

The year in review

Justice Secretary Humza Yousaf reflects on some key milestones of 2019.

As 2019 draws to a close I want to express my thanks to everyone working across Scotland's justice system – many of them through the festive holiday period – whether in law enforcement, the legal profession, prisons, social work or among community safety partners in the public and third sectors.

On a daily basis these many tens of thousands of people are working to help build a safer, just and resilient Scotland.

In my first full year as Justice Secretary I continued to meet victims of crime to hear from them about how we can continue improving the public's experience of the justice system.

Strongly allied to that is a firm focus on crime trends and identifying how to prevent criminality and reoffending in order to [continue reducing the number of victims](#) – down from one-in-five Scots adults in 2008-09 to one-in-eight in 2017-18.

Prevention begins long before anyone comes into the criminal justice system, with key partnerships across public services and the third sector for example in family support, education, employability, social work and housing.

Cashback for Communities

<https://webarchive.nrscotland.gov.uk/20220419012405/https://twitter.com/ScotGovJustice/status/1142114958731333634>

A key project in my justice portfolio is Cashback for Communities which reinvests seized criminal assets into projects to support young people, in some cases diverting them away from potentially anti-social or even criminal behaviour.

CashBack provides opportunities to raise the attainment, ambition and aspirations of young people, many of them living in our most disadvantaged communities.

Cashback's Phase Five, which [opened for bids in May](#), will take total investment to almost £110 million since the programme began in 2008, with funding allocations for 2020 to be announced early in the new year.

Police – serving a changing Scotland

Police Scotland continues to adapt to the changing nature of crime and of society – whether that's tackling sexual crimes, successfully disrupting [organised crime groups](#) and [traffickers](#), or strengthening its response to people in mental health distress.

This year the Scottish Government provided [dedicated funding to roll out new mobile technology](#), allowing officers to spend more time in communities.

In March the Parliament's Justice Committee recognised significant achievements since Police Scotland's creation in 2013, including new national capabilities and improvements in how rape and sexual crimes are investigated.

Domestic Abuse Act

This year a new domestic abuse law came into force in Scotland, recognising psychological harm, as well as physical harm, as an offence.

The means that abusers engaging in patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour can be punished by law. [#16days#EquallySafe pic.twitter.com/5DjMpyKaci](#)

– ScotGov Justice (@ScotGovJustice) [November 28, 2019](#)

Police Scotland has also undertaken a huge amount of work – including delivering [training](#) to more than 10,000 officers, and developing online training for all of its workforce – for the [successful implementation and enforcement of new domestic abuse laws](#).

Hailed by campaigners as a “landmark piece of legislation,” the Domestic Abuse Act [came into force in April](#), making coercive and controlling behaviour a specific offence. The Act also recognises children as victims of domestic abuse.

In October, the First Minister [announced proposals](#) to give police and courts new powers to remove suspected domestic abusers from the homes of victims or others at risk.

In 2020 I will continue working with colleagues across government to [tackle gender-based violence](#) and strengthen support for survivors.

Children and the justice system

<https://webarchive.nrscotland.gov.uk/20220419012405/https://twitter.com/ScotGovJustice/status/1168819632028966912>

In just a few weeks, child witnesses in the most serious cases will be able to have their evidence pre-recorded ahead of jury trials, reducing the potential for re-traumatisation in court. The change is part of our [Vulnerable Witnesses Act, passed by Parliament in May](#).

This year we have also made progress [towards introducing the Barnahus concept](#)

[to Scotland](#). A consultation on the draft standards will be published in the new year.

And in September, the Minister for Community Safety introduced the [Children Bill](#), which aims to ensure the child's interests are at the centre of every family law case.

Improving support for victims

2019 was marked by a number of important developments for victims, driven forward by the work of the [Victims Taskforce](#) which I established just over a year ago.

In July, I joined Victim Support Scotland to launch a [new service for families bereaved by crime](#). Developed by VSS with Scottish Government funding, it ensures families have a dedicated support worker and will reduce the number of times they have to re-tell their story to get essential support.

The Health Secretary recently introduced important legislation in the Parliament which, if passed, will [improve access to healthcare services for rape and sexual assault survivors](#), allowing self-referral for forensic examination and establishing clear rights for victims to know what will happen with evidence taken from them.

This year we also consulted on [widening the scope of victim statements](#), introduced a [new surcharge on offenders](#) to fund victim support work, and commissioned a major study into [repeat victimisation](#) to help tackle violence wherever it persists.

Scottish Jury Research

Today we have published major research into how juries in Scotland make decisions in criminal trials.

We will now engage with the legal profession, third sector and public to consider whether changes are needed to the system.

Read more:

<https://webarchive.nrscotland.gov.uk/20220419012405/https://t.co/IVP5cxrfH8> [#scotjuryresearch](#) pic.twitter.com/IlcNMvLDRU

– ScotGov Justice (@ScotGovJustice) [October 9, 2019](#)

In October we published research into jury decision making in Scotland's unique system. Nearly 1,000 people took part in the research, which found that the size of the jury, the number of verdicts available and the type of majority required can all have an effect on the outcome of finely balanced cases.

How our system operates in practice has a significant and long-lasting effect on people's lives, particularly those accused or a victim of crime. This research will allow us, for the first time, to have a nationwide discussion informed by the evidence and consider whether changes are needed.

Reducing Reoffending

A key part of our work to keep crime down and continue reducing victimisation rates is to challenge and support people with convictions to turn their lives around and contribute positively to their families and communities.

In June National Statistics showed [Scotland's reconviction rate remains at its lowest level since records began](#). Our firm focus on prevention and rehabilitation in both custody and the community is working, with the reconviction rate remaining at its lowest level in 20 years.

People released from a short prison sentence of 12 months or less were reconvicted nearly twice as often than those sentenced to serve community payback orders.

Sentencing and management of offenders

MSPs have voted to extend Scotland's presumption against ineffective short prison sentences, up to 12 months or less – to promote more effective community-based disposals that better address offending and support rehabilitation.
<https://webarchive.nrscotland.gov.uk/20220419012405/https://t.co/Iv6b7eR69W#SmartJustice@HumzaYousaf>
pic.twitter.com/ZWKFYld4Zo

– ScotGov Justice (@ScotGovJustice) [June 26, 2019](#)

Short prison sentences are disruptive and counterproductive so it was a significant moment, also in June, when Parliament voted to [extend the presumption against short prison sentences](#) to 12 months or less.

In doing so we are asking judges to give serious consideration to community alternatives that prioritise rehabilitation and use custody as a last resort.

Many people given short prison sentences have complex needs that contribute to offending behaviour. Rather than removing what stability they have from family, housing or a job, they can often be helped in the community to tackle the root causes of those problems. In so doing they avoid the revolving door of prison – where, rightly, those who commit the most serious crimes and pose a risk of harm, are detained.

This year Parliament also passed our [Management of Offenders Act](#) to allow greater use of electronic monitoring to support rehabilitation in the community while better protecting victims. I also established a national community justice leadership group to drive further progress.

Ultimately, by adopting smart justice approach to penal policy, we can continue to prevent reoffending and so contribute to keeping crime down and communities safe.

These are some of the highlights of the last 12 months, and among the issues that I will continue taking forward in 2020.

The post [The year in review](#) appeared first on [Justice and Safety](#).