Prison Population Projections: October 2025 edition

Executive Summary

This is the ninth report published since June 2023 on the Scottish Government modelling of the level of demand for prison accommodation in Scotland. It presents prison population projections for the six-month period from October 2025 to March 2026[1]. These have been produced using 'microsimulation' scenario modelling, which simulates prison arrivals and departures to estimate the number of individuals in prison on a given future date.

The projections are produced to support high-level decision-making, planning, and policy development. As they do not account for the full complexity of the prison population, they are not intended for use in the day-to-day management of those in prison.

Recent Developments

The previous projections were published in July 2025.

Since March 2025, all eligible short-term prisoners have been released after serving 40% of their sentence[2].

From October 2025 eligibility for Home Detention Curfew (HDC) has been expanded to prisoners who have served 15% of their custodial sentence (down from 25%), and the maximum time prisoners can be released on an HDC licence will be increased to 210 days (from 180)[3].

The population projections in this publication reflect the reduction in the sentenced population due to the legislative measures outlined above by adjusting release points accordingly.

As a result of increasing pressures on prison estate capacity, the Scottish Government recently announced measures to address and mitigate the rising prison population on 2nd October[4]. It should be noted that these latest prison population projections do not include the effects of these measures as they are yet to commence.

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[1] The projections start at the beginning of October 2025 because data available on cases progressing through courts only currently extends up to October 2025 (due to a time lag on receiving the processed data). As a result, the initial prison population used for the modelling is taken from 1st October 2025.
[2] Prisoners (Early Release) (Scotland) Act 2025, Prisoners (Early Release) (Scotland) Act 2025, 22nd January 2025 (STP40).
[3] Prison population: information note - October 2025 - gov.scot.
[4] Scotland's prison population: Ministerial statement - gov.scot.

The modelling accounts for how criminal justice system activity (especially in the courts) and the flows that drive the prison population may change and uses these to estimate short-term changes in the population. The uncertainty surrounding court activity is reflected in the three scenarios based on different levels of court case conclusions: ‘low’, ‘central’, and ‘high’.

As highlighted in previous publications, the key short-term drivers of the prison population are expected to be the flows into and out of the remand and sentenced populations.

Key Points

On 1st October 2025, the overall prison population in Scotland was 8,363, and the remand and sentenced populations were 2,096 and 6,267, respectively[5].

The latest prison population projections, shown in Figure 1, indicate if current trends continue and no further interventions (including the measures announced on 2nd October) were introduced, then:

- It is likely[6] that the overall prison population will increase between 1st October 2025 and 31st March 2026.
- Across the three scenarios, it is projected that the average daily prison population could be between 7,900 and 8,800[7] in March 2026.
- It is likely that the remand population will decrease between October 2025 and March 2026. It is projected that the average daily remand population could be between 1,250 and 2,600 in March 2026.
- It is likely that the sentenced population will increase between October 2025 and March 2026. The average daily sentenced population could be between 6,050 and 6,750 in March 2026.
- Between July and October 2025, the actual prison population aligned with the higher court case conclusions scenario of the last set of projections[8].
- If the actual prison population aligns with the central scenario in these projections, then it is likely that the demand for prison spaces will rise between October and March 2026.

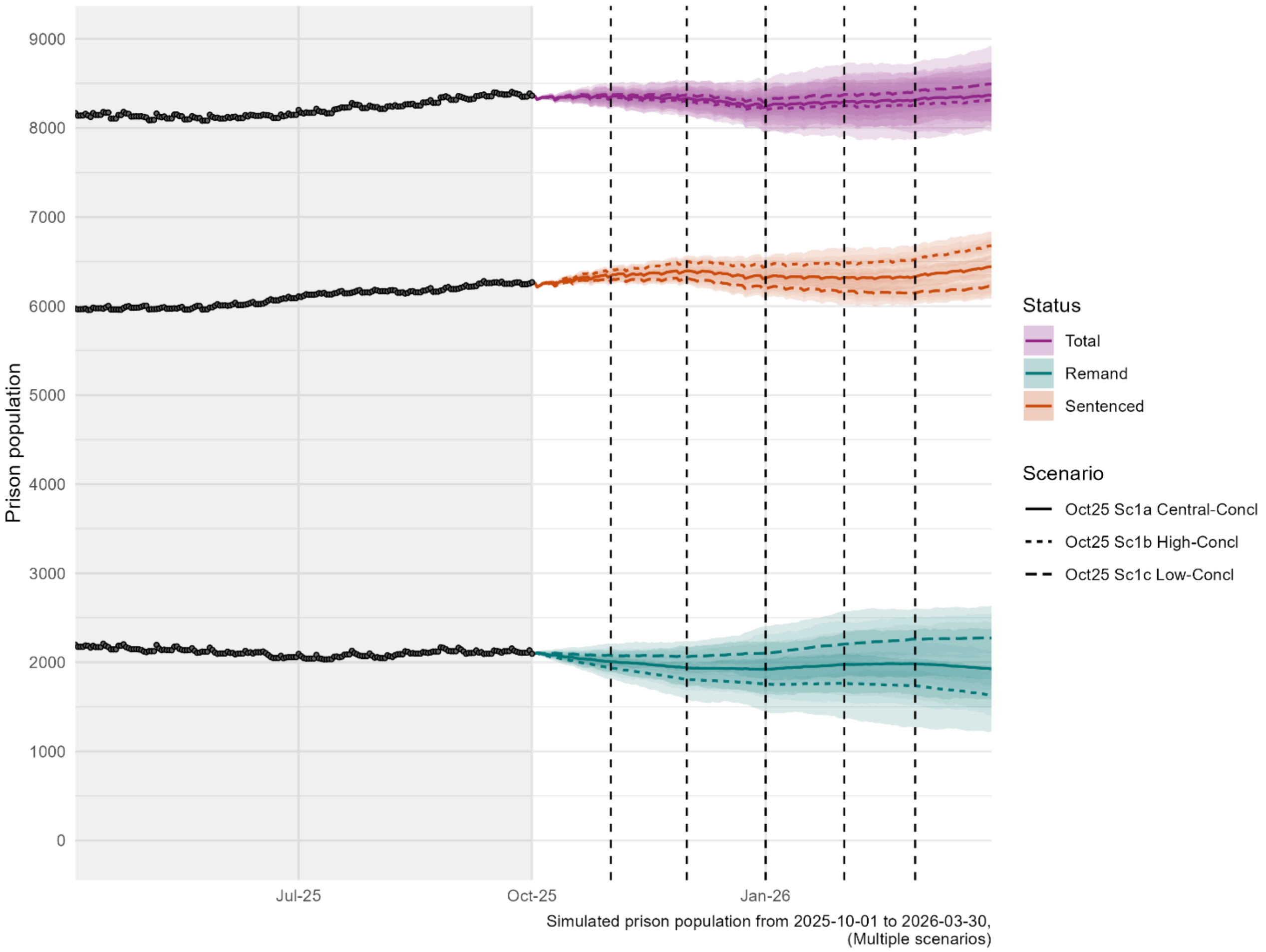
It is worth noting that in some past growth periods (e.g. early 2023 and early 2024) the actual population has tracked the upper end of the projection range for several weeks.

[5] Data, Research and Evidence | Scottish Prison Service.
[6] For more information refer to the Professional Head of Intelligence Assessment (PHIA) framework of language for discussing probabilities, Page 5, Epidemiology Modelling Review Group: consensus statement on COVID-19 (publishing.service.gov.uk).
[7] Future trends in the justice system demand and throughput, including the volume of remand arrivals and the rate of case conclusions, are uncertain which is reflected in the ranges given for the population estimates.
[8] As published in the July 2025 edition

There is uncertainty around the turn of the year when the population historically has tended to fluctuate rapidly in December and January[9].

Over the coming months, remand arrivals, sentenced arrivals, and case conclusion levels will be monitored to assess which scenario the actual prison population most closely follows.

Figure 1. Prison population projections for October 2025 to March 2026. The projection range includes the overlapping 50%, 75% and 95% confidence intervals for all scenario variants given in Table 1. The actual population is shown as a series of black points.



[9] Seasonal trends for the prison population since the COVID-19 pandemic indicate some very general similarities at the turn of the year. The sentenced population around late November/early December tends to increase, then between Christmas and the first week of January steeply decrease. The remand population tends to reduce from late November/early December, then it tends to increase sharply before stabilising between Christmas and New Year. The total population tends to fall slightly in late November/early December, then falls more sharply in late December before recovering somewhat by early February.

Background

The ‘microsimulation’ scenario modelling approach simulates the arrivals and departures of individuals to and from the prison population to estimate the number of individuals in prison on a given future date. The model uses individual-level data to construct a representation of the population of interest. Using known probabilities, the model can simulate changes in individuals’ custody status over time. The first issue of the Scottish prison population projections[10] provided a detailed overview of the modelling technique used.

Data and assumptions

To produce outputs, the model draws on selected court activity data, for example, court hearing volumes at various stages (such as pre-trial or trial) in High Court, Sheriff Court Summary, and Sheriff Court Solemn. This data is used to estimate levels of remand arrivals in the coming months. The model also incorporates assumptions on future court capacities, which are among the most important factors influencing short- and medium-term changes in the prison population.

Modelling limitations

As the model can be validated against historical data and can reflect a wide variety of dynamics, it is suitable for forecasting in the short- and medium-term. However, due to ongoing uncertainty in the justice system’s recovery (e.g., the rate at which court backlogs can be reduced by the recovery programme), which affects the model’s assumptions and limits its longer-term predictive power, currently only a six-month projection is generated using the model.

The model does not currently simulate flows by crime type, so trends specific to different crime categories are not explicitly modelled.

