

# Standards of Service for Victims and Witnesses 2026-27



Crown Office and  
Procurator Fiscal  
Service

Scottish Courts  
and Tribunals Service



**SPS**  
SCOTTISH  
PRISON SERVICE



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## **Introduction**

We're all working together with the Scottish Government to put victims and witnesses at the heart of our work. We're finding more ways to listen, and give people the support and information they need.

If you're a victim of crime, it's important you know what to expect from the different parts of the justice system.

The system is made up of several different organisations, including:

- Police Scotland
- Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS)
- Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service (SCTS)
- Scottish Prison Service (SPS)
- Parole Board for Scotland

Each of these organisations have a key role in the justice process. So we've all put together this document to explain:

- the standards of service you can expect from each of our organisations
- what should happen at each stage of the criminal justice process
- who you can contact if you're unhappy.

## **Putting you at the heart of Scotland's justice system**

When you stand up to crime, for example by reporting a crime or giving evidence in court, you're playing an important role.

We want you to feel as comfortable as possible when you do. And we know that making sure we give you the support and information you need is key to that – and to building a better criminal justice system.

The standards of service we set ourselves represent our commitment to doing that.

## **Our commitment to you**

We're dedicated to putting victims and their rights at the heart of Scotland's justice system.

We know you've already been through a lot when you report a crime to the police. So we will do everything we can to make your experience with us as good as it can be. We'll do this by making sure:

- you feel supported, safe and informed at every step
- you have access to the right support, advice and information when you need it
- you can exercise your rights
- we treat you fairly
- we support you to make your voice heard.

## **We know we need to make changes**

We appreciate the justice system can be complicated, frustrating and upsetting – especially when you have been a victim.

We don't always get it right. We all need to do more, and want to do more, to make things better for you. We want to do things differently if it will make the support we give you more effective. The standards in this document show how we will do that in the coming year.

## **We'll keep listening to you**

Changes that we make need to be informed by you and your experiences. So, over the next year we will carry on working with Victim Support Scotland and the Victims Organisations Collaboration Forum Scotland (VOCFS). We will also continue to be part of the Victims Taskforce, which is focused on improving the experiences of victims and witnesses.

This will allow us to better understand what victims and witnesses need and how we can meet those needs, so you are firmly at the heart of our justice system.

## **Our standards of service**

Knowing what standards you can expect from us is really important to make sure you get the support and information you need when you need it.

## **Setting the standards**

The Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014 ("the Act") was brought in to improve support for victims and witnesses. In section 2, it called for organisations in the criminal justice system to set and publish clear standards of service with this in mind.

We've created our Standards of Service to help us work to the main principles of the Act. These principles say that if you've been affected by a crime you will be:

- able to get information about what's happening in the investigation or court action related to your case
- kept safe during and after the investigation and any court action
- able to get the support you need during and after the investigation and any court action
- able to take part effectively in the investigation and court action related to your case, where appropriate.

## **About the information you're entitled to**

When it comes to getting the information you need, the Act also says you will:

## Standards of Service for 2026-27

- have access to relevant information early on and at appropriate points in the process, including:
  - about procedures and your role in them (if any)
  - progress reports with an explanation of any delays
  - the outcome of any court action
  - where you can get other information and support
- be able to understand the information you get – so the language should be easy to understand and the information should be available in alternative languages or formats if you need them
- be told who to contact if you want to talk about the information you've been given and get an explanation of anything you don't understand.

### **About your information**

The Act says that your personal information should be protected at all times. If an organisation has to share your information with other agencies, they must do it legally and safely.

We all do everything we can to keep your information safe. We only pass it on to another justice agency if we have to, so we can move forward with your case.

### **What happens at each stage of the criminal justice process**

We want you to know what to expect when you report a crime and what the various options are that might happen next.

You will likely come into contact with various different organisations throughout your journey in the justice system. The next few pages will help you understand the processes, what might happen and some of the support you can expect along the way.

This applies to you if you:

- are the victim of a crime
- are the parent or guardian of a child or young person who was a victim of a crime
- are the relative of someone who was the victim of a crime and they died as a result of that crime.

You can find further support, advice and guidance for victims at [victim witness support webpage](#)

Previous standards of service documents had included a map to help you visualise the process and see how it all fits together. The map is being reviewed.

