

Scottish Sentencing Council



7TH EDITION - DECEMBER 2025
Spotlight on Sentencing Circular

Welcome from the Council's Communications and Engagement Committee



Welcome to the seventh edition of the Spotlight on Sentencing Circular (SSC).

The past few months have been particularly busy for the Council as we marked our 10 year anniversary with a conference on sentencing in Scotland and finalised our rape offence sentencing guidelines, which have now been approved by the High Court. The guidelines will come into force in March next year and we will be working to raise awareness of them over the coming months.

In addition to this, we have also created a new easy read information guide on sentencing in Scotland. The guide has been developed with the assistance of the SOLD Network, a charity which supports offenders with communication needs, and we would like to express our thanks to those who contributed to its creation.

In September, we welcomed Sheriff Principal Aisha Anwar as an adviser to the Council and are already benefiting from her extensive knowledge and expertise. We are very grateful to the Sheriff Principal for her input so far and look forward to working with her further. Sheriff Scott Pattison has also been appointed as Chair of the Council's Communications and Engagement Committee, taking over from interim Chair Joanne McMillan, the Council's solicitor member. Thanks go to Joanne for her time overseeing the committee.

We have also issued a number of publications in recent weeks, including our annual report which sets out the Council's achievements over 2024-25, and research examining public attitudes to sentences in environmental and wildlife cases.

You can read more about our recent work below, and as always, we hope you find it interesting and informative. From everyone at the Scottish Sentencing Council, best wishes for a happy and peaceful festive season.

Latest News



Sentencing guidelines on rape offences approved by the High Court

The Council's new sentencing guidelines on rape offences have been approved by the High Court.

The two new guidelines, which cover offences of rape and rape of a young child under the age of 13, were approved at a hearing of the High Court in Edinburgh earlier this month. They will come into effect on 3 March 2026.

The guidelines contain sentencing ranges to assist judges with selecting an appropriate sentence, with all options in the ranges set at long-term custodial sentences.

The ranges are reflective of current sentencing practice as set out by the Appeal Court. In the rape sentencing guideline, the ranges reach up to 13 years' imprisonment, while in the rape of a young child sentencing guideline, they reach up to 14 years' imprisonment.

The options of extended sentences (a sentence where an offender is supervised in the community on release from custody) and Orders for Lifelong Restriction (a form of life sentence) are also included in the guidelines.

Chair of the Council, the Lord Justice Clerk, Lord Beckett, said: "I welcome the High Court's approval of the guidelines. These offences are among the most serious to come before the courts and are – quite rightly – of great concern to the public.

"It is the hope of the Council that the guidelines will offer all involved in such cases a better understanding of the sentencing options available to the courts and the reasons behind sentencing decisions."

[Read more about the new guidelines](#)



Conference marks Council's 10-year anniversary

The Council hosted a conference at the start of November to mark its 10-year anniversary. The *Sentencing in Scotland* conference reflected on the achievements of the Council over the last decade, including the creation of sentencing guidelines and numerous research projects and engagement events.

Over 100 people attended the conference at the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh, with Lord Beckett, Lord Justice Clerk and Chair of the Council, chairing the event. Speakers at the event also included the Lord Justice General, Lord Pentland, the Lord Advocate, Dorothy Bain KC, and Rachel Ormston, research director at Ipsos Scotland. During his speech, the Lord Justice General highlighted the importance of open justice and commended the Council on its public education work designed to support understanding of the sentencing process.

The conference also included a number of discussion sessions with Sarah Angus, Director of Policy, Scottish Prison Service; Natalie Beal, Divisional Head of Operational Support at Scottish Prison Service; Lynsey Smith, Head of Service - Justice Services, Glasgow and Co-Chair of the Justice Standing Committee of Social Work Scotland; and John Watt, Chair, Parole Board for Scotland.

Commenting on the event, Lord Beckett said: "The Council, with its functions to assist the courts, policymakers, and the public, holds a unique position within the criminal justice system. It is imperative that the Council exercises these functions independently and impartially, and - in line with the principle of open justice - that it is seen to do so."

His Lordship also paid tribute to Council members for their commitment and generosity in assisting the Council, and thanked others who have assisted in the Council's work over the years.

A full report on the event and the discussions which took place will be published at a later date.

[Read more about the anniversary conference](#)

Easy Read



New easy read guide on sentencing is released

A new easy read guide on Sentencing of Crimes in Scotland has been published by the Council.

The publication offers simple explanations on how a court decides a sentence and the different sentencing options available. It also explains how sentencing hearings work and what to expect for those who are attending, or want to know more about the process.