Report structure

The rest of this report is organised as follows:

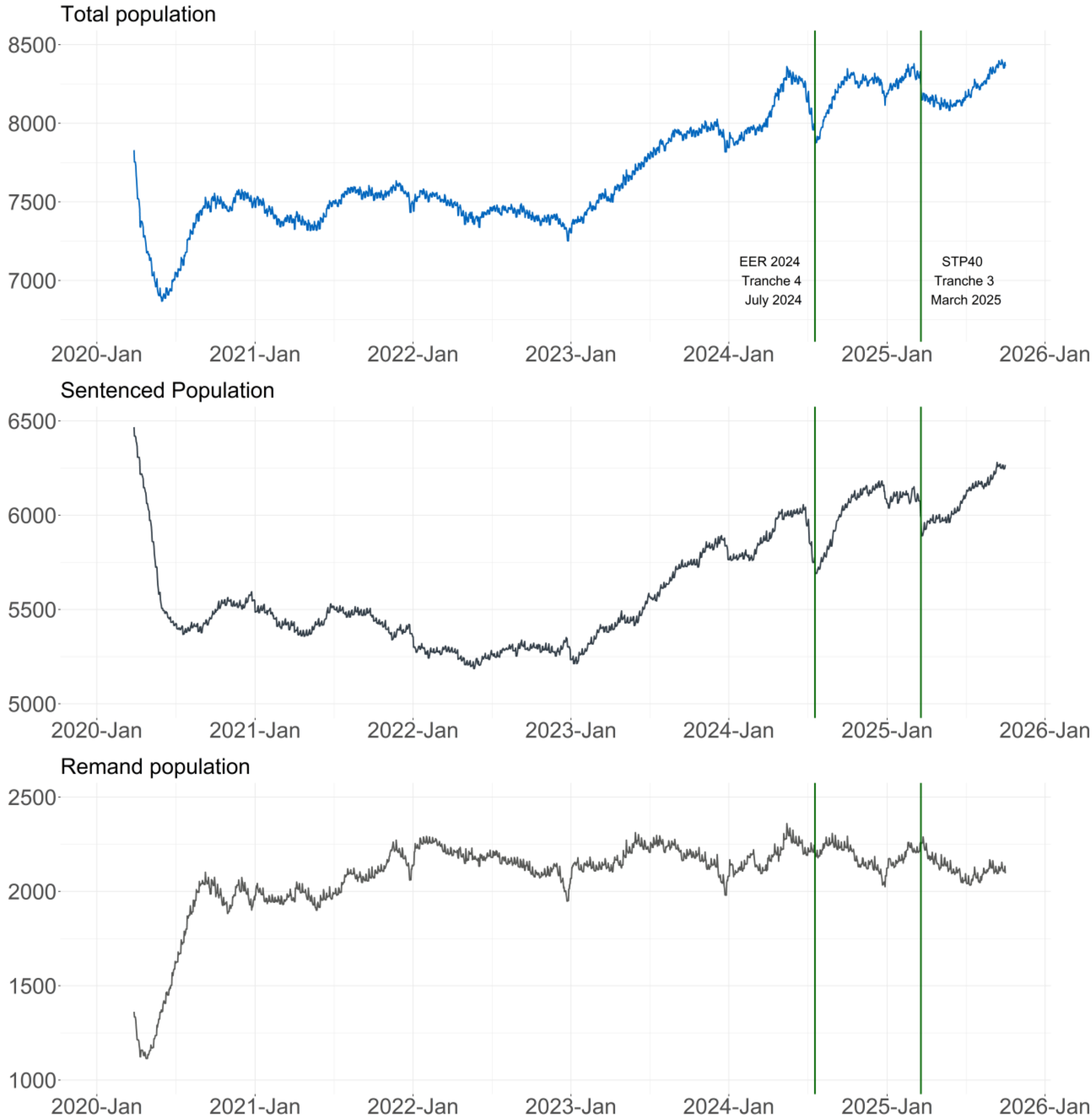
- Section 3 provides a brief overview of the prison population from 2020 to 2025 and trends in court demand from 2014 to 2025. It also discusses the drivers of population growth since 2023.
- Section 4 outlines the assumptions and scenarios used to project the prison population and explains how previous projections are validated against actual population data to assess robustness.
- Section 5 presents the latest population projection results for the period from October 2025 to March 2026.
- Section 6 summarises the key conclusions from the modelling and discusses the short-term factors that may influence prison population levels.
- Section 7 provides a technical annex, covers some technical aspects of the modelling approach and how the scenario variant assumptions are derived.

[10] For more information, refer to Scottish prison population projections - gov.scot (www.gov.scot), 1st June 2023.

Overview of Scottish Prison Population and Court Demand Trends

As shown in Figure 2 there have been substantial fluctuations in both the total and sentenced populations since 2020.

Figure 2. Prison population (total, remand and sentenced), between 26th March 2020 and 1st October 2025[11].



[11] Breakdown of total, remand and sentenced prison population, [Justice Analytical Services: safer communities and justice statistics monthly report - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)](https://www.gov.scot).

Total population

As can be seen in Figure 2, the prison population fluctuated within a range between 7,350 and 7,650 from September 2020 until late 2022. In 2023 and 2024, the population grew significantly, peaking at 8,361 on 14th May 2024.

The Emergency Release (ER)[12] of certain short-term prisoners led to 477 individuals being released early in June and July 2024. Following this, the population rose again, reaching 8,260 on 6th December[13]. Seasonal fluctuations continued into early 2025, before the population increased to reach 8,375 on 18th February.

In November 2024, the Scottish Government passed an Emergency Bill, resulting in eligible short-term prisoners being released at 40% of their sentence rather than 50%. The 311 individuals immediately impacted were released in tranches in February and March 2025[14]. This brought the population down to 8,170 on 21st March. It increased during the following months, standing at 8,363 on 1st October 2025.

Remand population

The remand population increased in early 2024, peaking at 2,360 on 14th May. The population then declined in the second half of 2024, reaching 2,124 on 1st January 2025. The highest remand population in 2025 so far was 2,289 on 25th March 2025. It has since decreased, standing at 2,096 on 1st October 2025.

Sentenced population

The sentenced population decreased slightly during 2022, from around 5,350 in January to approximately 5,250 in December. It generally increased throughout 2023 and early 2024 until it reached 6,056 on 21st June 2024[15].

Following the ER measures[16], the sentenced population fell to 5,691 on 20th July 2024, but rose again later in the year. It stood at 6,108 on 17th of February 2025, just prior to the implementation of the Prisoners (Early Release) Act 2025. The population then declined to 5,891 on 23rd March, before increasing again to 6,267 on 1st October 2025.

Remand Arrivals and Sentenced Departures

The prison population varies according to the volume and composition of the flows into and out of the remand and sentenced populations. Remand arrivals and sentenced departures are particularly important as they represent the main inflows and outflows, respectively, from the overall prison population.

Figure 3 shows monthly remand arrivals and sentenced departures from April 2020 to September 2025. The three-month period with the lowest remand arrivals – excluding

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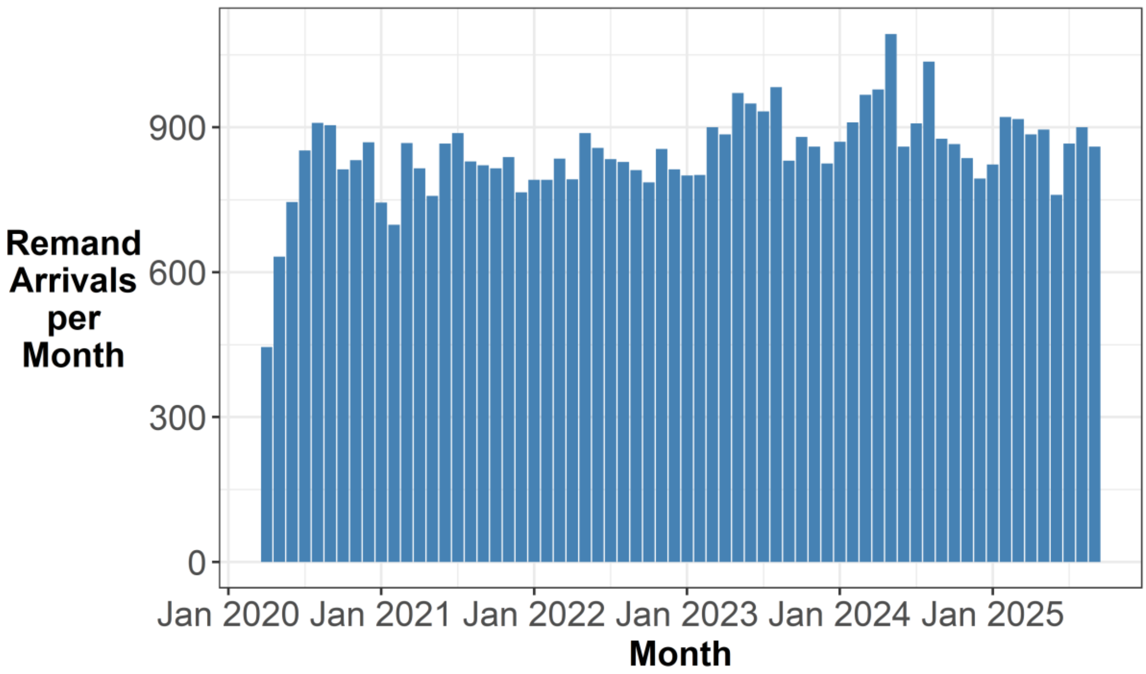
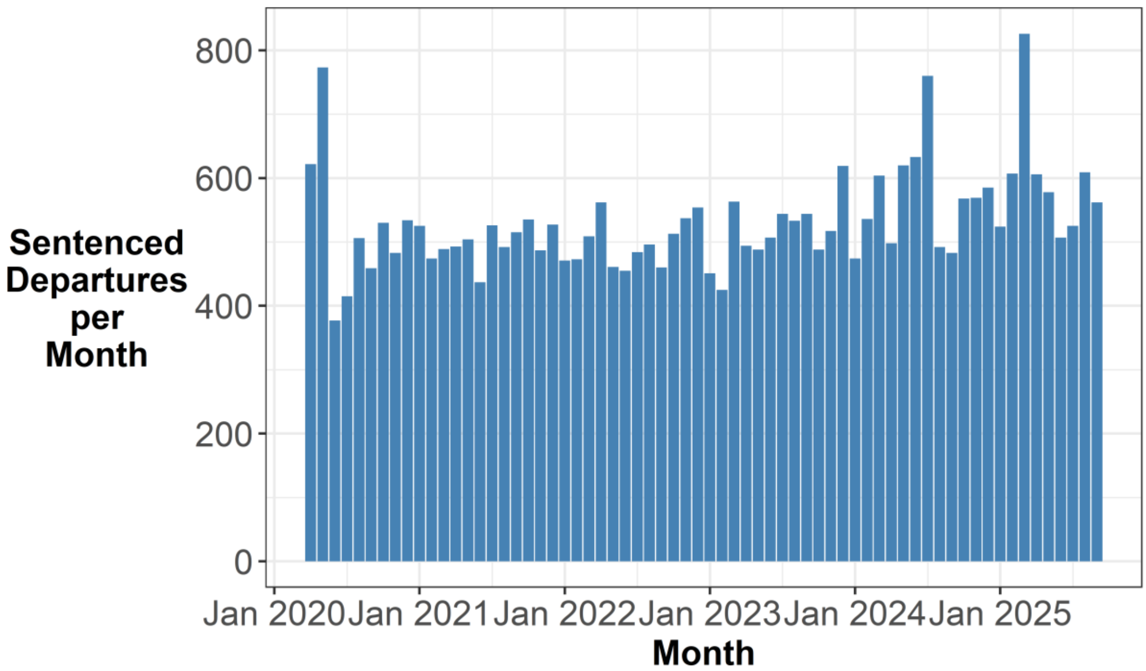
[12] SPS Early Release Data, Research and Evidence, 2nd September 2024, Early Release of Prisoners and Prescribed Victim Supporters (Scotland) Regulations 2024- Data Analysis Summary Report.pdf (sps.gov.uk).
[13] Data, Research and Evidence | Scottish Prison Service, accessed 8th October 2025.
[14] Release arrangements - Short-term prisoner release - gov.scot, 18th February 2025.
[15] Data, Research and Evidence | Scottish Prison Service, accessed 8th October 2025.
[16] Scottish Government, Prison population information note, 12th June 2024, Prison population: information note - gov.scot.

