

The week in review

The week's round-up includes the publication of legislation which would allow more pre-recording of evidence by vulnerable witnesses ahead of criminal trials, the launch of a new water rescue vessel in Aberdeen and the publication of the Damages Bill.

More pre-recording of evidence for criminal trials

✘ Legislation to enable the greater use of pre-recording of evidence by child and vulnerable witnesses has been introduced to the Scottish Parliament.

The [Vulnerable Witnesses \(Scotland\) Bill](#) would create a new rule that children who are due to give evidence in the most serious criminal cases should have their evidence pre-recorded in advance of trial.

The Bill proposes other improvements such as a simplified process for deemed vulnerable witnesses to request standard special measures such as giving evidence via a live TV link away from the courtroom during the trial.

It also includes a power to enable extension of the new rule to adult witnesses deemed to be vulnerable under the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995. This covers complainers of sexual offences, stalking, domestic abuse and human trafficking in solemn proceedings.

Justice Secretary Michael Matheson said:

“This represents a significant change to the law and practice, which justice organisations will need to implement in a managed way in order to achieve our aim of ensuring witnesses can give their best evidence, while protecting the rights of the accused.

“From investing in a more ‘victim-centred’ approach that ensures people feel supported through the justice process to expanding advocacy services and funding research into survivors’ experiences, we are making significant progress to improve support for victims and witnesses. We are working to deliver a criminal justice system that is increasingly focused on the people affected by crime rather than the processes surrounding them.”

SFRS launches new water rescue unit in Aberdeen

A team of specialist firefighters in Aberdeen are the latest to have been trained and equipped to stand on the frontline during severe weather related flooding and fast water rescue. ✘

The highly-skilled [Water Rescue Unit](#) will be able to respond to the type of severe weather related incidents which devastated the Aberdeenshire community of Ballater during Storm Frank in 2015.

Community Safety Minister Annabelle Ewing said:

“This investment in a new Water Rescue Unit for the north east is the latest example of the Scottish Government and SFRS’s continued commitment to protecting communities from emerging risks.

“The devastation to the Aberdeenshire community of Ballater by Storm Frank reminds us of the impact severe weather and flooding can have on communities. This new highly-skilled team will be better prepared than ever to help people who get into trouble in the water.

“And given that Scotland has more than 27,000 lochs alone, it is clear this is an important investment for Scottish communities.”

Human Trafficking – First Annual Progress Report

Cabinet Secretary for Justice Michael Matheson updated Parliament on progress in tackling human trafficking and exploitation in the past 12 months.

Read Mr Matheson’s full statement on the main Scottish Government [website](#).

‘Trafficking and Exploitation: Strategy – First Annual Progress Report’ is available [online](#).

Read our blog post with comments from key figures including TARA, Police Scotland and COSLA [here](#).

Watch the Cabinet Secretary’s Parliamentary statement on the video below:

Damages Bill introduced

Reforming the law on setting the personal injury discount rate.

Legislation to create a clearer, fairer and more credible way of setting of the personal injury discount rate for damages claims has been published.

The personal injury (PI) discount rate is used to help calculate lump sum

compensation to cover future losses such as future salary losses or future care costs in personal injury cases.

The Damages Bill, now introduced in the Scottish Parliament, addresses concerns that the current process for setting PI discount rate lacks transparency and has not been reviewed frequently enough – with the most recent change resulting in a substantial shift to the rate

Minister for Legal Affairs Annabelle Ewing said:

“This legislation is part of our wider programme of civil law reform which aims to ensure the system keeps pace with modern Scotland and the needs of its people. While the number of people affected by the discount rate is relatively small, we know that those cases tend to involve catastrophic injury with little prospect of the individual’s full recovery. That is why it is so important the law determining how the discount rate is set is clear, fair, transparent and credible.”

Read more on the main Scottish Government [website](#).

Hate crime reporting must continue

Statistics on hate crime published

Hate Crime in Scotland 2017-18 can be accessed [here](#)

Victims and witnesses to hate crime are being encouraged to continue to speak out, as new statistics suggest more people are reporting incidents.


Following the publication of the bulletin, Hate Crime in Scotland 2017-18 the **Community Safety Minister Annabelle Ewing said:**

“It’s reassuring to see more people are coming forward to report hate crime, and in particular disability hate crime. A significant amount of work has been done by Police Scotland, the Crown Office and community organisations over the past year to ensure this is happening.

“But I still believe this isn’t the full picture and remain concerned that crime motivated by prejudice is underreported and would urge anyone who experiences it to ensure it’s reported properly.”

Justice Secretary launches One Community

A group of women are helping young people from Glasgow's African community to create new lives in Scotland.

The ladies have become community champions supporting families to overcome challenges as they build a future in the city. 

The group are part of One Community which is led by prominent campaigner Khadija Coll who has spent more than 25 years working in Scotland and Africa with refugees. Khadija has developed the new project in collaboration with the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, which specialises in prevention work.

Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Michael Matheson, said:

“This project will have a crucial role in working with BME communities across Glasgow helping them to overcome barriers in access to education and encouraging positive life choices.

“Today I've had the opportunity to hear from some of the young people already benefiting from One Community's mentoring programme which reaches out to those who may feel disconnected from the community. The project's community champions provide vital support and empower these young people helping them move away from a potential life of chaos and violence.

“We want to build inclusive, resilient and safe communities across Scotland and we will continue to invest in the Violence Reduction Unit to deliver innovative ways to tackle violence.”

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