# Scottish Justice Secretary faces backlash over youth crime response amid surging violence



Scottish Justice Secretary Angela Constance is facing fierce criticism following her dismissal of urgent calls for a stronger approach to tackling youth crime. Her comments, widely perceived as 'in denial', arise amid alarming reports of a staggering 600 per cent increase in serious assaults involving teenagers and a nearly 300 per cent rise in violence within schools over the past five years. This crisis has reached a boiling point, particularly following the tragic death of 16-year-old Kayden Moy, prompting the Scottish Conservatives to sharply criticise the ruling SNP government for its failure to act decisively, claiming its leniency is "costing lives."

During a recent appearance on BBC Scotland’s Sunday Show, Constance dismissed the push for tougher disciplinary measures as "misplaced," insisting on early interventions instead of punishment. However, many view this as a naive approach that ignores the severity of the ongoing crisis. Conservative leader Russell Findlay condemned the current justice system as "reckless," highlighting its inability to adequately address youth offending and asserting that the lack of discipline in schools is creating a fertile ground for further violence.

YouthLink Scotland's chief executive, Tim Frew, pointed out that cuts to youth services are exacerbating the issue. With council-provided youth workers decreasing by 50 per cent over the past eight years, the implications are dire. Despite acknowledging the complexity of youth violence, Constance’s insistence that solving the issue requires a multi-faceted approach falls flat for many critics, who argue that substantive funding cuts by her administration have played a significant role in this ongoing crisis, a direct consequence of SNP governance.

Scottish Labour’s Pauline McNeil has joined the chorus of dissent, calling for immediate, decisive action to tackle the 'devastating rise' in youth violence. “We owe it to the next generation to confront this crisis head-on and ensure the safety of our young people,” she urged, underscoring the pressing need for government support for youth services.

While overall crime rates in Scotland are reported to be at their lowest levels in nearly half a century, this does little to alleviate concerns about the specific rise in youth-related violence. In fact, figures from the current year reveal a troubling uptick in non-sexual violent crimes by 4 per cent. Indeed, the number of sexual crimes recorded has surged by 8 per cent in the last year alone, highlighting a stark reality that youth and sexual violence are on the rise, calling into question the effectiveness of the government's current policies.

Adding to the alarm, recent warnings from Police Scotland suggest that austerity measures could threaten effective policing, including potential job cuts and station closures. Critics contend that such measures allow serious offenders to escape accountability, particularly given current guidelines that minimize imprisonment for under-25s.

As the Scottish government gears up for its second youth violence summit of the year, skepticism looms large. The urgency of the crisis—amplified by harrowing personal tragedies—demands robust leadership and a fundamental reevaluation of how youth services and justice systems operate. The public is left hoping for a recalibrated strategy that prioritises effective intervention over the ineffective policies that have failed to protect Scotland's youth.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14747941/SNP-minister-dodges-responsibility-soaring-youth-crime-dismisses-calls-tougher-discipline.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.scot/news/crime-remains-at-lowest-levels-in-50-years/> - Scotland's recorded crime rates have remained at their lowest levels in nearly 50 years, with a 4% decrease compared to pre-pandemic levels in June 2019. The overall number of crimes recorded by police for the year ending June 2023 was 4% lower than in June 2019. This decline is attributed to efforts across policing, justice, and community safety partners to deliver safer communities and investments in the justice system. The Scottish Government has allocated £1.45 billion in policing for 2023-24, increasing the resource budget by 6.3%, an additional £80 million, despite financial challenges due to UK Government austerity and a fixed budget.
3. <https://www.gov.scot/news/recorded-crime-in-scotland-2023-24/> - Between 2022-23 and 2023-24, crimes recorded by the police in Scotland increased by 4%, from 289,362 to 299,780. Non-sexual crimes of violence rose by 4%, from 68,870 to 71,463, with common assault making up the majority. Sexual crimes decreased by 1%, from 14,602 to 14,484. Crimes of dishonesty increased by 7%, from 103,393 to 111,054. Damage and reckless behaviour crimes decreased by 5%, from 43,123 to 41,129. Crimes against society increased by 4% from 59,374 to 61,650. The clear-up rate for all recorded crimes was 54.1% in 2023-24, up from 53.3% in 2022-23.
4. <https://www.gov.scot/news/recorded-crime-in-scotland-year-ending-december-2023/> - In the year ending December 2023, police in Scotland recorded 302,076 crimes, a 5% increase from 287,678 in the previous year, but 2% lower than 308,434 in December 2019. Non-sexual crimes of violence were 4% higher compared to the year ending December 2022, increasing from 69,117 to 71,900 crimes. Sexual crimes were 2% higher compared to the year ending December 2022, increasing from 14,640 to 14,894 crimes. Crimes of dishonesty were 11% higher compared to the year ending December 2022, increasing from 100,754 to 111,682 crimes. Damage and reckless behaviour was 4% lower compared to the year ending December 2022, decreasing from 43,711 to 42,124 crimes. Crimes against society were 3% higher compared to the year ending December 2022, increasing from 59,442 to 61,476 crimes.
5. <https://www.holyrood.com/news/view%2Curgent-need-to-combat-online-child-sexual-abuse-angela-constance-says> - Justice Secretary Angela Constance highlighted the urgent need for education and intervention to tackle the growing rate of cybercrime targeting children. Speaking at the 2025 Public Sector Cyber Scotland conference, she noted that at least 20% of all recorded sexual crimes in Scotland involve the internet, with victims and perpetrators often being young and known to each other. She emphasized the rise in online sexual abuse, including sex, torture, online grooming, and the distribution of indecent images, fueled by widespread use of social media and mobile technology. Constance called for education and intervention by staff and workers who support young people.
6. <https://www.scottishlegal.com/articles/action-to-tackle-growing-prison-population> - Justice Secretary Angela Constance outlined actions to address the rise in Scotland's prison population, which has been growing consistently since the start of the year. The increase is attributed to more people arriving on remand and a longer-term trend of more people being convicted of serious crimes, leading to longer sentences. The Scottish Government's commitment includes encouraging more widespread use of community-based interventions where appropriate. Recent actions include extending the presumption against short sentences from 3 to 12 months in 2019, introducing electronic monitoring on bail, passing the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Act 2023 to refocus how remand is used, and providing £134 million to support community justice services in 2023-24.
7. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/09/19/alarm-bells-as-sexual-and-violent-crimes-surge-in-scotland/> - Sexual and violent crimes have surged in Scotland, according to official figures that should set 'alarm bells ringing' after police warned of deep cuts to officer numbers and services. Violent crime rose by 4% in the 12 months to June compared to the same period in 2019. The number of sex crimes surged by 8% over the same period to 14,834, including a 4% rise in rapes and attempted rapes. Among the other large increases compared to before the pandemic were a 50% rise in cases involving indecent photos of children and an 82% rise in fraud. Although overall crime levels increased by 2% compared to 2022, SNP ministers argued that they remained at historically low levels over the past 50 years. However, the Tories said the increase in rapes was 'deeply alarming' and warned that some sex attackers were avoiding prison due to sentencing guidelines stating that those aged under 25 should only be jailed as a last resort. The figures were also published after Police Scotland warned that the force could be forced to shed 2,000 jobs and close 30 stations due to SNP funding cuts.