December due to seasonal effects – was May to July 2025, with an average of around 730 remand arrivals per month.

Sentenced departures peaked in March 2025, partly due to the second and third tranches of early release under the new legislation.

Figure 3. Remand Arrivals and Sentenced Departures per month between April 2020 and September 2025.





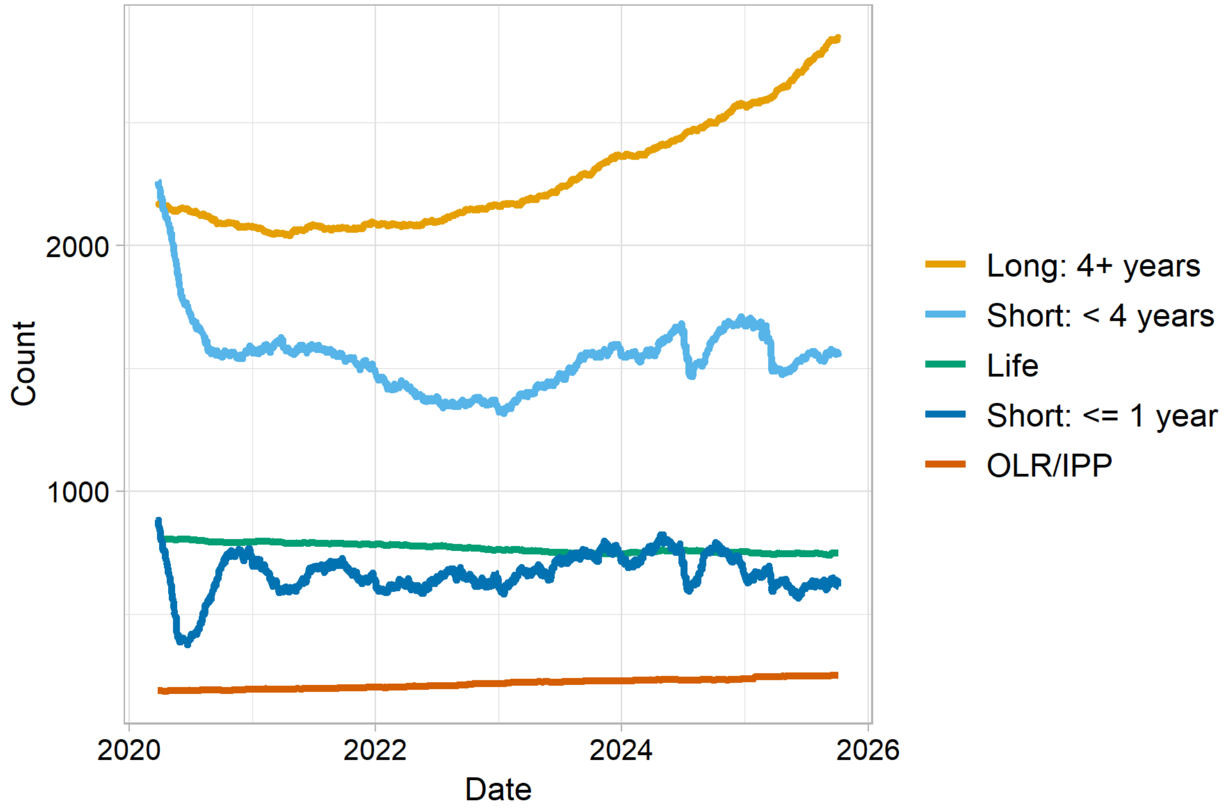
Composition of the sentenced prison population

Figure 4 shows the sentenced prison population from March 2020 to October 2025, broken down by sentence length. All population groups tended to increase between 1st January

2023 and June 2024. The short-term prison population decreased due to ER measures in June and July 2024 and again due to the short-term prisoner early release in February and March 2025.

The population serving overall sentences of more than four years, as well as those serving Orders of Lifelong Restriction, have steadily increased over several years and now exceed pre-pandemic levels. In contrast, the population serving life sentences has gradually declined since 2020.

Figure 4. Prison populations by overall sentence, 26th March 2020 to 6th October 2025[17].



Drivers of growth in prison population since 2023

The growth in the total prison population since the beginning of 2023 has been driven by increases in both remand and sentenced arrivals. The remand population is influenced by the level of new cases registered and the number of cases concluded in Scottish Courts[18]. Elevated court throughput (i.e., case conclusions) can lead to increased flow into the sentenced population. The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service (SCTS) regularly publishes data on case registrations and conclusions across all court types.

[17] Prison population monthly report, Safer communities and justice statistics monthly reports - gov.scot (www.gov.scot).
[18] Management Information from the Scottish Court and Tribunal Service (SCTS Official Published Statistics (scotcourts.gov.uk)) includes information about the arrival and liberty status for criminal case new business. This information includes the proportion who are on remand following Sheriff Court Petition (First Appearance) and Sheriff Court Summary First Calling (First Appearance), which have been broadly stable, ranging between 33.2% to 35.0% and 6.0 to 6.8% respectively during the past four years.

On 1 April 2023, some court recovery programme resources were reallocated from summary to solemn procedure. This resulted in the addition of two High Court and six Sheriff Solemn trial courts[19], but a reduction of ten Sheriff Summary trial courts.

Figures 5 to 10 present trends in registrations and conclusions in recent years for High Court, Sheriff Court Solemn and Sheriff Court Summary[20].

Figure 5 shows the number of High Court indictment registrations over the last decade from 2014/15 Q1[21] (covering April to June 2014) to 2025/26 Q1. The level of very serious criminal cases registered has increased such that the number of High Court indictments registered in 2025/26 Q1 (351) was 32% higher than during 2024/25 Q1 (265). In the latest SCTS criminal court modelling[22], it is assumed that the average High Court indictments per quarter in 2025/26 will be 381.

Figure 5. High Court Indictments registered.

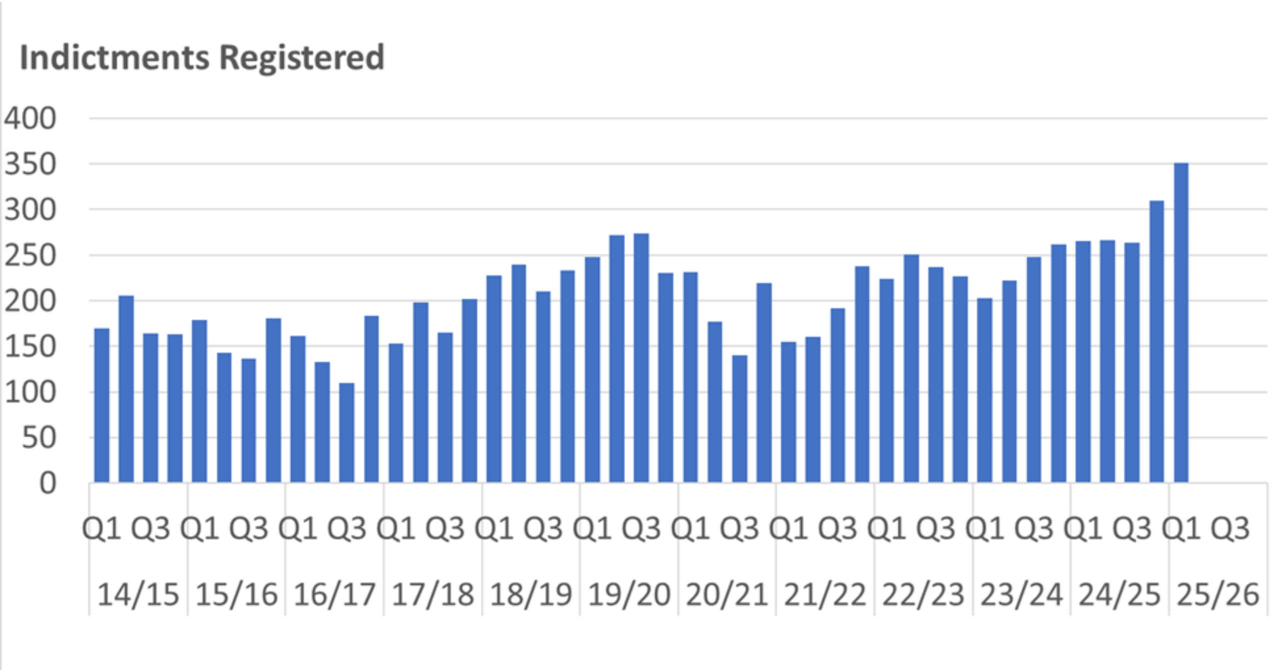


Figure 6 shows that High Court conclusions during 2025/26 Q1 (282) were around 18% higher than during 2024/25 Q1 (238).

