



## COMMUNITY SAFETY MEDIA MONITOR



September 2023

The SCSN Media Monitor provides a snapshot of Community Safety related media/press stories from across Scotland, the UK and sometimes internationally.

Some of the stories are from outwith Scotland, but are included as developments in the rest of the UK and internationally may be relevant to community safety here and we hope will be of interest and contribute to sector conversations.

We will only source articles from media/press sources that correspond with our values as an organisation and that refrain from using stigmatising language or images.

### Alcohol and Other Drugs

Alcohol deaths rise to highest level in 14 years

The number of people in Scotland whose death was caused by alcohol has risen again to the highest level in 14 years.

The latest figures from National Records of Scotland (NRS) show 1,276 people died from conditions caused by alcohol in 2022. This was 31 (2%) more than the previous year, which was the highest number since 2008. Male deaths - which were unchanged at 836 - again accounted for about two thirds of alcohol-specific deaths. Female deaths increased by 31 to 440. - Read more [here](#).

Leading alcohol expert outlines how Scotland can win battle with booze as deaths hit 14 year high

Deaths related to [alcohol](#) are running at a 14-year high in Scotland. Now a debate is raging about what the Scottish and UK governments can actually do to tackle our country's deadly relationship with the bottle. One of Scotland's leading experts on alcohol policy, Dr Alastair MacGilchrist of Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems, says the government does have options.

These include more services for those with serious alcohol problems to tackle the immediate crisis. These services are not cheap – but there are other policies which could finally bring Scotland to a healthier relationship with alcohol. - Read more [here](#).

Phone app helped students cut down on drinking, researchers say

Worried that you drink too much? A new app may help you cut down. Research conducted among students with “unhealthy” alcohol habits found that the Smart app helped them to reduce both their overall intake and number of days on which they binge drank. - Read more [here](#).

Could decriminalisation solve Scotland's drug problem?

The number of people who died due to drug misuse in Scotland last year fell by 279 to the lowest level for five years.

However, Scotland continues to have the worst drug death rate in the UK and the rest of Europe, with narcotics claiming about 90 lives on average every month. The Scottish government is proposing to decriminalise the possession of drugs for personal use to "help and support people rather than criminalise and stigmatise them".

But the UK government, which controls drugs policy, has rejected the plan as dangerous and says it has no intention of giving the Scottish Parliament the power to enact the new policy. - Read more [here](#).

### **Women in Law Enforcement: Julia's story**

*This blog is adapted from a speech given at the 'Women in Law Enforcement' civil society side event organised by [Law Enforcement Action Partnership](#) (LEAP), at the 66th session of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND).*

Julia is a new member of [LEAP](#) a group of Police, undercover operatives, intelligence service, military and a range of figures from the criminal justice system who are joining together with communities to bring about drug law reform. - Read more [here](#).

Public health warning over potential risk of potent synthetic opioids

A warning has been issued about the potential harmfulness of illegal recreational drugs Nitazenes. The Manx public health directorate said while the group of synthetic opioids had not been found on the island yet they could lead to an overdose. The directorate said the potency and toxicity of the drug was potentially 100 times that of morphine. - Read more [here](#).

'Erratic' Metropolitan Police commander who wrote drug strategy 'smoked cannabis every day before work', hearing told

A Metropolitan Police commander who wrote the force's drug strategy was smoking cannabis daily before going to work, a misconduct hearing has been told.

Julian Bennett is facing three gross misconduct allegations at a tribunal in central London, including using cannabis, LSD and magic mushrooms between February 2019 and July 2020. He is also accused of refusing to comply with a lawful order to provide a sample for a drugs test and of lying - claiming medical reasons - about why he could not do so on 21 July 2020. - Read more [here](#).

Hundreds of children thrown out of school in English county lines hotspots

Hundreds of extremely vulnerable children at risk of being recruited by criminal gangs are being thrown out of schools in county lines hotspots. Figures obtained by BBC Radio 4's [File on 4 programme](#) revealed there were more than 1,200 exclusions and suspensions of children assessed by social services to be grooming targets in England's four largest drug-exporting regions between 2021 and 2023.

Exclusion is widely regarded by child protection experts as a trigger point for criminal exploitation as pupils removed from classrooms lose the structure of the school day and the oversight of teachers. Some are left unsupervised at home and others are sent to pupil referral units, where gangs often recruit. - Read more [here](#).