## **What Police Scotland will do**

### **If you report the crime**

If a crime is committed against you, and you or someone else decides to report it to the Police, they will look into what happened. They will:

- ask you for a formal statement – this is your written account of what happened and can be used as evidence in court
- give you information on the support organisations that can help you.

### **You may be able to get compensation**

If you've been injured in a violent crime and reported it to the police, you may be able to get compensation from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority.

Find out more and apply at the following link which outlines [how to claim compensation after a criminal injury](#).

### **If the Police find a suspect**

The age of criminal responsibility in Scotland is 12.

If the Police find a suspect who is over 16 (or aged 12 – 15 years in very serious cases), they will report the crime to the COPFS if there's enough evidence and let you know.

The police can also choose not to involve the COPFS and give, for example, a recorded police warning or fixed penalty fine if they feel it's appropriate. They'll let you know if they do.

If the Police find a suspect who is aged 12 – 15 years (except for serious crimes), and there is enough evidence that they committed a crime, they will refer the case to the [Youth Justice Process](#). They will let you know if they do.

### **If the police can't find a suspect or enough evidence?**

The police cannot take the case any further and they will let you know the outcome of their enquiries.

### **If you don't report the crime**

If you decide not to report the crime, you can still ask support organisations for help if you need it.

### **Where to get support**

If you've been affected by a crime, there are lots of organisations that offer practical and emotional support and information to help you.

You can find out more at [victim witness support webpage](#).

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## **What the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service will do**

If COPFS is looking into your case, they may, depending on the circumstances, refer you to [Victim Information and Advice \(VIA\)](#) for support. VIA is a service which is part of COPFS.

VIA can help you understand how the Scottish criminal justice system works and what to expect. They can also tell you how things are going with your case, including relevant dates, decisions and sentences.

COPFS may also do one of the following actions:

### **1. Take court action**

If COPFS decides to take court action, and you've been referred to VIA, VIA will let you know what happens with your case. If you haven't been referred to VIA, you can ask COPFS to let you know what's happening with your case.

#### **If the accused person pleads not guilty?**

If the accused person pleads not guilty at their court hearing, a trial will be scheduled.

If you need to give evidence, you will get a citation from COPFS. This is a letter saying you must attend court to give evidence. It includes details about giving your evidence, and what to expect. You need to read it carefully and follow all the instructions.

If you don't need to give evidence, you can watch the trial if you would like to. You can ask COPFS for the date of the trial and other details, so you know where to go.

#### **If the accused person pleads or is found guilty?**

If the accused person pleads guilty before the trial or is found guilty after trial, you may be able to make a [Victim Statement](#). This is your chance to tell the court how the crime has affected you physically, emotionally and financially as well as any long-term effects on family life or employment.

The judge or sheriff will see your Victim Statement before they decide on the sentence for the accused. This can assist the judge / sheriff in assessing the seriousness of the crime and the harm it has caused.

### **2. Offer an alternative to court**

COPFS may decide to offer the accused person an alternative to going to court for a trial. For example, in certain circumstances, if the accused is willing to accept that they committed the crime, a warning, fine or diversion to social work may be the most appropriate outcome for your case.

If you've been referred to VIA they will let you know if this happens. If you haven't been referred to VIA, you can ask COPFS to let you know the outcome of your case.

### **3. Decide to take no action**

If there's not enough evidence to prove that a crime was committed by a particular person or, it is not in the public interest to prosecute, COPFS may decide to take no action. If this happens, you can ask COPFS to:

- explain this decision
- review their decision.

This process is called a [Victims' Right to Review](#) (VRR) and you should make your VRR request within about a month of learning about the decision not to prosecute.

### **What the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service will do**

If the case goes to court, SCTS will help you at court and give you as much support as possible.

#### **If you're giving evidence**

If you have to give evidence and you need special measures (for example, privacy screens or giving evidence from another room) [Victim Support Scotland](#) will get in touch with you before the court date to find out what you need. They'll also ask if you'd like to visit the court for a familiarisation visit, so you understand where to go and what will happen on the day.

When you arrive at court for the trial, you need to tell us you're here at the reception desk. Then we'll:

- tell you where to find volunteers from Victim Support Scotland so they can give you extra support if you need it
- give you regular updates about what's happening while you wait to go in
- call your name when it's time for you to give evidence
- let you know when you can go home.