[19] SCTS Quarterly Criminal Court (QCC) bulletin, 7th September 2023, Latest quarterly criminal court figures show progress in Sheriff solemn backlog (scotcourts.gov.uk).
[20] Management Information from the Scottish Court and Tribunal Service SCTS Official Published Statistics (scotcourts.gov.uk).
[21] The SCTS Statistics follow an annual cycle which begins on 1st April, hence Q1 covers April to June, Q2 covers July to September, Q3 includes October to December and Q4 runs from January to March.
[22] SCTS Criminal Court Modelling, scts-modelling-report-sep-25-final.pdf, September 2025.

Figure 6. High Court Indictments concluded.

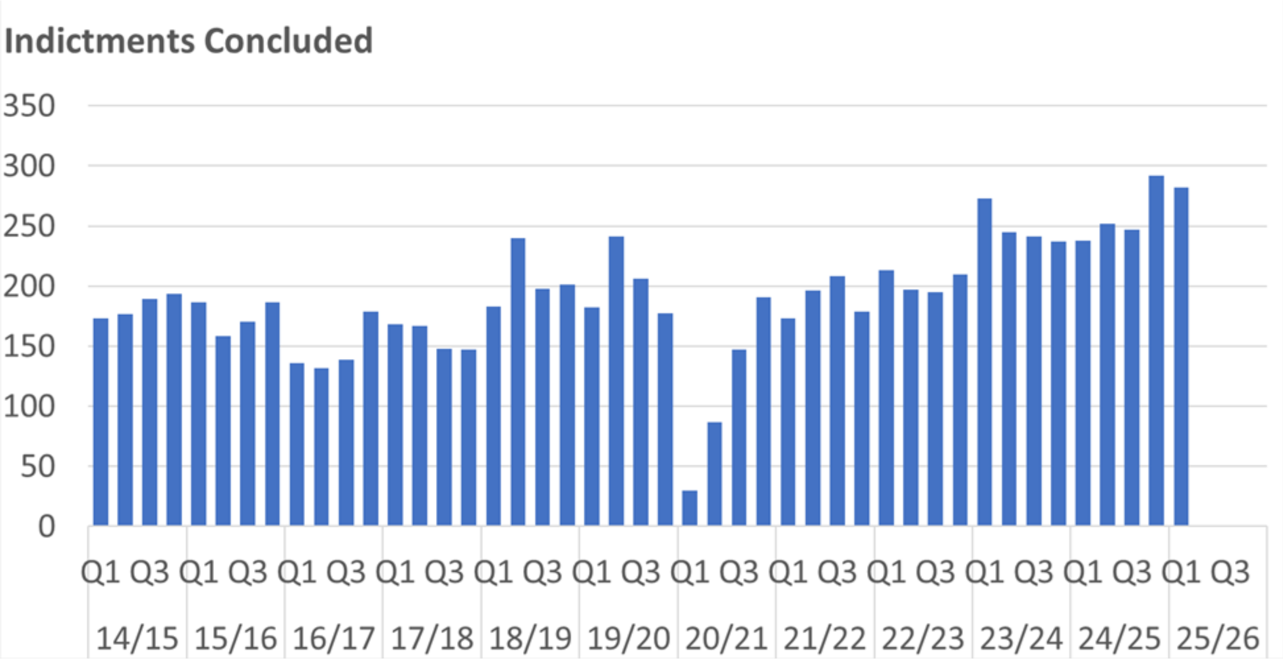


Figure 7 shows that Sheriff Solemn Indictment registrations in 2025/26 Q1 (1,713) were around 7% lower than during 2024/25 Q1 (1,840).

Figure 8 shows that conclusions also declined slightly, by 4%, from 1,941 in 2024/25 Q1 to 1,866 in 2025/26 Q1.

Sheriff Solemn imprisonment disposals are likely to continue to be elevated compared to prior to the introduction of additional solemn courts in April 2023; for example, in 2024/25 there were 6,351 imprisonments – 8% more than the 5,859 recorded in the same period in 2022/23[23].

[23] Scottish Government Justice Analytical Services Criminal Disposals Dashboard, Scottish Government Justice Analytical Services Criminal Disposals Dashboard (shinyapps.io), accessed 7th October 2025. The management information in the disposals dashboard shows disposals issued in Scottish criminal courts at charge level. This data does not indicate how many people received disposals as each accused person can have multiple charges and each charge can receive multiple disposals. Therefore, a change in charge level disposals could be related to changes in complexity of cases being disposed of in court (more or less charges per case). As such, the level of imprisonment disposals provides a broadly indicative, rather than precise, measure of activity.

Figure 7. Sheriff Court Solemn Indictments registered.

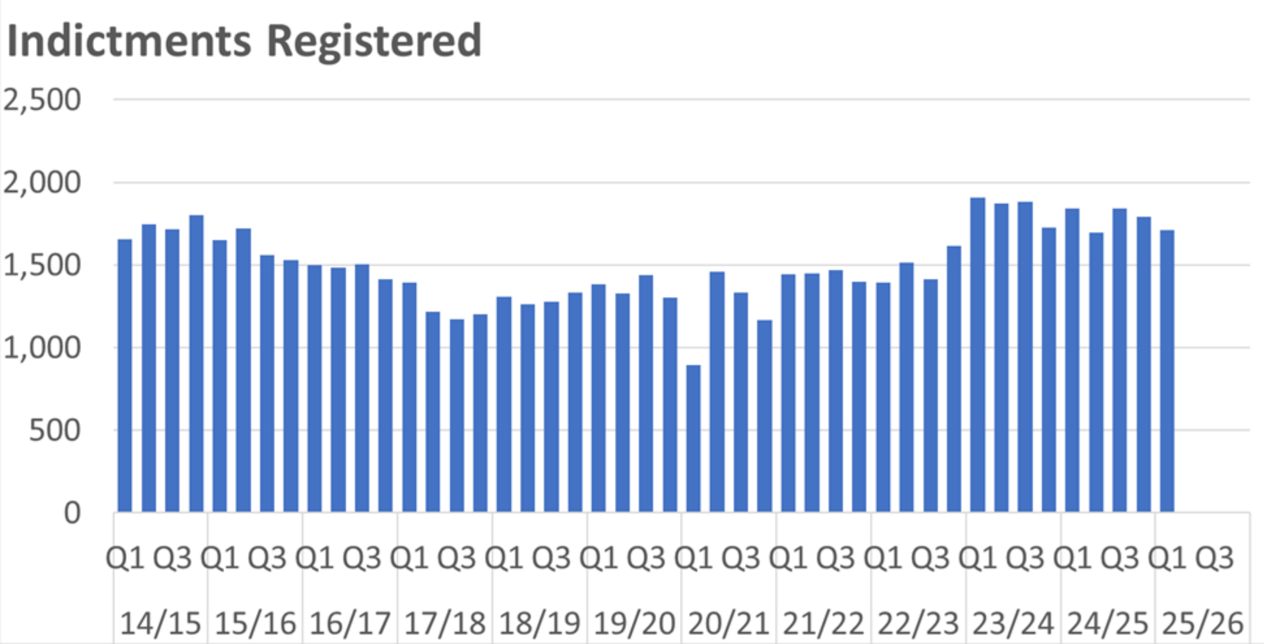


Figure 8. Sheriff Court Solemn Indictments concluded.

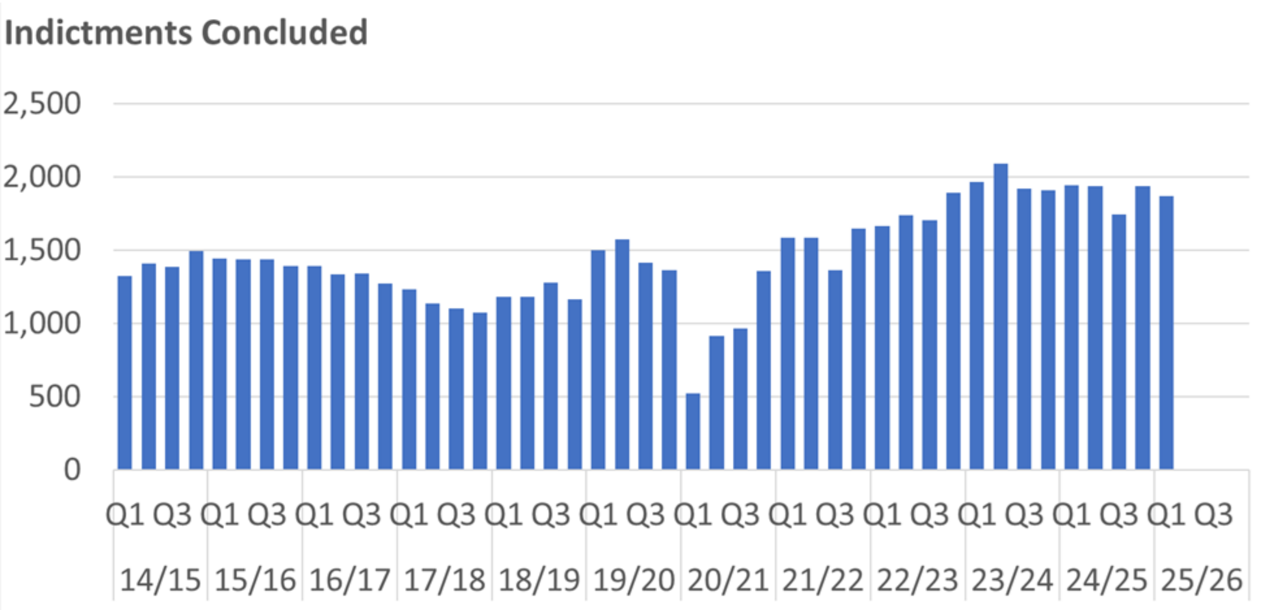


Figure 9 shows that 14,419 complaints were registered in 2025/26 Q1 in Sheriff Summary Courts, a 6% decrease from 16,344 in 2024/25 Q1.

