



Manifesto for the Scottish Parliament Elections 2026



The trusted voice for victims and witnesses of crime across Scotland



VSS is an **active and forceful advocate for victims and witnesses**.

The issues we campaign for are driven by:

- What victims and witnesses of crime tell us is important to them and impacts them the most
- The lived experience of victims and witnesses of crime
- Crime types that are becoming more prevalent
- Crime types that require systemic change
- The current legislative landscape that impacts victims and witnesses of crime



Current legislative and policy environment



Victim Support Scotland welcomes recent reform and improvements for victims and witnesses of crime that are included in the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform Act, and the Criminal Justice Modernisation and Abusive Domestic Behaviour Reviews Act, amongst others.

We acknowledge the continued determination from Members of the Scottish Parliament and Government in creating an Act that reflects the justice system of a modern Scotland, supporting positive change driven by the experiences of victims and witnesses of crime. Victim Support Scotland endeavours to reflect those views, and this drives our advocacy, lobbying, quest for continuous improvement, and indeed this manifesto.

In today's modern Scotland, we recognise the link between poverty, inequality, and vulnerability to crime. Victims from low-income backgrounds often face additional barriers to support and justice. We further recognise that people, for a variety of reasons and life circumstances, may be highly vulnerable to victimisation - but they are often excluded from, and might not consider themselves deserving of, support. For that and many other reasons, we want VSS to be a place for everyone.

We urge all MSPs standing for the next Scottish Parliament to support the needs of their electorate by strongly considering the asks in this manifesto. Some of this is implementing what is already passed, legislation which engaged all parties and attracted healthy scrutiny, debate and at times disagreement, but ultimately cross-party support.

This is your chance to let the people of Scotland know that if they are a victim of crime, their needs and experience will be respected, and reflected in the policies that you and your party will fight for.

So much has been achieved in recent years, and Victim Support Scotland rises to the challenge of building on those promises and progress.

Summary of our key asks



- #1 **The effective implementation of the Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform (Scotland) Act 2025.**
- #2 **Mitigate the harmful effects of emerging crime types.** This must include greater authority to regulate social media content, including more effective methods of removing, and enhanced powers to regulate, harmful or distressing content. The sharing of deepfake images, especially those that cause emotional or reputational harm, cannot go unchallenged.
- #3 **Enhanced support for people who are more vulnerable to being impacted by crime.** VSS seeks the implementation of a suite of targeted support and interventions to address the specific needs of vulnerable victims.
- #4 **Support for families bereaved by murder, culpable homicide, or terrorism.** Families who experience bereavement as a result of these crimes require dedicated support to cope with the unique range of emotions and practical challenges in the days, weeks, months and years after the crime has occurred.

Victim Support Scotland is calling for:



#1 The effective implementation of the Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform (Scotland) Act 2025.

Many victims of crime, alongside victim support organisations, have campaigned for years for the reforms that the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Act 2025 brings. This progress and momentum must be maintained. The Act represents a significant step forward, but real change will depend on effective implementation.

The measures contained in the Act must ensure that:

- Victims have access to relevant support that guides them towards their rights. This could be achieved in part through the provision within the Act which created an enhanced duty for Police Scotland to refer victims.
- Victims of crime are legitimately informed. This could be achieved in part through a revised Victim Notification Scheme.
- Every aspect is delivered in a trauma-informed way.

VSS is calling for a clear, funded plan and accountability framework across all agencies, with victims and victim support organisations central to its progress.



Victim Support Scotland is calling for:



#1 The effective implementation of the Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform (Scotland) Act 2025.

Specifically, we would draw attention to the following areas:

A. Referral pathways:

Victim Support Scotland fully supports the Justice Digital Front Door (JDfD), as agreed in the Victims' Taskforce, and as a key aspect of the Victim Centred Approach workstream.

Through commitment from all agencies involved, touchpoints of support are highlighted which offer an opportunity to provide emotional and practical support.

- Pilot opt-out or automatic referrals from key touchpoints e.g. (Police, COPFS Victim Information and Advice (VIA), healthcare) with informed consent and clear communication standards.

