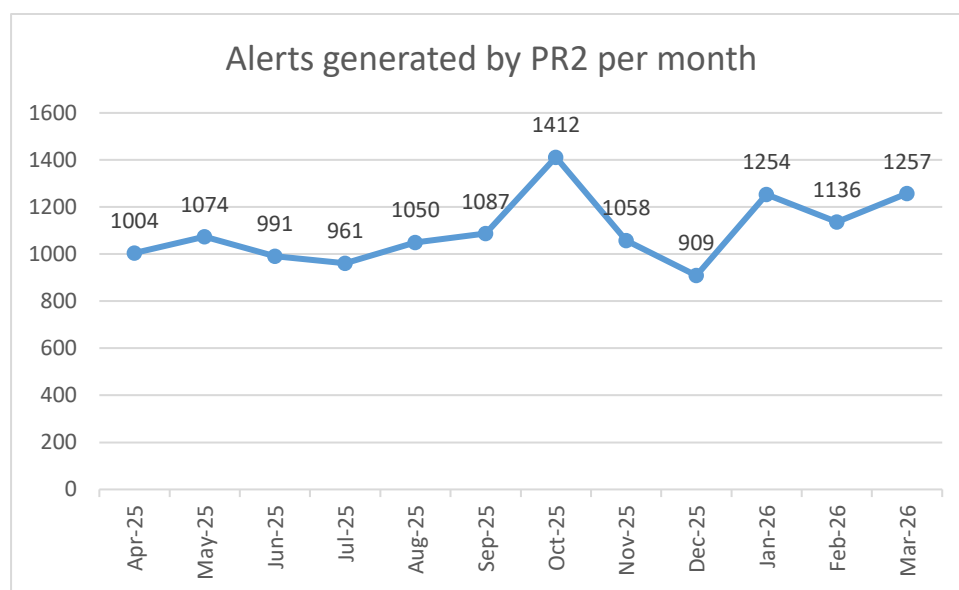
General

The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) is an Executive Agency of the Scottish Government and was first established in April 1993. In Scotland, there are currently 16 publicly managed prisons and 1 privately managed prison, HMP Addiewell. SPS currently has a contract for Scottish Court Custody and Prisoner Escort services with GEOAmey PECS.

How the delivery of the scheme works

Compliance with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) is essential in how the SPS' Victim Notification Scheme (VNS) team handles both registered victims' and offenders' personal information. The operation of the part of the VNS that SPS has responsibility for delivering, largely relies on a system of electronic alerts. SPS' internal prisoner records database (PR2) records relevant information about an offender and their sentencing arrangements. An alert on PR2 is triggered by changes to key information that is recorded against an offender which has relevance to a victim registered on the VNS. All such alerts are then manually interrogated by SPS' VNS team to determine, whether a registered victim should be notified of the information under the remit of VNS. The manual interrogation of alerts requires those within SPS' VNS team who operate the delivery of the VNS to have sufficient knowledge of the scheme and the potential changes that can occur in relation to an offender's sentence management over the course of serving a sentence of imprisonment.

Continually changing factors such as the number of offenders in custody, the number of registered victims and the stages that offenders are at in their custodial sentence, all impact on the numbers of alerts the PR2 database generates. Consequently, the number of alerts varies month to month, and year to year.



Collaborative Working

SPS continues to collaborate with the Scottish Government on policy development and has continued to be actively engaged with the improvement work of the Victims Taskforce. SPS' VNS team is live to the landmark changes being brought forward by The Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Act 2025.

In 2025-26, representatives from SPS' VNS team have also attended a number of external victim groups such as the Victims Taskforce, Victim Centred Approach Fund

(VCAF) meetings and Victim Centred Approach Programme Board. We have shared our experience of delivering the parts of the VNS for which SPS are responsible for and engaged to identify areas for improvement and provided input on further developing the VNS. We will continue to be involved in this improvement work in the year ahead.

This year, SPS' VNS team has also recruited another member of staff into the team, which enables SPS to deliver a more efficient service to victims. Members of the team have also continued to undertake e-learning modules related to understanding the impact of trauma and responding in a trauma-informed way. Two managers from the team also attended the short awareness course 'Working with trauma' at Glasgow University. SPS is committed to embedding trauma-informed practice. In addition, to further upskill the team, members of SPS' VNS Team also attended the Epione Trauma Skilled Course.

SPS' VNS team is also continuing its work to rewrite more of the VNS letters, being influenced by the learning and style from 'First Word - People at Heart training'.