Figure 10 shows that Sheriff Court summary conclusions in 2025/26 Q1 were around 14% lower than during 2024/25 Q1.

Sheriff Summary imprisonment disposals were around 13% higher in 2024/25 (12,155) than in 2023/24 (10,745)[24]. Therefore, despite the reduction in Sheriff Summary courts from April 2023, the upward trend of imprisonment disposals – beginning in Q1 2022-23 – has continued, with levels now comparable to pre-pandemic levels.

[24] Ibid.

Figure 9. Sheriff Court Summary complaints registered.

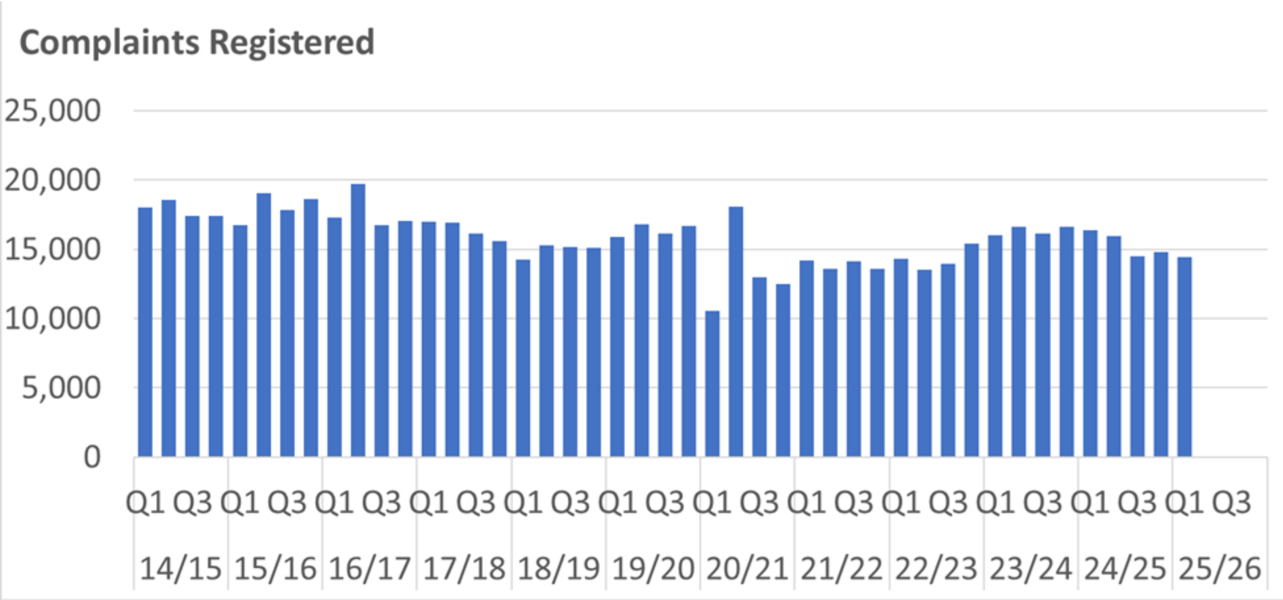
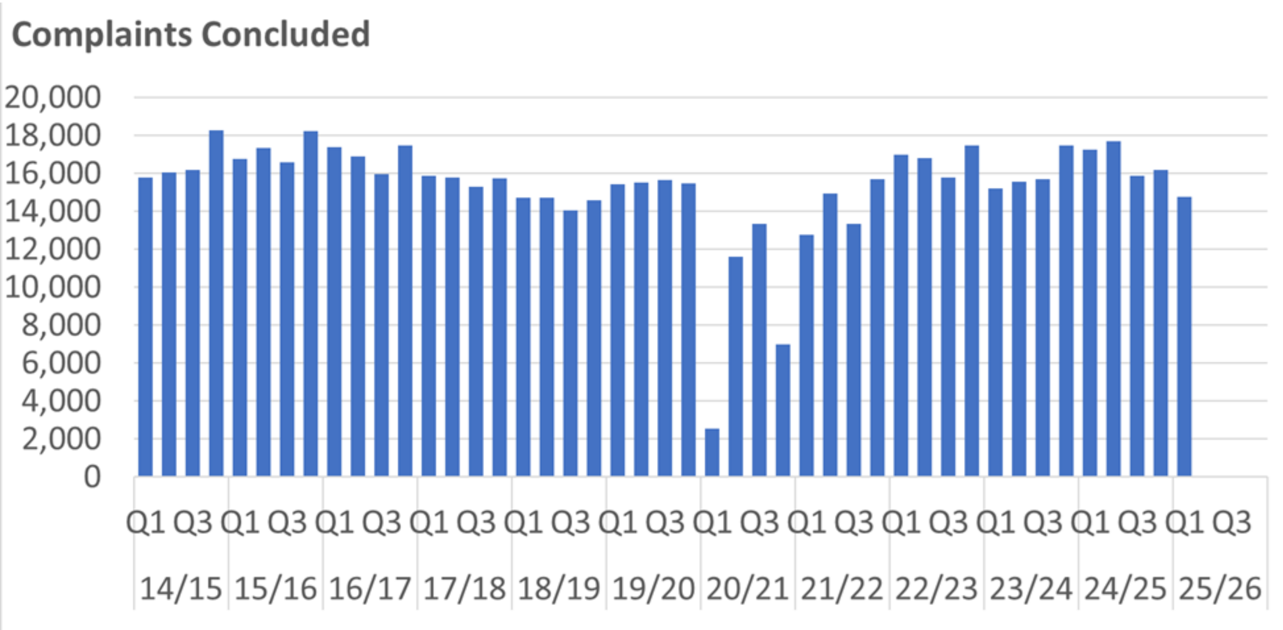


Figure 10. Sheriff Court Summary complaints concluded.



Taking all courts into consideration, elevated remand arrivals are associated with increased levels of both summary and solemn criminal court activity[25].

SCTS quarterly management information shows that the total number of trials scheduled[26] across all criminal courts increased steeply by around 140% from 18,100 in April 2020 to over 43,600 at the peak in January 2022 due to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. By the end of July 2025, this had fallen to 17,993[27].

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[25] Analysis of the drivers of criminal case registrations are beyond the scope of this publication. National crime statistics are updated annually: [Recorded crime in Scotland - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)].

[26] Outstanding trials scheduled are sometimes colloquially known as the criminal trials backlog.

[27] SCTS Criminal Court modelling, [scts-modelling-report-sep-25-final.pdf], September 2025.

However, trends vary by court type:

- Figure 11 shows that the number of outstanding High Court trials has increased by 19% between June 2024 (688) and June 2025 (818).
- Figure 12 shows that outstanding Sheriff Solemn trials decreased by 37% over the same period, reflecting the impact of enhanced solemn court capacity.
- Figure 13 shows a substantial 30% reduction in outstanding Sheriff Summary trials between June 2024 and June 2025.

Figure 11. High Court scheduled trials at end of period.

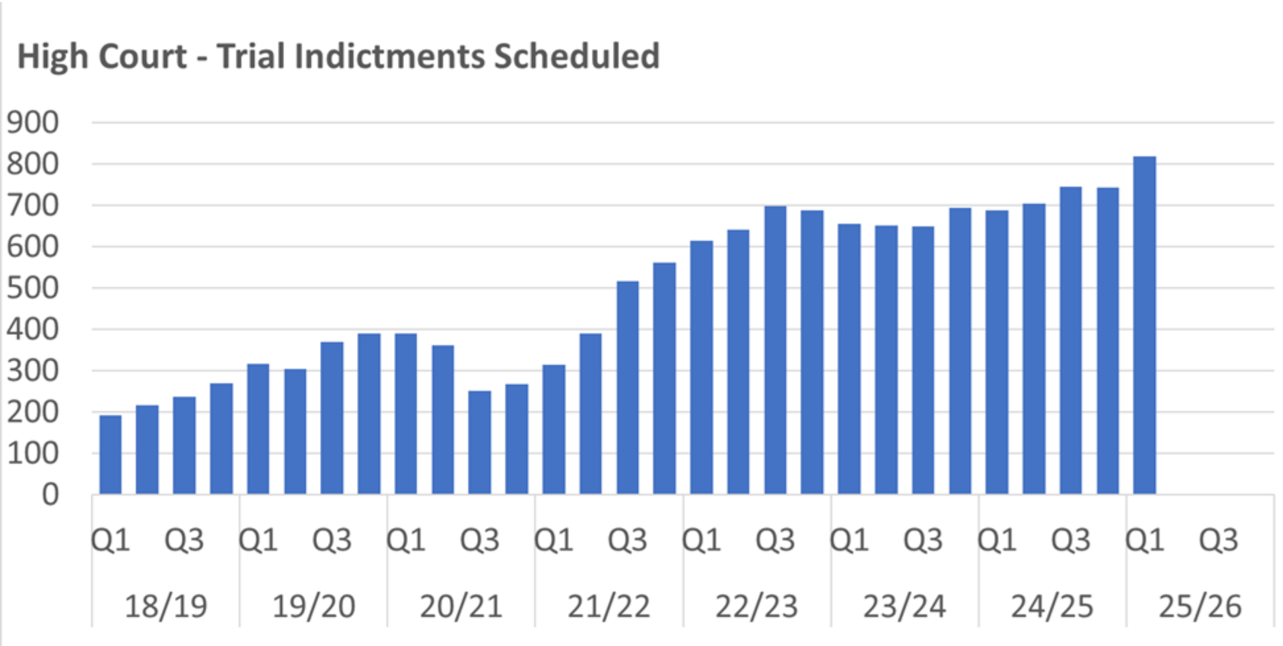


Figure 12. Sheriff Court Solemn scheduled trials at end of period.

