



# PRESS RELEASE

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## **Plans to Re-start Sheriff Court Jury Trials**

Remote Jury Centres are to be extended across Scotland to re-start Sheriff Court Jury trials, delayed as a result of COVID-19.

Scottish Government has provided £6.5 million to enable the new Remote Jury Centres to deliver capacity for 18 jury trial courts to operate. Jury centre venues for each Sheriffdom (six) are currently being sourced across Scotland with centres for Lothian and Borders Sheriffdom and Glasgow and Strathkelvin Sheriffdom expected to be in place by December. Other Sheriffdoms will follow in the early part of 2021.

The move, endorsed by Lady Dorrian's Restarting Solemn Trials Working Group, will replicate the High Court approach in sheriff courts across the country.

A cross-justice group involving the legal profession and third sector, led by Sheriff Principal Turnbull, will focus on the practical differences in hearing sheriff court jury trials in order to restart them quickly and effectively.

Lady Dorrian said:

"The innovative approach to Remote Jury Centres in the High Court is now up and running and the next stage is to plan the roll-out of this approach to sheriff court jury trials. This is an excellent collaborative effort across the justice sector which will increase court capacity in an environment that is safe for all participants."

Justice Secretary Humza Yousaf said:

"The introduction of Remote Jury Centres for Sheriff Court trials will provide assurance to victims, witnesses and accused who have been adversely affected by case delays due to COVID-19.

"The Scottish Government has provided £6.5 million funding for these centres to be used across the country allowing sheriff court trials to proceed as quickly as possible.

“This is in addition to the £5.5 million already provided for High Court jury centres and £3 million for court technology. Excellent progress has already been made, including the resumption of High Court trials in Edinburgh this week using the Remote Jury Centre.

“I am grateful to all those involved in the court service and across our justice system to address the challenges faced as a result of the pandemic and in getting to this point.”

Eric McQueen, Chief Executive, Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service said:

“This is an important step to re-start jury trials in the sheriff courts. The Remote Jury Centres will provide physically distanced facilities for juries which cannot be achieved in the traditional court set-up. The restarting of trials will be welcome news for accused, victims and witnesses whose lives have been put on hold as a result of the pandemic.

“This mirrors the approach we have taken in the High Court and we are sourcing venues to support each Sheriffdom.

“The extension of the Remote Jury Centres across Scotland will also provide the capacity for High Court sittings to take place in Aberdeen and Inverness.”

Stewart Munro, Vice Convener of the Law Society of Scotland Criminal Law Committee, added:

“The Law Society of Scotland warmly welcomes the news that the innovative Remote Jury Centre solution is to be extended to sheriff courts across Scotland. Sheriff and jury trials are an integral part of our criminal justice system. The interruption caused by the pandemic has caused real impacts on accused persons, complainers and witnesses alike. Today’s announcement means that we can quickly look forward to normal levels of trials taking place in a safe and secure manner.

“The remote jury model is a product of strong collaboration across the justice sector and shows what can be achieved through positive engagement. SCTS is to be commended for its considerable efforts in turning the model into reality. No doubt other jurisdictions will be watching with great interest.”

Kate Wallace, Chief Executive of Victim Support Scotland, commented:

“We welcome any move to reinvigorate trials that have been delayed as a result of COVID-19. The real life and negative impact that delays to trials have to people impacted by crime, cannot be underestimated.

“Earlier this year, Victim Support Scotland reported a staggering 400% increase in the number of people using our services expressing feeling suicidal, due in part to delays in trials going ahead. We have had huge concerns, alongside our partners, that the needs of victims have been neglected throughout the pandemic.

“While today’s announcement is to be welcomed, the justice sector must not rest in its laurels. There is still a mountain to climb for the justice sector to get back on its feet, with the reduction of the backlog just being one step in the right direction.”

**ENDS**

### **Notes for Editors**

- By March 2021 it is estimated that over 2000 sheriff court jury trials will be outstanding. Remote Jury Centres will restore the pre-Covid capacity but further measures are required to tackle the backlog and reduce timescales.
- The Edinburgh High Court Jury Centre sat this week for the first time. The Glasgow High Court Centre is programmed to hear trials from 12 October.

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