B. Summary Case Management:

As a specific example and as this is rolled out across Scotland, VSS wants to make sure the same support provisions are available.

- Introduce a formal referral

mechanism to support services under Summary Case Management to ensure support for all victims going through this process.

C. Wholescale review of early and emergency prisoner release schemes:

As the early release of prisoner schemes were introduced swiftly, VSS is calling for a review of the impact on victims, and the effectiveness of these measures. Scrutiny and review would indicate whether these schemes are trauma-informed and uphold victims' rights.

- Full implementation of the recommendations to improve the Victim Notification Scheme.
- Review of efficacy and impacts on physical health and mental wellbeing of victims and their families.

Victim Support Scotland is calling for:



#2 Mitigate the harmful impact of emerging crime types.

In 2023, VSS campaigned to moderate the detail and volume of graphic and detailed content available online about child murders in Scotland.

Specifically, we focused on the impact the availability and prevalence of this information has on surviving siblings.

Although this did not result in legislative change, we continue to make progress with this agenda.

Whilst we welcome the significant progress promised through provisions within the Online Safety Act 2023 and The Data (Use and Access Act 2025), we know that more needs to be done to mitigate the harmful impact of emerging crime types, and the application of ever-evolving technology.

Specifically we welcome:

- Greater authority to regulate social media content, including more effective methods of removing, and enhanced powers to regulate, harmful or distressing content.
- The Online Safety Act 2023 making it an offence to share - or threaten to share - intimate images (including deepfakes) without consent.
- The Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 will make it an offence to create or request of sexually explicit deepfakes either for sexual gratification or to cause alarm, distress or humiliation.

However, through the services we provide to victims of crime, we know there is more to be done, and that these Acts need to be fully implemented. While they remain largely unenforced, more victims are being created.

Victim Support Scotland is calling for:



#2 Mitigate the harmful impact of emerging crime types.

As a country we are increasingly desensitised to graphic detail, with real-time sharing becoming a way of life, especially for young people. We want to work with all parties across government on this agenda.

Given the growing appetite for true crime, user-generated content and the development of AI, we need to create a culture shift in which much more consideration is given to the victim or subject before content is shared: in other words, 'think before you share'.

A. Acknowledgement of harm and trauma caused, especially concerning content that is intimate, sexually explicit or featuring deceased persons:

VSS welcomes the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 which will make it an offence to create harmful sexually explicit deepfake images, particularly those that cause reputational damage

or negatively impact the physical health or mental wellbeing of victims of crime and their families.

Whilst *sexually explicit* deepfakes will be an offence, the creation of a deepfake of a *deceased person* is not included.

VSS is calling for this to be a new offence.

Through our support services, VSS sees firsthand how distressing this kind of content is for families.

Victim Support Scotland is calling for:



#2 Mitigate the harmful impact of emerging crime types.

B. Fraud and financial crime:

Given the growth of fraud and financial crime, VSS would like to see a national response to this emerging crime type, which offers both emotional and practical support to people impacted.

VSS is asking that victims' needs are recognised beyond the practicalities of the financial investigation.

We also see the need to prioritise protection for older and financially-vulnerable people.

Many banks are active in their fight against fraud and financial crime, and referral to support for victims should be a contemporaneous part of their investigations.

To acknowledge and tackle the prevalence of fraud and financial crime, VSS is calling for this to be more explicitly reflected in a future Ministerial role.



Victim Support Scotland is calling for:



#3 Enhanced support for people who are more vulnerable to crime or likely to be targeted.

A. Tackling antisocial behaviour:

Across Scotland, antisocial behaviour is increasing, and local authority budgets are unlikely to be able to tackle this alone.

That is why it is important that we amplify the impact on the physical health and mental wellbeing of people affected by this harmful behaviour, and make recommendations on policy and budgetary outcomes at Government level to help tackle this.

We see these increases despite Part 1 of the Anti-Social Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act 2004 which states:

1. Each local authority and chief constable shall, acting jointly, prepare a strategy for dealing with antisocial behaviour in the authority's area.
2. Each local authority shall publish the strategy.

