

Criminal Justice Committee

Pre-budget scrutiny 2025-26

Written submission by Victim Support Scotland

Victim Support Scotland (VSS) welcomes the opportunity to respond to a call for views on the current and future financial challenges for organisations working or interested in the criminal justice sector and views on the priorities for the next budget settlement.

Victim Support Scotland is a recipient of three sources of funding that support the Scottish Government Justice Directorate to meet some of its over-arching objectives in relation to victims and witnesses of crime.

- 1. Victim Centred Approach Fund**
- 2. Victim Surcharge Fund**
- 3. Local Authority funding**

1. Victim Centred Approach Fund (VCAF)

Victim Support Scotland is predominantly funded by VCAF, which is accessed following a competitive bidding process.

VSS has benefited from a 3-year funding agreement from VCAF. This allows for better strategic planning of activity and resources, enabling us to more substantially meet the needs of victims and people affected by crime. It also supports core costs of our organisation enabling us to improve service delivery and ensure security and sustainability. By supporting back-office functions this supports achieving our mission.

In addition to the reasons outlined above, this longer-term approach to funding also works towards the Scottish Government's commitment to Fairer Funding by 2026 (see below).

However, it is important to highlight that flat line funding does not take inflationary costs into consideration and equates to a cut in real terms. Based on the 2024/25 Scottish Government budget for Justice and Home Affairs (excluding Scottish Fire and Rescue and Police and Fire Pension budgets), Victim Support Scotland's grant award equates to just 0.22% of the overall budget. VSS continues to provide support to people affected by crime in Scotland in the face of increasing costs, and we believe that our interventions with victims and witnesses of crime achieve exceptional value for money and financial savings in other areas of the Scottish Government budget.

VSS continues to provide valuable outcomes for the funding that is awarded. These are detailed in the funding agreement, and include:

- **Improved Health and Wellbeing:** People affected by crime will experience reduced stress and anxiety, and increased confidence and resilience
- **Feeling Safer:** Victims will feel safer, less vulnerable and be less likely to be re- victimised. Witnesses will feel reassured and more confident about giving evidence in court
- **Feeling Informed:** Victims and witnesses will feel more informed about the criminal justice system, their case, their rights, and the support available to them
- **Reduced Economic Impact:** Victims and witnesses who have been financially impacted will feel less economic impact as a result of being affected by crime

We note and welcome that The Programme for Government reports a £16 million investment on the Victim Centred Approach Fund in 2024-25. We would ask that consideration is given to sustainability and longevity of provision. This is critically important for:

- the established referral pathways with criminal justice,
- building knowledge of services and what they can provide
- supporting victim confidence in having long-standing partners who can be there for them along their journey.

2. Victim Surcharge Fund

VSS is a recipient of Victim Surcharge funding which is used to deliver its Emergency Assistance Fund (EAF). Last year, EAF provided £446,727 worth of goods to 1,746 individuals in crisis. By funding VSS to administer this fund, the Scottish Government is ensuring the greatest chance of reaching people most in need due to our networks and trust in the sector.

3. Local Authority funding

Income from Local Authority grants and Service Level Agreement (SLAs) for the work of VSS has made up an average of 4.5% of income over the past ten years, but only 1.9% of all income over the last five years. The overall trend is in a downwards direction, with the total income from Local Authorities having fallen by almost 75% since 2014/15. It is anticipated that as local authority funding comes under further pressure in the coming financial years, that they will look to make savings by further reducing or removing financial support to VSS (and other organisations).

Fair Funding - key principles from SCVO

VSS supports the key principles of fair funding as highlighted by SCVO.

1. Rising inflation and the resulting cost-of-living and running costs crises have put pressure on voluntary organisations, exacerbating financial and operational challenges.

2. SCVO has spoken to many organisations who have not received an uplift for many years, including one who reported no uplift for 13 years, a 27% cut in real terms at the time.

The contribution of volunteers

VSS relies on volunteers to deliver services to people affected by crime. They provide a significant contribution to our work in supporting people affected by crime right across Scotland. We have valuable and committed volunteers from the Shetland Islands, right down to the Scottish Borders. The funding provided to VSS by the Scottish Government supports this voluntary effort and provides enhanced return for the investment. However, it is not 'free' as resources are required to support the recruitment and retention of volunteers. This should be recognised and valued as part of budget scrutiny. Further details of volunteer contribution, more generally, in Scotland is below.

We support the key messages of Volunteer Scotland and highlight:

1. The key contribution of volunteers to Scottish society, contributing 300 million hours in 2022, and contributing an estimated £5.3 million to Scotland's economy.
2. The challenges facing volunteering as a result of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, leading to a four percentage point decline in volunteering participation (26% in 2019 to 22% in 2022), reinforcing the need for sustainable resource (in line with SCVO fair funding calls) to ensure volunteers have positive experiences.
3. The need for volunteer-led services to be aligned with the Volunteer Charter, which details 10 key principles for the sustainable and legitimate engagement of volunteers.
4. The importance of infrastructure bodies which support volunteering and volunteer involving organisations.

Programme for Government

We welcome inclusion of reform of the Victim Notification Scheme (VNS) and the introduction of training on trauma for staff across the justice system as part of the Programme for Government.

We are aware of plans for the Scottish Government to set up a contact centre to manage victims signing up to the VNS. While we welcome the intent of this approach, we wish to highlight the importance of investment in this area not depleting from funds available to victim support organisations or other third sector partners. This would be false economy as provision of support to victims has a much greater reach, and need, than simply notifications related to the VNS.

Budgets

VSS is mindful of the role criminal justice plays in the Scottish landscape. Scotland's justice system will see total investment of over **£3.1 billion** in 2022-23 to strengthen and reform vital front-line services. As reported above, the VCAF grant

awarded to VSS equates to 0.22% of the Justice and Home Affairs budget, excluding Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), and Police and Fire Pensions.

VSS regularly highlights the impact of governmental decision on victims, their confidence in the criminal justice system, and the rights of victims as enshrined in legislation. We are mindful that this consultation relates to pre-budget scrutiny of the criminal justice budget. We also highlight the potential costs that are saved in other budget streams by support provided by VSS and other victim support organisations.

We know from victims that our support improves their health and wellbeing, makes them feel safe and informed, and reduces the economic impact of crime. This supports a broad spectrum of Scottish Government's National Outcomes. These savings across the public purse are difficult to quantify but should not be underestimated when considering the application of budgets.