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Dear Mr McArthur

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS S6W-24085, S6W-24086 & S6W-24087

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

S6W-24085: To ask the Scottish Government how many court hearings that were redirected to Aberdeen or Inverness, due to the pause to solemn criminal business in island courts, have been (a) delayed, (b) postponed and (c) cancelled due to the failure or inability of a witness or complainer to attend proceedings on the date and time summoned.

Since solemn business in the island courts was paused in July 2023, four cases redirected to Inverness were adjourned. Three of these adjournments were related to the availability of crown witnesses.

The reasons for trial adjournments are noted within individual court minutes. These reasons can include for a witness to attend. However, procedural minutes will not indicate if this was a failure or inability to attend. In some situations a new witness may require to be cited, or, a witness may have been excused attendance at short notice for medical/personal reasons.

Witnesses in criminal matters are cited by COPFS and Defence Solicitors. SCTS have made enquiries with COPFS and they have also confirmed that they do not hold this information.

S6W-24086: To ask the Scottish Government how many court hearings have been (a) postponed or (b) cancelled due to reportedly ongoing issues with the Scottish Prison Service's prisoner escort services.

The Scottish Court Custody and Prisoner Escort Service contract is between Scottish Ministers and GEOAmev PECS Ltd. The Scottish Ministers are represented by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS). The contract is a 'self-reporting' contract which requires GEOAmev to report performance issues to SPS as contract managers.

The SCTS collects manual information from local courts in relation to performance of the Scottish Prison Service's prisoner escort services, from that information we have recorded the following:

From 1 July 2023 until 1 January 2024, 30 hearings were postponed due to issues with accused attending court from remand:

- 2 High Court jury trials
- 5 Sheriff Court jury trials
- 16 Sheriff Court summary trials
- 1 JP Court summary trial
- 6 Sheriff court – other

From 1 July 2023 until 1 January 2024, 4 hearings were cancelled as the accused could not be brought from the Police Custody Unit and the accused appeared on the next lawful day.

- 1 petition warrant
- 3 summary new cases

There may be other cases that have been postponed or cancelled that have not been reported by local courts.

You may wish to consider contacting SPS directly to request information in respect of the contract in place: gaolinfo@sps.pnn.gov.uk

S6W-24087: To ask the Scottish Government how many cases that would have otherwise taken place in island courts have now been heard at "hub" courts in (a) Inverness and (b) Aberdeen as a result of the pause to solemn criminal business in island courts, broken down by affected island court.

Since solemn business in island courts was paused in July 2023, 12 cases from island courts have called at Inverness Justice Centre. Four of these cases have proceeded to an evidence led trial:

Trials called at Inverness	Cases
Wick	4
Stornoway	3
Kirkwall	1
Portree	4

There have been no solemn cases transferred from island courts to Aberdeen Sheriff Court and there have been no solemn cases transferred from Lerwick.

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



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