Easy read is a format that simplifies complex information and makes written text more accessible through plain language, short sentences and pictures.

The guide was produced with support from the SOLD Network, a charity which supports offenders with communication needs. The Council would like to extend its thanks to the charity and its members for their helpful contributions.

[Access the easy read guide](#)

Sheriff Principal Aisha Anwar appointed as an advisor to the Council

Sheriff Principal Anwar has been appointed as an advisor to the Council and will serve for a two-year term. Appointed as Sheriff Principal of South Strathclyde, Dumfries and Galloway in April 2020, she later took on the role of Sheriff Principal of Glasgow and Strathkelvin in May 2023 and became President of the Sheriff Appeal Court.

In 2024, she was named as a Temporary Judge and appointed as Honorary King's Counsel. She designed and led summary justice reforms and currently chairs the Summary Case Management Board.

Her extensive knowledge and expertise will be invaluable as the Council develops its guidelines.

[Learn more about the appointment](#)

Publications and research



Public attitudes towards the sentencing of environmental and wildlife offences

The Council has published new research looking at the public's attitudes towards sentencing of environmental and wildlife offences. Conducted in 2024, the research focusses on findings from both an online survey and focus group discussions.

The research found a clear difference in views on the severity of imposed sentences between survey respondents, who largely believed sentences were too lenient, and focus group participants, who expressed more mixed opinions. Focus group participants also felt there was a need for more transparency, and many also admitted to having limited knowledge of sentencing outcomes for such offences.

Opinions on fines, a common disposal for environmental and wildlife offences, were divided. Some participants viewed fines as too lenient, particularly for corporate offenders, while others found them effective in certain contexts. There was strong agreement that it should never be cheaper to break the law than to adhere to it, and concerns were raised that corporations might pass the cost of fines onto consumers.

The research report will help to analyse key issues in the public landscape and will inform the Council's work in this area going forward.

[Read the full report](#)



Council publishes its 2024-25 annual report

The Council released its annual report 2024-25 in October focussing on its key activities and achievements. This is the first annual report from Lord Beckett, Lord Justice Clerk and Chair of the Council since he assumed the role.

The Council made significant progress on guidelines on domestic abuse and sentences following a guilty plea, along with finalising its sentencing guidelines on rape offences. This involved holding a public consultation on draft sentencing guidelines on rape offences, a crucial stage in their development. A range of accessible educational materials were also published throughout the year, including a new video on prison sentencing and the launch of a podcast called Scottish Sentencing Conversations with episodes on community and prison sentences explained.

The Council also commissioned research projects on public attitudes, victims' views and experiences of sentencing, including in relation to offences of rape and domestic abuse, as well as releasing literature reviews on stalking and firearm offences.

[Read the annual report](#)

Two new guest blogs published on rehabilitation and sentencing



The Council has published two new articles on its Spotlight on Sentencing blog. The first one, by Jenny Paterson, CEO of Venture Trust, explains the importance of rehabilitation and the role played by the power of the outdoors.

The second looks at public attitudes towards sentences following a guilty plea and is by Dr Jay Gormley, Lecturer at the University of Glasgow, School of Law, and Cyrus Tata, Professor of Law and Criminal Justice at the Law School, University of Strathclyde. Since the commission of this work, Jay has now become a Council member.

[Read our Spotlight on Sentencing blogs](#)

Guideline latest

Table of progress

Guideline	Stage 1 - Initial consideration of the guideline topic	Stage 2 - Development of a draft guideline	Stage 3 - Seeking the views of judges	Stage 4 - Consulting on the guideline	Stage 5 - Finalising the guideline	Stage 6 - Submitting the guideline for approval	Stage 7 - Raising awareness about the guideline	Stage 8 - Monitoring and review
Rape	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Domestic abuse	✓	✓	✓					
Sexual assault	✓	✓						
Indecent images of children	✓	✓						
Sentencing after a guilty plea	✓	✓						
Environmental and wildlife crime	✓							
Statutory offences of causing death by driving	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sentencing young people	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The sentencing process	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Principles and purposes of sentencing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

[Read more about our guidelines on our website](#)

Minutes from the latest meeting

The minutes of the Council meeting on 3 October 2025 are now available and published on our website. Minutes from our last Council meeting on 5 December will be published in the coming weeks.

[Read the minutes from the latest Council meeting](#)



Upcoming meetings

6 February 2026

The next meeting of the Scottish Sentencing Council will take place on Friday 6 February 2026.

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