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Convener  
Criminal Justice Committee

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3 February 2025

Dear Convener,

Thank you for your letter of 18 December following my appearance at the Criminal Justice Committee meeting the previous week, at which we discussed the Scottish Government's plans to amend the Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill in relation to the Victim Notification Scheme (VNS).

### Progress on the recommendations from the Independent Review of the VNS

The independent review made a number of recommendations that apply across all aspects of the VNS.

After publication of the report, officials prioritised exploring the views of those who operate, use and interact with the VNS, in order to better understand the report's recommendations. That extensive engagement focused on how to provide a more responsible and human service. Officials also spoke with colleagues who run the Victim Contact Scheme in England and Wales to discuss the recommendations which were inspired by their model for victim notification.

These discussions, and changes within the policy landscape following publication of the review report, influenced the Scottish Government's response to the review, which was published on 9 October 2024. Our approach to taking forward the recommendations was set out in that response, and we have nothing further to update at this time.

### Number of victims registered on the VNS

The following table sets out the number of new registrations to the VNS in Scotland over recent months.

Data about registrations is held on an operational database, which cannot be historically interrogated. Victims will register onto and exit from the scheme. Once an offender reaches their sentence expiry date, the victim's personal data is no longer held.

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Date period	VNS (where an offender is sentenced to 18 months and over)	VIS (where an offender is sentenced to less than 18 months)	Total number of new registrations
June 2024	47	7	54
July 2024	50	12	62
August 2024	51	8	59
September 2024	49	4	53
October 2024	40	8	48
November 2024	39	7	46
December 2024	37	5	42
<b>Total</b>	<b>313</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>364</b>

In total, 364 victims registered onto the VNS (including VIS) in Scotland between 1 June and 31 December 2024.

You may wish to note, on 23 January 2025, there were 3,073 registered victims, of which 57 are registered to VIS.

### CORO VNS

For the CORO VNS, I am able to inform the Committee that five or fewer victims have registered to this branch of the VNS over the past six months. I cannot provide greater detail than this, in order to maintain confidentiality.

The low number of recent registrations reflects the small number of Compulsion Orders with a Restriction Order (COROs) imposed each year. The [Mental Health Act Monitoring Report 2023-24](#), recently published by the Mental Welfare Commission, shows the number of COROs given in previous years. I attach information from that report at **Annex A**.

### Information pack and forms

I have separately provided pdf copies of the forms provided to individuals who are eligible to register for the VNS and CORO VNS as requested. The forms are sent with a printed copy of the relevant information booklet:

- [Supporting documents - Victim Notification Scheme: guidance for victims of crime - gov.scot](#)
- [Victim notification scheme for victims of offenders with a mental disorder: compulsion and restriction orders - gov.scot](#)

### Victim Contact Team

Further to discussion at the evidence session, I am committed to establishing the victim contact team. We will take a multi-agency approach to developing our implementation plans. We will involve existing delivery partners, expertise from other areas of government, and from victim support organisations to determine what the victim contact team would look like. We will also need to develop systems and back office procedures to support the team.

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A number of areas will need to be worked through, including estate, data sharing, governance, service design and delivery. We will explore costs in the context of ensuring the best possible support and information for victims to be aware of the VNS, helping them understand how it operates in their case, and to receive ongoing support if necessary. Much of this is likely to be possible through more effective joint working and the role of third sector support providers in providing practical and emotional support and engaging directly with victims will be recognised.

The current work of the Victim Centred Approach workstream of the Victims Taskforce may also be relevant in terms of the model for victim support. The scoping and modelling project report was published on 28 November. We will consider the report as we engage with partners about the victim contact team.

I will provide further detail on the implementation of the Victim Contact Team in due course. You will recall that establishment of the Victim Contact Team will be through administrative as well as legislative change, and that amendments in relation to this will provide the legislative underpinning for the automatic referral of eligible victims from the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service to the Victim Contact Team. Whilst officials are working on implementation of administrative recommendations for reform, the legislative underpinning of the victim contact teams means that this cannot come into effect until provisions are agreed to and commenced.

I will provide specifics of proposed amendments that apply to VNS reform as they become available.

Yours sincerely,



**SIOBHIAN BROWN**

## ANNEX A

### Excerpt from Mental Health Act Monitoring Report 2023-24

**Table A16. Number of Criminal Procedure Act orders by order type and year**

Category	Order	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Treatment and assessment	Treatment Order	106	113	109	119	99	100	102	105	110	93
	Assessment Order	133	141	129	131	122	140	105	131	110	105
Unfitness for trial	Temporary Compulsion Order	20	18	20	20	16	11	12	18	11	6
Acquittal due to mental disorder	S57(2)(a) Compulsion Order	21	26	28	50	33	22	27	22	22	21
	S57(2)(a) Compulsion Order - Community	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	*	0	0
	S57(2)(b) <b>CORO</b>	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	7	6
Post-conviction pre-disposals	Interim Compulsion Order	21	23	26	23	15	24	13	14	19	11
	S200 Committal	0	0	0	0	0	*	0	0	0	*
Mental health disposals	Hospital Direction	*	*	0	*	*	0	0	*	0	*
	S57A(2) Compulsion Order	44	45	60	43	46	52	45	39	41	36
	S57A(2) Compulsion Order - Community	*	0	*	*	0	0	*	*	0	*
	S59 <b>CORO</b>	8	9	10	*	8	8	6	*	*	*
Transfer for treatment	Transfer for Treatment Direction	38	36	58	36	40	38	44	33	23	25
<b>Total</b>		<b>400</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>446</b>	<b>433</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>373</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>316</b>

\*ns=5 and secondary suppression to maintain confidentiality

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