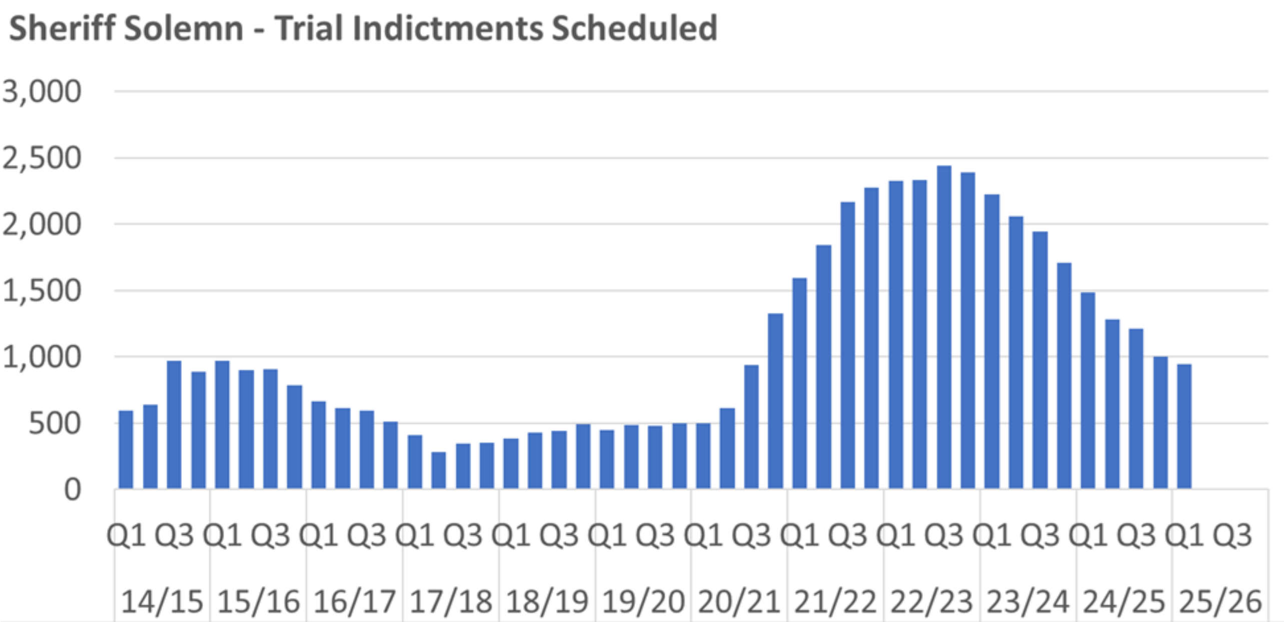
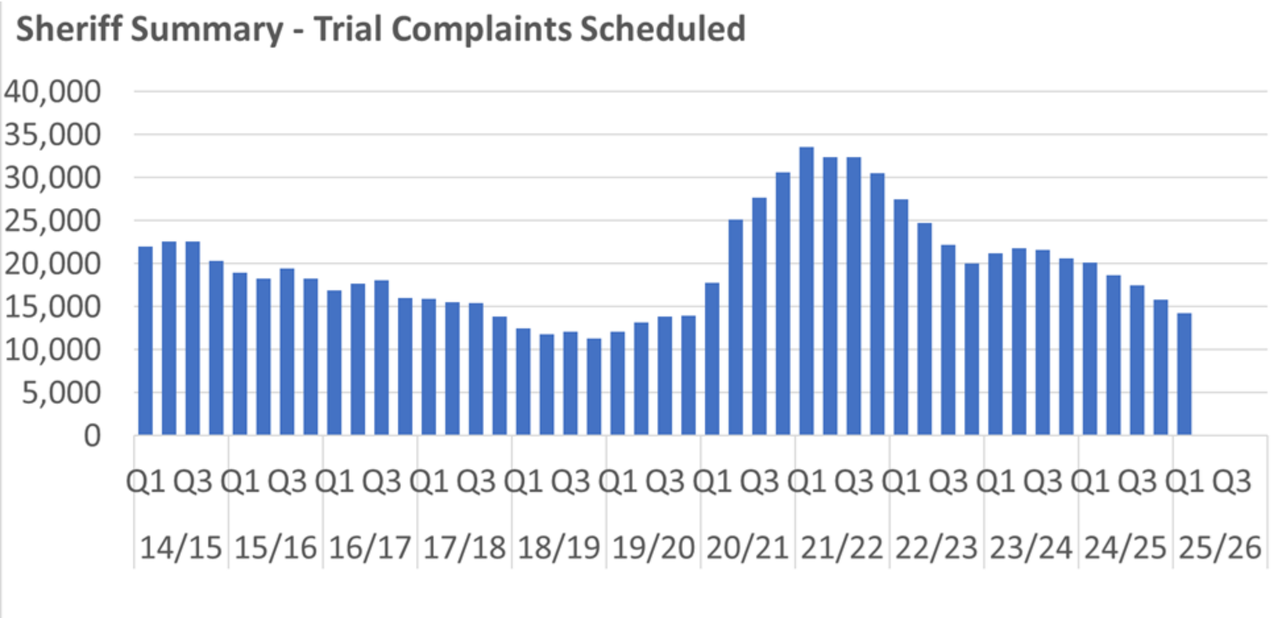


Figure 13. Sheriff Court Summary scheduled trials at end of period.



Introduction to Prison Population Projections

This section provides an overview of the assumptions and scenarios used to project the prison population, and explains how the model's previous projections are validated against actual prison population figures to assess robustness. The first issue of the Scottish prison population projections[28] provides a more detailed overview of the modelling technique used.

Model Assumptions and Scenarios

The projection scenarios are based on a range of assumptions about how the rate of transitions into and out of the prison population might change. The assumptions reflect trends and planned changes in the court system, including: changes in court capacity; variations in court conclusions rate; fluctuations in remand arrivals; the remand/bail mix; and, the prioritisation of remand case progression through courts.

Departures from the sentenced population are estimated using a combination of court disposal data and snapshots of the prison population.

To assess the sensitivity of the prison population to variation in court case conclusion rates, three scenario variants are included in the modelling:

- "Central" throughput: based on case conclusion rates per courtroom from October 2024 to September 2025;
- "Higher" throughput: assumes a 10% increase in the average case throughput per court; and
- "Lower" throughput: assumes a 10% decrease in the average case throughput per court.

The three scenarios are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Prison population scenario variants.

Scenario	Court Case Conclusion Rate
Sc1a	Central
Sc1b	Higher (+10%)
Sc1c	Lower (-10%)

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the justice system, with criminal court business temporarily restricted to essential business only[29]. Combined with increased court activity, this led to a backlog of trials. While court recovery resources have reduced the backlog from its peak, they remain high in High Court and Sheriff Solemn compared to pre-pandemic levels. This imbalance in the justice system makes it more difficult to estimate future case conclusion rates and imprisonment disposals.

[28] Scottish Government Prison Population projections, 1st June 2023, Scottish Prison Population Statistics and Projections - gov.scot (www.gov.scot).
[29] Prison population projections, 3 Overview of Scottish Prison Population Trends - Scottish prison population projections - gov.scot, 1st June 2023.

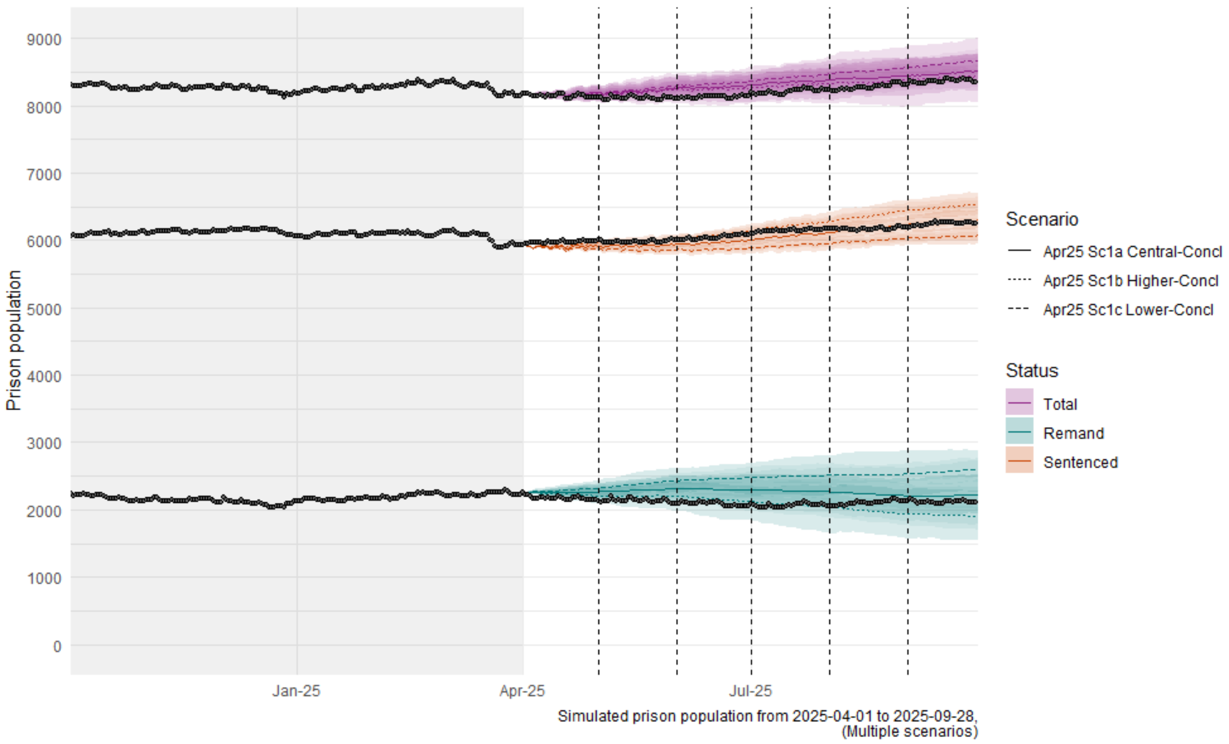
Therefore, since the progression of the justice system's recovery (e.g., rate of reduction of scheduled trials) impacts the model's assumptions and longer-term predictive power, the projections cover a limited period – from October 2025 to March 2026. A review of previous trends also shows that a general seasonal pattern tends to occur at the end of the year which is associated with irregular court throughput and remand arrivals during the months of November, December and January. To account for this, in the latest projections the assumptions for November and December 2025 are sampled from November and December 2024 and the assumptions for January 2026 are based on January 2025. Assumptions for the other months in the projection are sampled from the twelve-month period between October 2024 and September 2025.

