

Criminal Justice Committee

3rd Meeting, 2021 (Session 6), Wednesday 8 September 2021

COVID and the justice sector

Note by the clerk

Introduction

1. The Criminal Justice Committee is holding a series of roundtable meetings about subjects within its remit.
2. The first roundtable meeting will take place on 8 September 2021.
3. The subject is the impact of COVID on the justice sector and plans for the recovery from COVID.

Participants

4. The following people will be taking part—
 - Tony Lenehen, President of Scottish Criminal Bar Association, Faculty of Advocates;
 - Ken Dalling, President, Law Society of Scotland;
 - Assistant Chief Constable Kenny MacDonald, Criminal Justice and Chief Superintendent Barry Blair, Criminal Justice Services Division, Police Scotland;
 - Eric McQueen, Chief Executive, Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service;
 - Chief Officer Martin Blunden and Deputy Chief Officer Ross Haggart, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service;
 - Teresa Medhurst, Interim Chief Executive and Tom Fox, Head of Corporate Affairs, Scottish Prison Service;
 - James Maybee, Chair of Justice Standing Committee, Social Work Scotland;
 - Kate Wallace, Chief Executive Officer, Victim Support Scotland.

Format

5. Members of the Committee will be attending the meeting in person. Everyone else will be participating in the meeting using a video link. This is due to the rules on social distancing.

Topics

6. The roundtable meeting will be a chance to discuss topics such as—

In general

- The current issues facing the main bodies in the criminal justice system because of COVID and the future challenges (for the courts, prisons, policing etc.)
- What emergency powers are still required and should any or all of these be retained for the longer-term?

Sector specific

- The current backlog of cases in the criminal justice system and what further steps can be taken to reduce this
- The impact of a permanent move to a much greater use of digital justice, opportunities and threats of such a move
- The impact of COVID on policing and the fire and rescue service in Scotland, in areas such as staff absences, the availability of personal protective equipment, and how these roles are undertaken. This would also include issues of policing powers during the pandemic.
- How COVID has impacted on prison regimes, in areas such as prison regimes, education / training / rehabilitation / progression programmes, in-person family contact, and staff absences
- The impact of COVID on the work of third sector and voluntary groups in the justice sector