Nitrous oxide: Laughing gas ban could harm users, experts warn

The proposed ban of nitrous oxide could stop users seeking medical help in hospitals, health experts have warned.

In a letter to the government, seen by BBC Newsnight, 15 neurologists and related health experts say possession of the drug should not be criminalised. Despite rising numbers of hospital patients suffering the effects of so-called laughing gas, they warn the ban could worsen the stigma around users. The government has responded, saying it plans to go ahead with the ban. - Read more [here](#).

## Crime and Justice

Former solicitors general call for public inquiry into Andrew Malkinson case

Two former solicitors general have backed growing calls for a public inquiry into the wrongful conviction of Andrew Malkinson after the Guardian revealed that the police had key DNA evidence 16 years before he was cleared of rape.

Lord Garnier KC, who was David Cameron's first solicitor general, described the miscarriage of justice in Malkinson's case as "jaw-dropping" and called for a public inquiry to establish what went wrong. - Read more [here](#).

Andy Malkinson: Living costs deduction scrapped for wrongly convicted

A controversial rule which deducted living costs from compensation paid to wrongly jailed people has been scrapped. The government rethink follows the case of [Andrew Malkinson, who spent 17 years in jail for a rape he did not commit](#).

He welcomed the move but said he still faces a two-year wait for his payment. Speaking to the BBC, Mr Malkinson said: "It's a step in the right direction. But there's much more that needs changing too. - Read more [here](#).

### **'Wheels are coming off' miscarriage of justice watchdog, warns legal expert**

The "wheels are coming off" the miscarriage of justice watchdog, legal experts have warned, after it emerged that the commission's chair has been in Montenegro promoting her property business during one of its biggest modern scandals.

The Guardian [revealed](#) on Friday that Helen Pitcher, head of the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC), was pictured barefoot outside a mussels bar promoting her holiday home business while her organisation was in crisis over its handling of the Andrew Malkinson case. - Read more [here](#).

The terrible power of the state to ruin lives was exposed by the case of Andrew Malkinson (Comment)

We like to think that our criminal justice system locks up criminals and exonerates the innocent. A comforting working assumption; but the reality is more complex. High-profile miscarriages of justice – and the years some spend wrongfully in prison – are signs that the system sometimes gets it dreadfully wrong. One way of designing out wrongful convictions is through a demanding evidentiary threshold: to convict someone, juries need to be "sure" that a [defendant is guilty](#). The flipside of this is that the probably-guilty have to be allowed to walk free. - Read more [here](#).

Fears over reforms of legal regulation in Scotland

Lawyers and judges have claimed changes to how Scotland's legal profession is regulated could leave the justice system "open to political abuse".

Plans to reform how the profession is regulated would allow Scottish ministers to have more say over the running of the legal sector. But senior legal figures have warned the move threatens the sector's long-held independence. The Scottish government denied this and said it would improve accountability. - Read more [here](#).

Are Scotland's prisons fit for purpose?

When an Irish judge blocked a man's extradition to Scotland on humanitarian grounds, it raised questions about the state of Scotland's prisons.

Mr Justice Paul McDermott said Richard Sharples faced being locked up for 22 hours a day in less than 10ft (3m) of space. He said Scottish authorities could not guarantee that Mr Sharples' complex mental health needs could be met at either Barlinnie or Low Moss prisons. - Read more [here](#).

**'Serious failings' contributed to baby's death in 12-hour lone prison birth**

Serious systemic failings contributed to the death of a newborn baby in a cell at Europe's largest women's prison, a coroner has concluded.

Rianna Cleary, who was 18 at the time, gave birth to her daughter Aisha alone in her prison cell at HMP Bronzefield, in Surrey, on the night of 26 September 2019. The care-leaver was on remand awaiting sentence after pleading guilty to a robbery charge.

The inquest into the baby's death heard that Cleary's calls for help when she was in labour were ignored, she was left alone in her cell for 12 hours and bit through the umbilical cord to cut it. - Read more [here](#).

Three-quarters of prisons in England and Wales in appalling conditions as overcrowding fears grow

The vast majority of prisons are providing inadequate conditions or unacceptable treatment, according to an *Observer* investigation that has led to claims of prisoners being "warehoused" in a system in crisis.

An analysis of hundreds of inspections found that three-quarters of prisons in England and Wales are now providing insufficient standards in at least one respect.

More than a third were deemed to be insufficiently safe. On Saturday night, several senior figures warned that prisons were in the worst condition they had known. - Read more [here](#).