Model Quality Assurance

At each update, the previous projections are compared with the actual prison population figures to determine the model's continued suitability to produce reliable projections. Figures 14 and 15 show the projections from the microsimulation which were published in April 2025[30] and July 2025[31].

Even after accounting for a wide variety of uncertain dynamics in the system, Figure 14 indicates that the projected ranges for the remand, sentenced and total populations have aligned reasonably well with the observed population levels. Throughout the six-month projections the population remained within the confidence intervals. At the end of the forecast period, the populations were close to the central conclusions scenario.

Figure 14. Prison population projections and the actual prison population beginning on 1st April 2025, based on courts and prison population data up to the end of March 2025. The actual population is shown as a series of black points up to 28th September 2025.

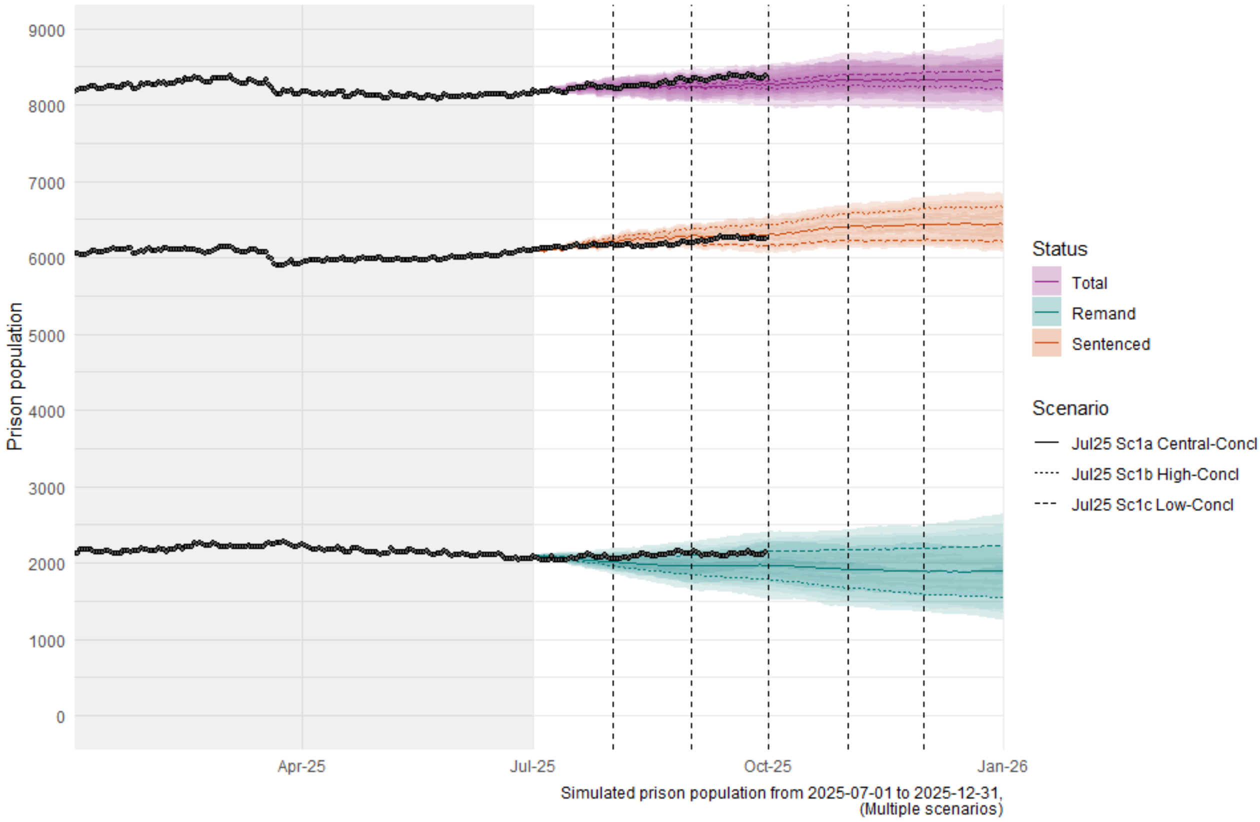


[30] Scottish Government Prison Population projections, 29th April 2025 [Scottish prison population projections: April 2025 - gov.scot]

[31] Scottish Government Prison Population projections, 7th August 2025 [Scottish prison population projections: July 2025 - gov.scot]

Figure 15 shows that the prison populations have also aligned with the latest projections published in August.

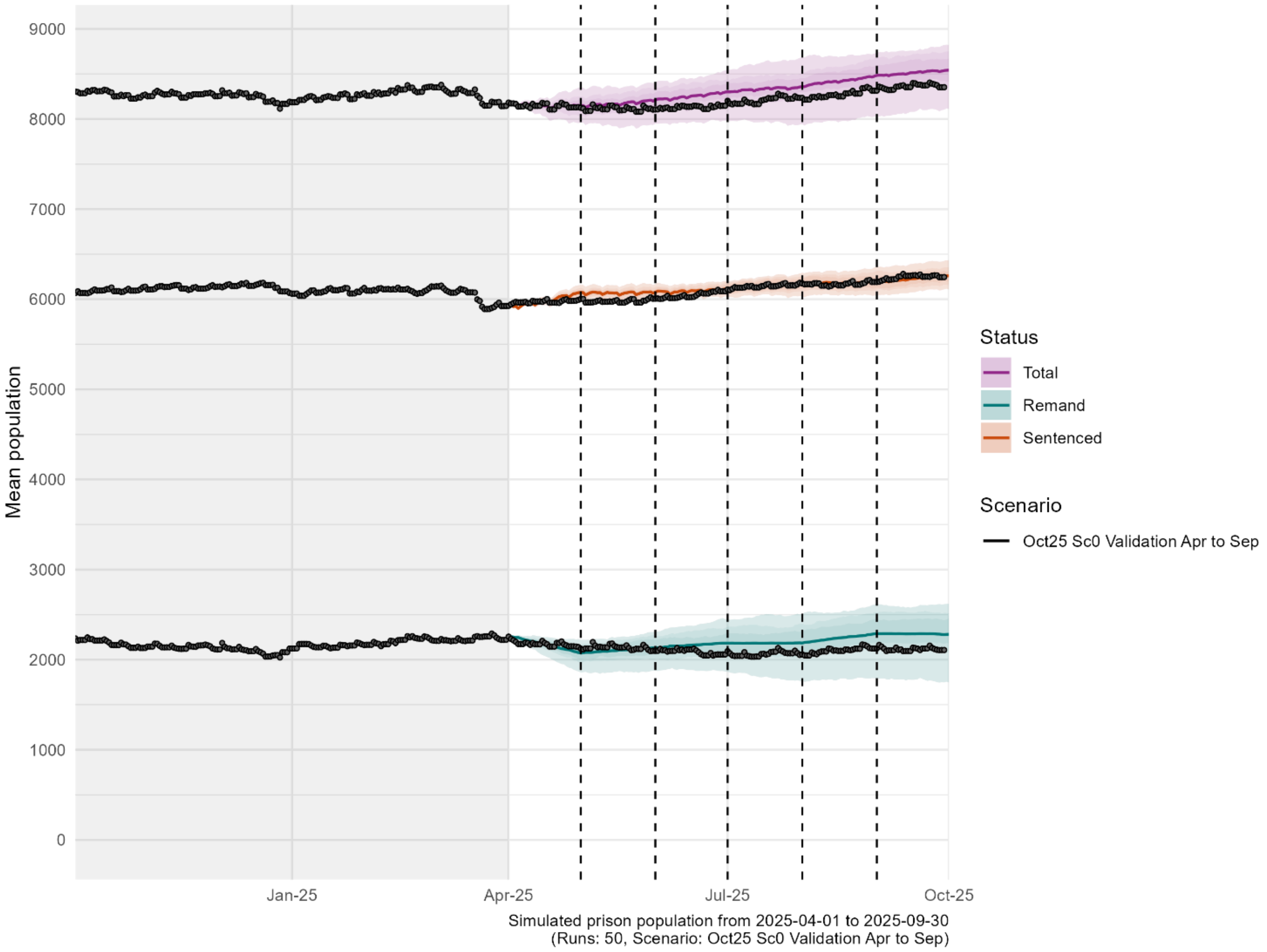
Figure 15. Prison population projections and actual prison population beginning on 1st July 2025, based on courts and prison population data up to the end of June 2025. The actual population is shown as a series of black points up to 1st October 2025.



To further assess the model, back-casting is used. This involves generating a retrospective projection using actual monthly court throughput data, thereby removing most assumption-based uncertainty. Any divergence between the back-cast and the actual figures may indicate technical limitations in the model.

The recent back-cast, presented in Figure 16, indicates that the actual prison population remained within the modelled range from April to September 2025.

Figure 16. The back-cast is based on remand arrival and courts throughput data from April 2025 to September 2025. The actual population is shown as a series of black points.



