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30 April 2025

Dear Mr Kerr

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION S6W-36256 and S6W-36257

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

S6W-36256: To ask the Scottish Government whether it has conducted a review of (a) internet speeds in Scottish courts, (b) the effectiveness of video conferencing technology that is used in Scottish courts for virtual hearings and (c) the resourcing of the technology and infrastructure provided for such virtual hearings.

The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service supports an extensive range of virtual hearings and remote video links across Scotland for all aspects of criminal, civil and tribunal hearings on a daily basis. SCTS continually monitor network speeds and utilisation across the entire estate to ensure connectivity. The suite of tools SCTS utilises enables us to quickly identify and resolve any issues. SCTS can also increase networking bandwidths, allowing for additional network connections, across the estate, should utilisation encroach on upper thresholds.

There are currently no outstanding reported technical issues with the SCTS WebEx platform which is used to facilitate virtual hearings. Further, SCTS have no recorded information concerning any widespread issues regarding its performance.

SCTS has made significant investment in our digital infrastructure to support the running of virtual hearings, and we have a rolling programme of court and tribunal hearing room upgrades to ensure our systems are robust and utilising up-to-date technology. SCTS follow a continuous improvement model, based on user feedback, to further enhance the user experience and quality of the virtual hearing solution. Plans for the coming year include a review of the audio capture technology and utilisation of a hearing platform that seamlessly integrates all Audio-Visual technology standards.

S6W-36257: To ask the Scottish Government how much court time it estimates is currently being lost per month on average due to any delays in establishing remote links and re-establishing failed remote links during virtual court hearings, and what the reasons are for any such delays.

The SCTS does not hold the specific data required to provide an estimate of the average amount of court time currently being lost each month due to delays in establishing or re-establishing remote links during virtual court hearings.

Guidance for those participating in, or preparing for, virtual courts or remote attendance in hearings is publicly available via the virtual criminal and civil courts section of the SCTS website. All remote links have a required “end to end” connectivity test prior to live usage.

When technical issues do arise - these are logged by our Digital Services Team via a dedicated service desk, who then coordinate with other technical staff to resolve any problems as quickly as possible. We have Service Level Agreements in place with 3rd parties for any hardware issues (our supplier must attend within 1 hour of any hardware issue being raised).

In circumstances where technical difficulties affect the ability of a participant to join a hearing remotely, ‘dial-in’ options are provided as a contingency. Ultimately, the decision to proceed or adjourn a hearing rests with the presiding sheriff or judge, taking into account the circumstances and any impact on fairness or efficiency.

SCTS does receive feedback that live links are not always as effective as they could be. In addition to the continued investment to improve the infrastructure to ensure our systems are robust and reliable, we also work in collaboration with other justice organisations, including His Majesty’s Courts and Tribunals Service, Scottish Prison Service and Police Scotland, to continuously improve the reliability of remote links and deliver a high quality of service.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Malcolm Graham', with a horizontal line underneath.

Malcolm Graham
Chief Executive