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The Scottish Government has been warned not to overlook the need for crime enforcement as it seeks to boost focus on prevention.

Justice secretary Michael Matheson published a report today outlining the need to prevent crime before it took place, particularly among young people.

And while this move was welcomed by the Scottish Conservatives, they said the SNP was still guilty of a “soft touch” approach and couldn’t afford to overlook the role of the police or prisons.

In the ‘Justice in Scotland: vision and priorities’ document, Mr Matheson bemoaned the fact more was spent on enforcement than prevention, adding: “A shift towards preventative spending is challenging but is likely to be more effective in the long term.”

Shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr pointed out that, only this week, a killer who’d been released after just three years had returned to the dock to plead guilty to two violent assaults committed since.

That is the latest in a string of “paltry” sentences dished out north of the border under the SNP.

There was also no mention in the report of whole-life sentences.

The Scottish Conservatives have repeatedly campaigned for their introduction for the most serious criminals, as happens elsewhere in the UK.

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has said in the past it would be “right and proper” for the Sentencing Council to look at this, but there was no repeat of this in today’s report.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said:

“Increasing focus on crime prevention is important, and I welcome that this report seeks to do that.

“That, alongside improved rehabilitation, is clearly the most effective way of reducing crime.

“However, this cannot come at the expense of enforcement and keeping communities safe.

“Michael Matheson has hinted he wants to shift away from enforcement, but that will only make life easier for the criminals who destroy lives in towns and cities across Scotland.

“The SNP remains too soft-touch on justice. Only this week we saw a convicted killer, who was released after a paltry three-year sentence, back in the dock after more violent assaults.

“And there’s no point in relying more heavily on community sentences if criminals never end up serving the payback orders or paying the fines.

“In addition, it’s disappointing there’s barely any mention of the victims of crime in this report, who already suspect their feelings and needs are overlooked in favour of the interests of criminals.

“This was also a golden opportunity for the Scottish Government to introduce whole-life sentences for the most dangerous and brutal criminals, as happens elsewhere in the UK.

“But the SNP shirked away from this again, and that’s a slap in the face to victims and their families.”

The full report is available here:

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00522271.pdf>

The Scottish Conservatives have repeatedly campaigned for whole life sentences:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/02/time-for-whole-life-sentences-to-bring-justice-for-murder-victims/>

Yesterday, a killer was back in court having committed two further violent attacks after serving just a three-year sentence:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-40560568>