Action urged to avoid re-traumatisation of female crime victims

Efforts must be made to reduce the re-traumatisation of female victims and witnesses of crime to promote equality in the justice system, experts have told the Scottish Government.

Senior leaders in the sector, including Solicitor General Ruth Charteris KC, Police Scotland chief superintendent Hilary Sloan and Jen Ang of the Scottish Women's Rights Centre, are the co-authors of an independent report which advises ministers on how to improve the experiences of women in the justice system. - Read more [here](#).

## Policing

Police officers to face quicker sackings for gross misconduct in England and Wales

Police officers guilty of gross misconduct in England and Wales will face automatic sackings, the government has announced. The change follows high-profile cases of officers committing rape and murder.

The Police Federation, which represents rank and file officers, called the changes "a return to kangaroo courts". Under the new system, chief constables or their deputies will chair misconduct panels hearing serious allegations against officers. - Read more [here](#).

### **Police 'must show how it will tackle violence against women'**

Scottish Police should be more proactive in detailing how it will tackle violence against women and girls and discrimination within its ranks, His Majesty's chief inspector for police has said.

In his annual report published on Wednesday, Craig Naylor, HM chief inspector of constabulary in Scotland (HMCICS), praised Police Scotland and the retiring chief constable Sir Iain Livingstone for their work. - Read more [here](#).

### **Mental health triggers among police being missed, says Scottish officers' body**

Triggers for mental health breakdown and self-harm in overstretched police officers are being routinely missed, according to their representative body in [Scotland](#). The warning comes as the Guardian reveals a "startling" increase in the number of absences due to psychological disorders.

Data obtained through freedom of information (Fol) requests shows that absences caused by mental ill-health have nearly doubled among officers across Scotland in the eight years for which amalgamated figures are available, rising from 610 in 2015-16 to 1,154 in 2022-23, accounting for about 7% of the force.—Read more [here](#).

Police Scotland sued over 'outdated' antidepressant rule

A woman is suing Scotland's police force after a "dream" job offer was withdrawn because she was taking antidepressants. Laura MacKenzie was described as an impressive candidate whose application to become a probationary police officer "stood out". She was shocked that Police Scotland had, "such a stigmatising attitude towards mental health."

The recruitment inspector was also said to be "apologetic" for the decision to rescind her offer of employment. - Read more [here](#).

Public 'at risk' if police and fire funding disputes not solved

Frontline responders from two of Scotland's emergency services have demanded the Scottish Government implement new pay rises and roll back planned cuts as forces are "stretched to the limit".

Workers represented by the Scottish Police Federation (SPF) held a demonstration in Edinburgh over their fight for an 8.5% pay uplift, while in Glasgow the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) gathered in George Square to protest against £11m worth of cuts to "meet immediate financial challenges". - Read more [here](#).

## Cyber Crime/Security & Online Safety

Police Scotland record more than 3500 online grooming crimes

POLICE Scotland have recorded more than 3500 online grooming crimes, according to new figures published by the NSPCC.

The new research also shows that in Scotland, 1873 offences took place against primary school children, with under-13s making up more than half of victims. The new analysis comes ahead of MPs and Lords making final decisions on the Online Safety Bill next month. - Read more [here](#).

Cyber-attack on UK's electoral registers revealed

The UK's elections watchdog has revealed it has been the victim of a "complex cyber-attack" potentially affecting millions of voters.

The Electoral Commission said unspecified "hostile actors" had managed to gain access to copies of the electoral registers, from August 2021. Hackers also broke into its emails and "control systems" but the attack was not discovered until October last year. - Read more [here](#).

Blocking feature to be removed from former Twitter platform X, says Musk

Social media company X, formerly known as Twitter, will remove a protective feature that lets users block other accounts, [Elon Musk](#) has said in another controversial move for the company he bought last year.

The block function allows a user to restrict specific accounts from contacting them, seeing their posts or following them. "Block is going to be deleted as a 'feature', except for DMs [direct messages]," Musk [said](#) in a post on the platform, saying later: "It makes no sense." - Read more [here](#).

**Let's ditch the tired tropes about video games – and research their impact properly** (Comment)

No, gaming isn't a niche, violence-inducing pastime, it's the defining entertainment medium of our time. We should treat it as such.