Emergency Release

In 2025-26, registered victims, where the offender was released early as part of Emergency Early Release, were notified by SPS' VNS team of the change to the offender's release date, ahead of their release. Where a phone number was held this communication was delivered by speaking with the registered victim.

In addition, temporary expedited processes were also introduced to enable victims who had not registered on the VNS but confirmed eligible to join, to find out themselves or through a named Victim Support Organisation, an offender's release date.

Common Standards of Service

There are a number of common standards of service for the agencies, and these are set out in the document.

Complaints

SPS received less than five formal complaints relating to VNS this reporting year. Victims may express dissatisfaction when making a telephone or email enquiry, however, this can be due to misunderstanding information received and the query can normally be resolved by speaking with the victim. As detailed above, SPS has continued and will continue to work to improve the communications victims receive through implementing the use of the First Word People at Heart style guide.

Request for Information in alternative format/language

Any requests received for information to receive VNS communications in an alternative format/language in the period from April 2025 to March 2026, have been actioned by SPS' VNS team.

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SPS standards of service

Context

SPS delivers both custodial and rehabilitation services for offenders in custody. SPS achieves this by ensuring delivery of secure custody, safe and ordered prisons, decent standards of care and opportunities for offenders to develop in a way that helps them reintegrate into the community on release. After appropriate risk assessment, this may include unescorted access to the community which many victims find difficult for understandable reasons. SPS is acutely aware of the unintended upset this may cause and will continue to ensure that victims' representations are sought in such cases from registered victims who have opted into Part 2 of the Scheme.

The table below shows the number of victims currently registered at 31 March 2026, compared with the previous three years:

Date	Total number of registered victims	Life Sentence (inc. Order of Lifelong Restriction)	Long Term Sentence (4 years or more)	Short Term Sentence (less than 4 years) – includes those registering for the 'Victim Information Scheme' (less than 18 months)
March 2026	3234	1241	1539	454
March 2025	3104	1185	1488	431
March 2024	2676	1139	1264	273
March 2023	2757	1105	1326	326

Applications to join the scheme

The VNS is an opt in scheme in Scotland, victims may choose to join the VNS at any time after an offender is convicted. In 2025-26, there were 582 applications to join the scheme received in the year. Application levels remained similar to the previous year but as shown above the overall number of victims registered on the VNS increased in 2025-26.

The table below shows the number of applications to join the scheme at 31 March 2026, compared with the previous three years:

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Year to	Total
March 2026	582
March 2025	599
March 2024	474
March 2023	464

Provision of Information

The table below shows the number of letters containing VNS information sent to victims at 31 March 2026. There has been a significant increase in the past year. The previous three years are reported for comparison:

Year to	Total	No. not issued within 48 hrs
March 2026	3187	0
March 2025	2169	2
March 2024	1267	1
March 2023	1683	8

The VNS standard for information to be provided in response to an alert is '48-hours'. During the reporting period no letters were issued out with the 48-hour period. There were no delays over 5 working days.

In 2025-26, it remains the case that a small number of VNS letters sent to registered victims continue to be returned to SPS Headquarters by Royal Mail marked as undelivered. VNS correspondence is sent by Recorded Delivery. When SPS receives mail returned undelivered, we make a further attempt to provide the victim with the information in writing. It's not always clear why the registered victim has not received their letter. It may be because the registered victim has moved address, no longer wishes to receive VNS information, or the attempts to deliver the letter have been unsuccessful. To help increase awareness of the need to keep contact details up-to-date, VNS correspondence issued by SPS includes information asking victims to please inform us of any change of address. This reminder included continues to have had a positive impact as we receive regular requests to update contact details.

Representations

In 2025-26, VNS letters were issued to victims who had selected the option to make representations about the release of an offender, including temporary release. Where an offender is granted access to temporary release, victims of life sentence prisoners can also make representations in person by contacting SPS' VNS team to arrange this, or by phone or in writing.

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SPS' VNS team also issues VNS letters seeking representations where an offender is being considered for release on Parole, and on completion, the victim provides their representations directly to the Parole Board for Scotland for consideration.

VNS Telephone and Email Enquiries

SPS continues to receive a substantial number of VNS telephone enquiries on a daily basis. The phonenumber and mailbox are monitored on a regular basis (Monday to Friday). Enquiries received in 2025-26 were largely responded to within one day with the majority able to be dealt with at the time of the call.