#### **If you're not giving evidence**

When you arrive at court, you need to ask at the reception desk which court room the trial is being held in.

If you need any support, we can help you with that (in most of our courts).

If the accused person pleads guilty or is found guilty, the case may be adjourned (postponed) to gather more information. If this happens:

- you may be told if the offender is released on bail

- you will be told if you can write a victim statement (where you tell the court how the crime has affected your health and finances)

## **The outcome of the trial**

### **If the accused person is found guilty**

If you have written a victim statement, this will be considered before the sentence is decided.

Once the offender has been given their sentence:

- the court will let you know if the offender has to pay you compensation
- the offender can appeal their sentence in the Sheriff Appeal Court or the High Court of Justiciary
- you can ask VIA what the final outcome of the case is, including any appeal.

### **If they're found not guilty or there's no verdict**

If the accused person is found not guilty or the case does not proceed to a verdict, the accused can go free. They cannot usually be taken to court for the same crime. You can ask VIA for an explanation about this result if you want more details.

## **What Scottish Prison Service and the Parole Board for Scotland will do**

If the offender is given a custodial sentence and sent to prison, if you join the Victim Notification Scheme, the Scottish Prison Service will send you the information that you are entitled to while they're in prison and provide you with their release date.

If they are sentenced to 18 months or more, you can also register on part 2 of the Victim Notification Scheme and make representations (give your views and to inform licence conditions) if they are considered for temporary release. The Parole Board for Scotland will consider your views for the decision about any release on parole.

## **Living up to our standards**

In the next few sections, you'll read about the standards of service for each of the five justice organisations.

We all set our own standards and monitor and review them regularly. And every year, we report on how well we met them in the previous year.

## **Our common standards**

Each of the organisations included in this document has its own standards of service, 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 you need.

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

## Our individual standards

### Police Scotland

Police Scotland is responsible for policing across the whole of Scotland. Our purpose is to improve the wellbeing of people, places and communities in Scotland, focusing on keeping people safe in line with our values of integrity, fairness and respect. [Our 2030 vision](#) for policing in Scotland is for safer communities, less crime, supported victims and a thriving workforce. As well as our own standards, we are guided by the [Code of Ethics for Policing in Scotland](#) and our [Standards of Professional Behaviour](#).

What you can expect from us:

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

## **The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service**

What you can expect from us:

**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.

**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.

**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 when available, apply for you to be supported with the appropriate measures.

**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.

## **The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service**

What you can expect from us:

**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.

## 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:

- 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

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before any decision is taken on the first occasion that the prisoner is considered for temporary release.

## **Parole Board for Scotland**

What you can expect from us:

**Standard 1** - 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 0800 160 1985);

**Standard 2** - 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;

**Standard 3** - 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 that is suitable for the victim.

**Standard 4** - Victims that are registered for part 2 of the Victim Notification Scheme, will be given the opportunity, where the prisoner has been given a Life Sentence, Extended Sentence or Order for Lifelong Restriction, to request to observe the prisoner's Oral Hearing (subject to the approval of the Oral Hearing Chairperson). The observation will take place from a suitable venue. This will not be at the victim's home. These requests to observe will be processed within 10 working days of receipt.

**Standard 5** - 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.

**Standard 6** - Parole Scotland will normally contact victims by letter clearly stating the reason for contact and any action needed. If Parole Scotland need to contact a 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.

**Standard 7** - 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 not be provided to the prisoner. The Victim will be advised of the information which has been withheld. Where appropriate, the victim's may be sought in advance of deciding whether information falls under Rule 9.

**Standard 8** - The Board will provide a summary of 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.

**Standard 9** - All formulated decision summaries for Release decisions for Part 4 cases will be published on the Parole Board for Scotland's [website](#) and removed after a 12 month period. Requests for all other decision summaries should be submitted via email and will be acknowledged within 5 days of receipt. Parole Scotland will aim to action and process summary minutes within 20 working days of the Oral Hearing.

The Parole Board for Scotland is a Court and not a Criminal Justice Agency.

Parole Scotland, the Board's administrative support body, is considering how best to meet the publication requirements for Standards of Service to Victims in the future.