VSS is therefore calling for:

- Build on the Report of the Independent Working Group on Antisocial Behaviour (Scottish Government, 2023), ensuring local approaches focus on prevention, early intervention, and the rights of victims and communities.
- Make adequate funding available to Local Authorities to be ringfenced for services to support victims of antisocial behaviour.
- Strengthen links between antisocial behaviour, hate crime prevention, and community cohesion strategies.
- Explore options to ensure people in social and private rented housing are safe in their homes.

Victim Support Scotland is calling for:



#3 Enhanced support for people who are more vulnerable to crime or likely to be targeted.

B. Young people in conflict with the law and knife crime:

Anecdotally, and through the support we offer to bereaved families, too many young people have lost their lives due to knife crime in Scotland in recent years. We also hear that there are many more knife attacks, as well as those which are not reported to the police.

Official statistics over the past ten years show a worrying and marked increase year on year of possession of a blade in a public place. Sharp instruments have remained the most common method in cases of murder or culpable homicide for the past 20 years (1).

The age group 16-34 years remains mostly likely to be affected by crime. This will include knife crime (2).

VSS is therefore calling for:

- Commission a comprehensive review of young people in relation to knife crime, examining the causes, social drivers, and effectiveness of current prevention programmes.
- Review current controls on knife sales and carrying lengths, informed by engagement with families affected by knife crime.
- Explore national provision of bleed kits to minimise catastrophic outcomes of knife incidents.

References:

1. [Homicide in Scotland 2024-25](#)
2. [Knife Crime Statistics: FOI Release](#)

Victim Support Scotland is calling for:



#4 Support for families bereaved by murder, culpable homicide, or terrorism.

Families who experience bereavement as a result of murder, culpable homicide, or terrorism require dedicated support to cope with the unique range of emotions and practical challenges in the days, weeks, months and years after the crime has occurred.

Specifically, we are calling for changes in the following areas.

A. Post mortems:

- Introduce a 14-day time limit for a second defence post mortem to take place in cases of murder and culpable homicide.
- Reduce the timeframe in which a body can be released following a post mortem when a person has died as a result of crime.
- Ensure sensitive communication and practical support during post mortem processes.

Victim Support Scotland is calling for:



#4 Support for families bereaved by murder, culpable homicide, or terrorism.

B. Creation of new laws in Scotland:

Following on from VSS's successful campaigning to amend the Parole Board for Scotland rules, relating to decisions where a prisoner has information about the victim's remains, VSS wishes to enhance the law in relation murder. Specifically, we wish to create new offences of desecration of a body, and concealment of a corpse.

Desecration of a body refers to the burning or dismembering of a body, or removing or attempting to remove identifiable body parts.

Concealment of a corpse refers to concealing or attempts to conceal the deceased body of another person, with the intention of obstructing an investigation, or to facilitate another criminal offence. This can include burying a corpse or submerging a corpse in water.

Establishing legislation to cover these two topics builds on what has been legislated for in the Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform (Scotland) Act 2025 to support and protect families when information about the location of remains is withheld.

Both of these actions result in further trauma for the family, and means that they are unable to view the body of their family member and pay their final respects in the way they would have chosen to.

We are calling for:

- New offence of desecration of a body.
- New offence of concealment of a corpse.

Victim Support Scotland is calling for:



#4 Support for families bereaved by murder, culpable homicide, or terrorism.

C. Readiness for mass casualty and terror-related events:

While the UK has arrangements for responding to mass casualty and terror-related incidents, key services such as policing, emergency services, community safety, health and social care are devolved in Scotland.

Current UK proposals do not adequately consider how victim support will be resourced in the event of a major incident in Scotland.

Involving victim support representatives and trauma specialists in the planning of such work is essential to ensure Scotland has the capacity, funding, and coordination in place to deliver an effective trauma-informed response to support victims and their families.

We are calling for:

- Mass casualty response planning in Scotland to include victims' representatives and trauma specialists.

Thank you

For taking into consideration the rights and needs of victims, witnesses, and everyone who is impacted by crime in Scotland.

We look forward to working with you in 2026 and beyond to create a criminal justice system that truly has victims at its heart.




Victim Support Scotland