Microsimulation Model Limitations

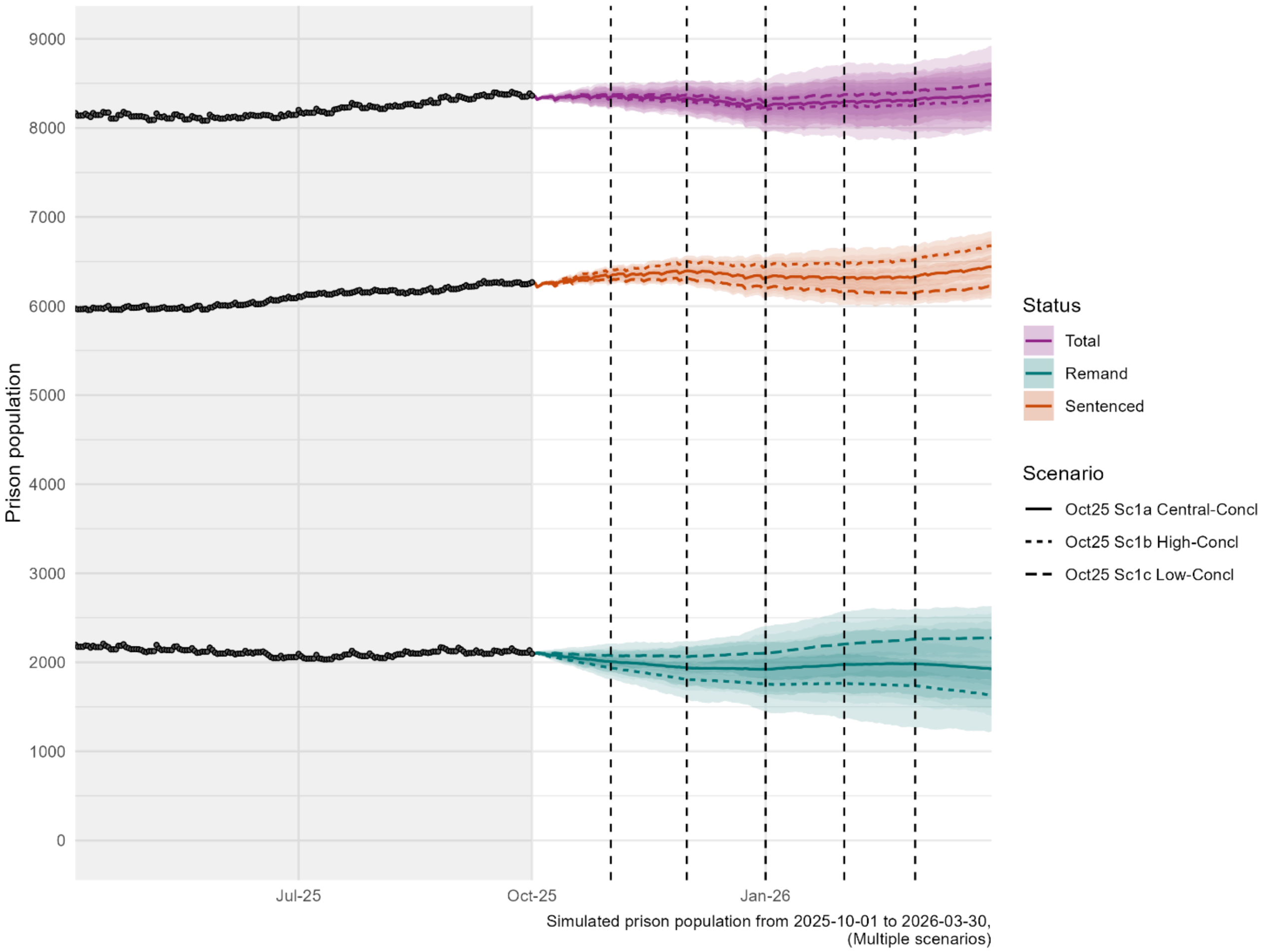
The model relies on access to a large amount of high-quality, frequently updated data on court activity and prison populations. Some of this data can be resource intensive to obtain and process.

The model does not currently simulate flows by crime type, so crime-specific trends are not explicitly modelled. However, there are plans to develop the model further and include case-mix in future modelling.

Microsimulation Model Results: October 2025 to March 2026

The latest prison population projections are shown in Figure 17 and Table 2 below.

Figure 17. Prison population projections for October 2025 to March 2026. The projection range (sometimes referred to as the *fan*) includes the overlapping 50%, 75% and 95% confidence intervals for all scenario variants given in Table 1. The actual population is shown as a series of black points.



On 1st October 2025, the total prison population was 8,363. The overall projected range for the average daily prison population in March 2026 is between 7,900 and 8,800. The modelling indicates it is likely that the overall prison population in Scotland will increase between the beginning of October 2025 and the end of March 2026.

The remand population on 1st October 2025 was 2,096. The projected range for the average daily remand population in March 2026 is between 1,250 and 2,600. Modelling indicates it is likely that the remand prison population in Scotland will decrease between October 2025 and March 2026. If the remand population decreases primarily because of enhanced monthly case conclusions, this could contribute to an increased sentenced population as people transition from remand to the sentenced population.

The sentenced population on 1st October 2025 was 6,267. The projected range for the average daily sentenced population in March 2026 is between 6,050 and 6,750. Modelling indicates it is likely that the sentenced prison population in Scotland will increase between October 2025 and March 2026. The rate of inflows to the sentenced population could increase if either the overall rate of transition from remand to the sentenced population increases or if there is a greater inflow of individuals directly from the community to the sentenced population.

Table 2. Prison average daily population upper/lower estimates for October 2025 to March 2026[32]. These estimates are calculated from the 95% confidence intervals combined across all three scenario variants given in Table 1.

Month	Remand		Sentenced		Total	
	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Oct 25	1,950	2,150	6,250	6,350	8,300	8,450
Nov 25	1,700	2,200	6,250	6,500	8,200	8,500
Dec 25	1,550	2,300	6,150	6,550	8,050	8,550
Jan 26	1,400	2,500	6,050	6,600	7,950	8,650
Feb 26	1,300	2,600	6,000	6,650	7,900	8,700
Mar 26	1,250	2,600	6,050	6,750	7,900	8,800

In Table 2 the upper total population and remand range estimates are from the lower court conclusion rate scenario. The lower range estimates for the total and remand populations are from the higher court conclusion rate scenario.

It should be reiterated that while the projections are based on recent trends, they do not explicitly model the impact of potential future policy or operational changes, nor their potential impact on the prison population.

[32] The values have been rounded to the nearest 50 and exclude the home detention curfew population. The upper and lower estimates of the total prison population may not be equal to the sum of the sentenced and remand populations as they can be from different scenario variants.

Conclusions

As of 1st October 2025, the prison population was 8,363. The modelling indicates a projected range for the average daily total prison population of between 7,900 and 8,800 in March 2026.

It is likely that the overall prison population will increase over the projection horizon.

It is likely that the remand population will decrease, and it is projected that the average daily remand population in March 2026 could be between 1,250 and 2,600.

It is likely that the sentenced population will increase, and it is projected that the average daily sentenced population could be between 6,050 and 6,750 in March 2026.

From October 2025 eligibility for HDC will be expanded to prisoners who have served 15% of their custodial sentence (down from 25%), and the maximum time prisoners can be released on an HDC licence will be increased to 210 days (from 180)[33].

As a result of increasing pressures on prison estate capacity, the Scottish Government recently announced measures to address and mitigate the rising prison population[34]. It should be noted that these latest prison population projections do not include the effects of these measures recently announced which are yet to commence.

Over the coming months, remand arrivals, sentenced arrivals, and case conclusion levels will be monitored to assess which scenario the actual prison population most closely aligns with.

For several reasons, the microsimulation becomes less accurate over longer time horizons. This could be due to systematic errors in the model, inaccurate assumptions due to unforeseen circumstances, or limitations in the model's ability to adapt to evolving and unforeseen circumstances. Experience to date suggests that a six-month projection window provides a reasonable balance between reliability and foresight.

As previously highlighted, the key short-term drivers of prison population change are the flows into and out of the remand and sentenced populations. These flows are influenced by factors such as the court recovery programme, including the reallocation of resources from summary to solemn in April 2023. The current modelling assumes no further changes to the number of courtrooms allocated to summary and solemn procedure until at least April 2026[35].

[33] Prison population: information note - October 2025 - gov.scot.
[34] Scotland's prison population: Ministerial statement - gov.scot.
[35] SCTS Courts modelling, September 2025, scts-modelling-report-sep-25-final.pdf.

Technical Annex

Terminology definitions

This section includes definitions and explanations of modelling practices and terminology used to describe the level and range of projections for the total, sentenced and remand prison populations.

Microsimulation scenario definitions

As in the first publication of June 2023, three scenario variates are reported: “low”, “central”, and “high” court throughput. It is assumed that remand arrivals will remain similar to the levels observed in the 12 months leading up to October 2025.

All scenarios use common underpinning data on court case progression and the prison population, sourced from the SCTS and the Scottish Prison Service, respectively. The scenarios differ only in their assumptions about how future levels of court case conclusion rates may evolve.

The microsimulation methodology requires each scenario to be simulated repeatedly – dozens of times – to generate confidence intervals for the total, sentenced and remand populations. The full projection includes the 95% confidence intervals for all three scenarios. These intervals are shown in Figures 1, 14, 15 and 17, and are overlapping, such that it is not possible to easily identify individual scenarios visually.

The upper and lower estimates of the populations in Table 2 represent the outer limits of the 95% confidence intervals for the most divergent scenarios.

Court throughput rate scenario definitions

The “central” scenario assumes that the average case throughput per court will remain similar to the average observed over the year leading up to the 1st October 2025 data cut-off.

The "high" scenario assumes that the average case throughput per court will be 10% greater than observed.

The "low" scenario assumes that the average case throughput per court will be 10% lower.

A rolling sampling period is used, meaning each edition of the projections incorporates case conclusion data from the most recent twelve-month period. This ensures that the model reflects current trends in each successive update.