Scottish Prison Service

What you can expect from us:

Standard 1 - For those who have joined the Victim Notification Scheme (VNS), information that you are entitled to receive under section 16(3) of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003 will be provided to you by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) within two working days.

This consists of the following:

- The date of the prisoner's release (other than being granted temporary release);
- If the prisoner dies, their date of death;
- If the prisoner has been transferred out of our custody;
- That the prisoner is, for the first time, entitled to be considered for temporary release;
- That the prisoner is unlawfully at large; or
- That the prisoner who was released or was unlawfully at large has been returned to custody.

Standard 2 - If you write to SPS about any matter concerning the Victim Notification Scheme, they will respond within 5 working days.

Standard 3 - Where a telephone enquiry cannot be answered by SPS at the time, they will call you back within one working day.

Standard 4 - For those of you who have joined the Victim Notification Scheme, and have expressed a desire to make representations in relation to licence conditions under section 17 of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003, SPS will write to you no less than two weeks before any decision will be taken for release:

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- On the first occasion that the prisoner is considered for temporary release; or
- By the Parole Board for Scotland.

Standard 5 - For those victims of offenders sentenced to less than 18 months, they will notify you of the date of release or escape of the offender within 2 working days of confirmation that you are an eligible victim. They will do this by telephone where you have provided a current contact number.

Standard 6 - For those victims of life sentenced offenders who have joined the Victim Notification Scheme, and have expressed a desire to make representations in relation to licence conditions under section 17 of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003, SPS will provide you with an opportunity to make representations in person, orally or in writing before any decision is taken on the first occasion that the prisoner is considered for temporary release.

Parole Board for Scotland Standards:

- Where a victim is registered for part 2 of the Victim Notification Scheme, The Board will take account of any representations alongside other relevant information when deciding whether to approve release. Victim Support Scotland may be able to help in preparing any representations (contact number 0345 603 9213);
- Where a victim is registered for part 2 of the Victim Notification Scheme, Parole Scotland will advise when a decision has been made. Victims will be offered the option of being told by telephone (unless there are good reasons for not doing so) and, if release is granted, Parole Scotland will provide information about any licence conditions that are relevant. If the victim prefers to receive a letter, Parole Scotland will send this by 1st class post within 1 day of the Parole Board's decision;
- Where a victim is registered for part 2 of the Victim Notification Scheme and the prisoner has been given a life sentence, The Board will give the victim an opportunity, to make any representations in person to a member of the Parole Board. The Parole Board member the victim meets will not be part of the Oral Hearing that considers the prisoner's case.
- Please note that the meeting with the member of the Parole Board will normally take place between 12 and 8 weeks before the date set for the Oral Hearing and will not be at the victims home. The meeting will be at a time and place that is suitable for the victim.
- Parole Scotland will answer victim letters, emails or telephone calls promptly. Letters or emails will be answered within 5 working days. If Parole Scotland are not able to answer victim telephone enquiries at the time of the call, a call back will be arranged or text or email may be used.
- Parole Scotland will normally contact victims by letter clearly stating the reason for contact and any action needed. If Parole Scotland need to contact the victim by telephone, Parole Scotland will check that it is convenient for the victim to discuss the matter and will explain why contact was needed, followed by any action needed.
- The Parole Board will carefully consider representations submitted by the victim, including whether any information contained in them should be withheld from the prisoner under Rule 9 of the Parole Board (Scotland) Rules 2022. Rule 9 includes the possible grounds on which information may be withheld. Where the Board is of the view that any of these grounds are met, the information will be redacted from any documentation provided to the prisoner. The Victim will be advised of the information which has been

redacted. Where appropriate, the victims views may be sought in advance of deciding whether information falls under Rule 9.

- The Board will provide a summary of any decision where required under Rule 34 of the Parole Board (Scotland) Rules 2022. This rule refers to indeterminate cases only. These are cases of life sentence and OLR sentence prisoners as well as prisoners serving an extended sentence who have been recalled to custody and who are in the extended part of their sentence.

The rights of victims:

In some criminal cases, victims may have the right to receive information about the release of an offender. Victims may also have a right to be told when the offender is being considered for release and to make representations about the release of the offender.

The scheme that allows victims to be told about an offender's release and to make representations is known as the **Victim Notification Scheme** (VNS).

The VNS is in two parts:

- **Part one** allows victims to receive information about an offender's release.
- **Part two** allows victims to make representations to the Parole Board in advance of an offender being considered for release on parole or non-parole licence.