## **What to do if you're unhappy with our service**

We always do our best to meet our standards and give you an excellent service whenever you come into contact with us. But we know things go wrong sometimes.

If you're unhappy with the service, please let the organisation involved know so we can try to put things right for you.

If we can't find a good solution, you can make a formal complaint if you want to. The organisation will give you details of their formal complaints procedure. You'll find the contact details for complaints for each organisation below too.

Every justice organisation takes complaints very seriously. We will handle yours fairly, and as quickly and effectively as possible. We will also look into what went wrong to make sure it doesn't happen again.

## **How to contact us to complain**

Here are our details if you want to make a complaint. So that we can help you quickly and effectively, please:

- make it clear when you get in touch that you want us to treat what you tell us as a complaint
- tell us what happened and why you're unhappy, including as much background information as you can
- any reference numbers we've given you for the case your complaint is related to.

## **Police Scotland**

You can find out about making a complaint and how we'll handle it on our website at: [Complaints - Police Scotland](#).

If you're unhappy with our service, you can:

- fill in an online complaint form on our website
- write to us at:  
Professional Standards Department  
PO Box 2460  
Police Scotland  
Dalmarnock  
GLASGOW G40 9BA
- call 101 and report your complaint over the telephone
- go to a police station and make a complaint in person.

## **Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service**

You can find out about making a complaint and how we'll handle it on our website at: [Feedback and complaints | COPFS](#).

If you're unhappy with our service, you can:

- email [complaints@copfs.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@copfs.gov.uk)
- write to:  
The Response and Information Unit  
Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service  
25 Chambers Street Edinburgh EH1 1LA
- call 0300 020 3000

## **The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service**

You can find out about making a complaint and how we'll handle it on our website: [Complaints and feedback | Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service](#).

If you're unhappy with our service, you can:

- complain in person at any of our courts or offices
- call the court involved
- write to the court involved
- email the court involved

You can find contact details for all our courts on our website at: [Find us | Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service](#).

## **Scottish Prison Service**

You can find out about making a complaint and how we'll handle it on our website at: [Complaints | Scottish Prison Service](#).

If you're unhappy with our service, you can:

- call 0131 330 3664
- email [spsvictimnotificationscheme@prisons.gov.scot](mailto:spsvictimnotificationscheme@prisons.gov.scot)
- write to the Victim Notification Scheme at the following address:  
Victim Notification Scheme (Legal Services Branch)  
Scottish Prison Service HQ One Lochside,  
1 Lochside Avenue,  
Edinburgh EH12 9DJ

## Parole Board for Scotland

You can find out about making a complaint and how we'll handle it on our website at: [Complaints Procedure | Parole Board for Scotland](#).

If you're unhappy with our service, you can:

- write to:  
PBS Complaints  
X5 Spur  
Saughton House  
Broomhouse Drive  
Edinburgh  
EH11 3XD
- call 0131 244 8373
- email: [enquiries@paroleboard.scot](mailto:enquiries@paroleboard.scot)

## Taking the matter further

For:

- COPFS
- SCTS
- SPS
- Parole Board for Scotland

If you're unhappy with the way any of these organisations have handled your complaint, you can contact the [Scottish Public Services Ombudsman](#) (SPSO).

The SPSO looks into complaints about organisations that provide public services in Scotland. They make independent and impartial decisions to help resolve disputes. If you have been through the organisation's complaints procedure and you're still unhappy, you can pass your complaint to SPSO by:

- Filling in an [online form](#)
- Calling 0800 377 7330, to request a form by post.

## **For Police Scotland**

If you're unhappy with how Police Scotland has handled your complaint, you can contact the [Police Investigations and Review Commissioner for Scotland \(PIRC\)](#). They independently review the way the police handle complaints from the public.

If you have been through Police Scotland's complaints procedure and you're still unhappy, you can pass your complaint to PIRC by:

- calling 01698 542900
- emailing [enquiries@pirc.gov.scot](mailto:enquiries@pirc.gov.scot)
- writing to:  
Police Investigations & Review Commissioner  
Hamilton House, Hamilton Business Park  
Caird Park  
Hamilton  
ML3 0QA

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This document is available in PDF only from the following organisations:

**Police Scotland**

**Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service**

**Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service**

**Scottish Prison Service**

**Parole Board for Scotland**

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