

Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service



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Dear Ms Clark

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS S6W-28083; S6W-28084; S6W-28085; S6W-28086; S6W-28087

The Cabinet Secretary in her response to the above PQ's indicated that they relate to operational matters within the responsibility of the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service. I am now writing in response to the matters raised.

By way of background, there is no change in responsibilities for public order as a consequence of the policing model pilot in Edinburgh Sheriff Court. Police Scotland remain responsible for public order in all our courts and fully recognise that a dedicated policing response to any conduct that may interfere with the court process is essential.

The model being piloted at Edinburgh sheriff court brings a new dynamic policing approach, enhancing public safety across the entire court building with frequent visits to court rooms. In this model a fixed police presence will be maintained in custody courts and through an intelligence-led approach in any court room where risk is identified.

My response to the individual questions raised are as follows:-

S6W-28083 Katy Clark: To ask the Scottish Government what monitoring it will undertake of the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service's pilot to reduce police numbers at Edinburgh Sheriff Court.

The SCTS has established an implementation group, which consists, of key justice organisations and trade union representation. For the duration of the pilot, the group will meet every fortnight to review the operation of the policing model, any issues arising and share feedback on the progress of the pilot. In addition, the implementation group will meet if a specific incident occurs which requires to be reviewed immediately, which may cause the pilot to be halted. At the conclusion of the 3-month pilot, both SCTS and Police Scotland will formally evaluate the pilot.

S6W-28084 Katy Clark: To ask the Scottish Government how the safety of (a) defendants, (b) witnesses, (c) staff and (d) the public is ensured while attending court.

Public order within the Court building is the responsibility of Police Scotland, who have assured SCTS that moving to the new policing model does not compromise the safety of any court user within the building, specifically defendants, witnesses and public or those who provide a service within the building, including Judiciary, staff, and solicitors.

S6W-28085 Katy Clark: To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the pilot to reduce the number of police officers routinely on duty at Edinburgh Sheriff Court.

The policing model is a matter for Police Scotland, who are best able to determine the resource requirements to ensure the public safety of all who are within a court building. Police Scotland have reassured SCTS that the reduction in officers and the move to a more dynamic model where officers patrol the entire court building as opposed to a fixed model where they are static in certain courts, ensures that public safety is maintained, with enhanced visibility of the police presence in all parts of the court building.

The new model enables the daily allocated number of police officers to reduce from 10 to 7, however the police will draw on whatever resources they require to manage any incident, as they do at present, including the significant number of police officers who are present in our courts every day to give evidence in criminal trials.

S6W-28086 Katy Clark: To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on any risk assessment that has been undertaken in relation to the pilot to reduce the number of police officers routinely on duty at Edinburgh Sheriff Court, in light of reports that this does not have the support of the recognised trade union.

SCTS undertook a risk assessment of the new policing model before the pilot commenced to ensure that a safe environment is maintained. SCTS has continued to actively engage with union officials to resolve any outstanding issues. Trade union officials from both SCTS and COPFS are members of the Implementation Group, which meets fortnightly to review the progress of the pilot. Separate Risk assessments were undertaken by Police Scotland and COPFS.

S6W-28087 Katy Clark: To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service regarding the safety of (a) staff, (b) members of the public and (c) other court users during the pilot to reduce the number of police officers routinely on duty at Edinburgh Sheriff Court.

Police Scotland and SCTS engaged with justice organisations, staff, judiciary and trade union officials on the new policing model currently being piloted in Edinburgh Sheriff Court. Police Scotland have assured SCTS that the new model, does not reduce their ability to maintain public order within the building, ensuring that all court users continue to be in an environment, where their safety is maintained.

A copy of this letter will be placed in the Scottish Parliament Information Centre and published on the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service website.

Yours sincerely



Eric McQueen
Chief Executive