Victims in cases where a life sentence has been imposed have continued to be offered an interview with a Parole Board member to allow them to make representations in person under Section 17(1) of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003.

Victims of offenders who are serving a life sentence, extended sentence or order for lifelong restriction are able to request to attend the oral hearing of the offender as a silent observer. This provision is made possible under Rule 30 of the Parole Board (Scotland) Rules 2022, which came into effect on 1 April 2023.

The Board will consider victim representations along with all other information on the offender's case before reaching a decision. Representations are fully considered by the Board as part of its overall decision making process.

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If the Board does decide to release, then representations may assist in deciding the licence conditions that will be imposed. The primary aim of licence conditions is to minimise risk to public safety. Licence conditions must be lawful, proportionate and necessary. Licence conditions will stay in force until the end of the sentence that was given.

The following provides information on what the Board has achieved in relation to the Standards of Service during April 2025 – April 2026.

What have we done:

Some of these activities have been carried forward from 2024/2025.

1. Parole Scotland have continued to develop its Victims Team to support the key changes made by the introduction Parole Board (Scotland) Rules 2022.
2. Victim Service Delivery has been a key objective for the Board for 2025 – 2026.
3. Parole Scotland have continued to listen to victims and learn from experiences of the parole system to enable improvements to be made in guidance, operating procedures and training.
4. Parole Scotland have developed a new means of obtaining feedback via QR code, allowing victims to scan this from any mobile device and leave feedback. This will assist Parole Scotland in improving the service provided to victims. Feedback in writing or by telephone may also be accepted.
5. Board member and staff guidance has been kept under constant review to ensure that sections relating to victims are current.
6. Victim training for Board members and Parole Scotland staff has been reflected in learning plans. Further Trauma Informed and Skilled practice training is being delivered later this year to further develop the skillset of staff when dealing with victims.
7. Parole Scotland have constantly monitored internal operating systems and procedures to ensure the best service delivery is provided for victims. The Victims Team continues to utilise the new casework management system to its optimum efficiency, ensuring Parole Scotland can provide the best service to victims. The Victims Team gave input to the development of this system to ensure it meets the needs of victims.
8. Parole Scotland have looked to design and launch various information tools for victims and continue to update the dedicated page on our [website](#) for victims and their families. Parole Scotland are continuously reviewing communication methods to ensure optimum reliability and efficiency.

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9. Parole Scotland have engaged with the Scottish Government's plans to procure external expertise to work with others across the justice sector to review victim-focussed publications (including letters, leaflets, websites).

10. Parole Scotland continue to maintain and monitor the Safe Space Initiative, which includes the support of all 32 Local Authorities and the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service, who have provided 38 venues to support the network.

11. The Victims Team issues quarterly newsletters to ensure that members of the initiative are kept up to date with the projects activities.

What we will do:

Some of these activities have been carried forward from 2025/2026.

1. Parole Scotland will continue to monitor the requirements of the Victims Team and ensure the team have all the resource needed to provide an excellent service for victims.
2. Parole Scotland will continue to ensure all emails are answered within 5 working days of receipt to the Victims Team Mailbox.
3. Parole Scotland will continue to develop induction materials for new members of the Victims Team to ensure they are brought up to speed as quickly and efficiently as possible.
4. Parole Scotland will continue to listen to victims and learn from experiences of the parole system to enable improvements to be made in guidance, operating procedures and training.
5. Parole Scotland will continue to ensure that Board members and staff guidance is kept under constant review to ensure that sections relating to victims are current.
6. Parole Scotland will continually monitor requirements for future victim training for Board members and Parole Scotland staff and implement this when needed, this includes Trauma Training, which we plan to deliver to new members of staff this year.
7. Parole Scotland will continue to consider its internal operating systems and procedures to ensure the best service delivery for victims.
8. Parole Scotland will continue to look to design and launch various information tools for victims and continue to update the dedicated page on our its [website](#) for victims

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and their families. Parole Scotland will continue to review its communication methods to ensure optimum reliability and efficiency.

9. Parole Scotland will continue to engage with the Scottish Government's plans to procure external expertise to work with others across the justice sector to review victim-focussed publications (including letters, leaflets, websites).

10. Parole Scotland will continue to monitor and improve the Safe Space Initiative, ensuring access to safe and secure meeting venues for victim interviews and observations across Scotland. Parole Scotland will ensure to send updates and lessons learned to the projects members quarterly.

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