

**Scottish  
Sentencing  
Council**

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**8TH EDITION - MARCH 2026**

**Spotlight on Sentencing Circular**

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# Welcome from the Council's Communications and Engagement Committee



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

Our work over the last few months has culminated in [the rape offence sentencing guidelines](#) being approved by the High Court and coming into effect on 3 March. The Council will continue to monitor the new guidelines and has started raising awareness of them. This includes [a webinar](#) for legal professionals that was hosted by members of the Council, providing an overview of the sentencing guidelines.

At the start of the year, we welcomed [a new judicial member](#) to the Council. Lady Drummond succeeds Lord Matthews whose five-year term with the Council came to an end late last year. We would like to thank Lord Matthews for all his expertise and dedication as a member of the Council.

The Council released its [national survey report on public perceptions of sentencing](#). The survey asked over 1,000 residents in Scotland their views on sentencing and provided valuable insights into the public's understanding and awareness.

A number of blogs have also been published focussing on key sentencing topics. A guest blog from Professor Gavin Dingwall from Northumbria University discusses the topic of [sentencing firearm offences](#), and Argentine Judge Maria Jimena Monsalve provides an insight into [therapeutic justice](#).

You can read more about our recent work below and, as always, stay updated on our latest news and information via our social media channels and [website](#).

# Latest News



## New judicial member appointed to the Council

The Lord Justice General has appointed Lady Drummond as the new judicial member of the Council. Lady Drummond succeeds Lord Matthews, whose five-year term with the Council came to an end late last year.

Lord Justice Clerk and Chair of the Council, Lord Beckett, said: “I am pleased to welcome Lady Drummond to the Council as our new senator member. Her wealth of experience, knowledge and expertise will be of great assistance as we continue the development of several important sentencing guidelines, as well as our research projects and work to increase public awareness of sentencing in Scotland.

“I would like to extend my thanks to Lord Matthews for the time, dedication, and expertise he has given to the Council over his five years as a member. In particular, his considerable contribution to the Council’s sentencing guidelines on rape offences – which were recently approved by the High Court – has been invaluable.”

Lady Drummond was installed as a Senator of the College of Justice in May 2022 after serving as an appeal sheriff and a temporary High Court judge since 2020. She became a QC in 2011 after acting as standing junior to the Advocate General and Scottish Ministers. She is also the Chair of the Judicial Institute for Scotland, the body responsible for providing education and training for Scottish judges.

Lady Drummond took up post on 1 January 2026 and will serve on the Council for five years.

[Read more about our new Council member](#)



# Guidelines for rape offences

The Right Hon. Lord Matthews  
The Hon. Lady Drummond  
Victoria Young

## Rape sentencing guidelines come into effect

The new sentencing guidelines on rape offences came into effect on 3 March 2026. The two new guidelines, which cover offences of rape and rape of a young child under the age of 13, were developed following extensive stakeholder engagement and research, culminating in a full public consultation last year.

They were approved at a hearing of the High Court in December and contain sentencing ranges to assist judges with selecting an appropriate sentence, with all options set at long-term custodial sentences.

The new guidelines include options for 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), and address how non-harassment orders operate.

They also set out some of the factors that can be taken into account around the culpability (the level of blame) of the offender and the harm caused to the victim, including use of threats, an abuse of a position of trust, and psychological harm and trauma.

As part of the development process, the Council undertook a public consultation, considered relevant sentences imposed by the Scottish courts, and commissioned research projects including a report exploring the views of victims.

The Council also hosted [a webinar](#) to help raise awareness of the sentencing guidelines for legal professionals. The webinar featured talks from Lord Matthews, former judicial member of the Council, Lady Drummond, Council judicial member, and Victoria Young, Council advocate member.

The guidelines are available to view on the [Council's website](#).

[Read more about the new guidelines](#)



## Competition winner meets Lord Justice Clerk

A high school pupil from Dumfries has been awarded first prize in a Scottish Sentencing Council essay competition.

Lia Dymkovska, an S4 pupil at Dumfries High School, was presented with an award and certificate by the Lord Justice Clerk, Lord Beckett, Scotland's second most senior judge, during a visit to Parliament House in Edinburgh on 9 March.

The 15-year-old submitted an essay answering the question 'Is sentencing in Scotland fair?', with her submission picked as the winner from numerous entries from schools across Scotland. The competition was run in partnership with the Modern Studies Association.

As well as meeting the Lord Justice Clerk, Lia was presented with £100 and received a tour of Parliament House, visiting the High Court of Appeal and the historic Parliament Hall.

Chair of the Council Lord Beckett said: "It was a pleasure to meet Lia and personally congratulate her on her successful entry.

"Lia's well-written essay was an intelligent and socially aware look at sentencing, which considered issues such as prison capacity, perceptions of leniency in sentencing and geographical inconsistencies in rehabilitative programmes. The thought and effort put into writing the article was clear.

"I would like to extend my thanks to the Modern Studies Association and to everyone who took part in the competition, with a special mention to our five runners up who also submitted thoughtful and interesting essays."

[Find out more about the essay competition](#)

# Scottish Sentencing Council

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## Council provides response to Sentencing and Penal Policy Commission Report

The Scottish Sentencing Council notes the report of the Sentencing and Penal Policy Commission, published on 6 February 2026.

In terms of matters of policy, the Council's remit is restricted to assisting with the development of policy in relation to sentencing. The Council's role is also limited to sentencing matters. It has no remit in relation to bail or arrangements for release from prison except insofar as the limited circumstances in which these might relate to sentencing. It was therefore right that the examination of the range of issues explored by the Commission was carried out by a separate body.

Several of the Commission's recommendations are of direct relevance to the Council and the Council will give these specific consideration. Others may be of indirect relevance to the Council, should they form the basis of any future legislative or policy proposals. Any consideration in that regard would be limited to the consideration of the potential implications or practicability of emerging proposals. The extent to which the Council will be able to take forward or assist with any recommendations will be dependent on the resources made available to it.

The Council's response to the Commission's call for evidence in 2025 is [available here](#) and its prior evidence on the announcement of various measures to address the prison population in November 2024, provided in response to an invitation by the Scottish Parliament Criminal Justice Committee, is [available here](#).

[Read the Council's response](#)

# Publications and research



## National Survey reveals public attitudes to sentencing in Scotland

The Council has published a new report on public understanding and perceptions of sentencing in Scotland following a wide-ranging national survey.

The survey, conducted by Ipsos Scotland on behalf of the Council, asked residents in Scotland about their views on different aspects of sentencing, including community sentencing; sentencing of domestic abuse; media coverage of sentencing; and the sentencing of people with mental health conditions and developmental or intellectual differences.

Following on from similar research published by the Council in 2019, the findings showed that a majority of respondents (60%) thought sentencing in general was either 'much too lenient' or 'a little too lenient' – an increase from 56% in 2019. However, attitudes tended to be much more nuanced when respondents were presented with anonymised or hypothetical cases.

Most respondents overestimated the use of custodial sentences in Scotland, with the average estimate being that 30 out of 100 adults convicted receive a custodial sentence, compared to the actual figure of 13 out of 100.

However, despite low self-reported knowledge, many respondents were able to demonstrate awareness of other aspects of sentencing, such as the conditions which can be attached to community sentences.

The Council plans to conduct further research to better understand whether or not self-assessed knowledge fully reflects the public's understanding and awareness of sentencing.

[Read the full report](#)

## Exploring unwarranted disparities

The Council has released a new research report, [Exploring unwarranted disparities in sentencing in Scotland](#).

The research, conducted by academics from the Universities of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Surrey and Leeds, focusses on the consistency of sentencing in Scottish courts.

The report examines unwarranted disparities and how they can be reduced, while also highlighting the need to develop new sources of in-depth and meaningful data on sentencing patterns.

The authors found that high quality data is essential to: the promotion of consistency in sentencing; the informed development of sentencing policy; and efforts to inform public knowledge and awareness of (and so confidence in) sentencing and the independent judiciary.

[Read the full report](#)

## Two new guest blogs published on sentencing firearm offences and therapeutic justice



The Council has published two new guest blogs focussing on sentencing. The first blog is written by Argentine Judge María Jimena Monsalve who met with the Council while on a knowledge exchange programme. Judge Monsalve discusses therapeutic justice and how it can help reduce re-offending rates.

Professor Gavin Dingwall from Northumbria University, has also written a blog for the Council on firearm offences and how sentencing these offences can raise complex issues for courts.

[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 5 December 2025 are now available and published on our website.

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



## Upcoming meetings

27 March 2026

The next meeting of the Scottish Sentencing Council will take place on Friday 27 March 2026.

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