Over the past few years, it feels as if there has been a subtle shift in the way that we view video games. That classic trope of games being a socially isolating experience, primarily within the purview of angry, pallid teenage boys, seems increasingly tired and outdated – because it is. Video games are no longer a niche, nerdy pastime. Much the opposite: they are one of, or perhaps *the* defining entertainment medium of the 21st century. - Read more [here](#).

**UK cybersecurity agency warns of chatbot 'prompt injection' attacks**

The UK's cybersecurity agency has warned that chatbots can be manipulated by hackers to cause scary real-world consequences.

The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has said there are growing cybersecurity risks of individuals manipulating the prompts through "prompt injection" attacks.

This is where a user creates an input or a prompt that is designed to make a language model – the technology behind chatbots – behave in an unintended manner. - Read more [here](#).

## Human Rights/Equalities

Clampdown on gender-neutral toilets planned by the government

The government has confirmed it is working to reverse the "rise in gender-neutral toilets" as part of its wider efforts to protect single-sex spaces. Regulations will mean single-sex toilets become the default and minimum for new non-residential buildings and those undertaking major refurbishment. - Read more [here](#).

Mhairi Black: Trans people should not be made into intellectual debate

TRANSGENDER people's lives should not be up for "intellectual debate" and the media and politicians should "leave them the hell alone", [Mhairi Black](#) has said. The [SNP's](#) depute [Westminster](#) leader said "bad actors" are using the debate around trans people as a "wedge issue to cause chaos", adding that the only place where sex, not gender, should matter is in a medical setting. - Read more [here](#).

Two men stabbed in homophobic attack in Clapham, London

TWO men were taken to hospital after being stabbed in a homophobic attack outside a nightclub. The men, one aged in their 20s and the other in their 30s, were treated at hospital and discharged following the incident which took place on Sunday night. - Read more [here](#).

UK would be outlier with Russia if it left ECHR, Law Society says

The UK would be an international outlier along with Russia and Belarus if it left the European convention on human rights, a leading law body has warned, after a senior minister signalled that the move could be an option to stop small boat crossings. Robert Jenrick, the immigration minister, said the government would do "whatever is necessary", even if that meant pulling out of the ECHR, the 70-year-old pan-European treaty that protects human rights and political freedoms in the continent. - Read more [here](#).

### **Bibby Stockholm asylum barge is 'potential deathtrap', say firefighters**

Firefighters have accused ministers of attempting to house asylum seekers on a "potential deathtrap" after health and safety officials prompted a further delay to the use of a giant barge until next week. The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) said it is planning to write to the Home Office about overcrowding and access to fire exits on the vessel. - Read more [here](#).

## General Community Safety

Most motorists want noise cameras installed to clamp down on loud cars

Some 58% of drivers want to see cameras that detect illegally loud vehicles rolled out across the UK, according to a new survey. The RAC poll found that 22% of the 1,424 motorists polled were against the idea - and 20% were unsure. A £300,000 trial of noise cameras began in a small number of areas in England last year. - Read more [here](#).

### **'Frightening' rise in vehicles driving wrong way on England's motorways**

Incidents of vehicles being driven the wrong way on England's motorways rose to almost 900 in the last 12 months, an increase of 13%, according to figures described as "frightening".

Alarmed motoring groups called for technological interventions to reverse the increase in these potentially lethal driving errors, which are thought to be linked to an overreliance by drivers on satnav devices. - Read more [here](#).



## **Dramatic climate action needed to curtail 'crazy' extreme weather**

The "crazy" extreme weather rampaging around the globe in 2023 will become the norm within a decade without dramatic climate action, the world's leading climate scientists have said. The heatwaves, wildfires and floods experienced today were just the "tip of the iceberg" compared with even worse effects to come, they said, with limitations in climate models leaving the world "flying partially blind" into the future. - Read more [here](#).

Global heating likely to hit world food supply before 1.5C, says UN expert

The world is likely to face major disruption to food supplies well before temperatures rise by the 1.5C target, the president of the UN's desertification conference has warned, as the impacts of the climate crisis combine with water scarcity and poor farming practices to threaten global agriculture. - Read more [here](#).

Plan for carbon tax on Scotland's largest estates gains momentum

A RANGE of community groups, trade unions, churches, charities, and businesses representing over a million members are calling for the introduction of a world-leading tax for greenhouse [gas](#) emissions on landholdings over 1000 hectares in Scotland. - Read more [here](#).

## **Sunak's new oil and gas licences are 'moral and economic madness'**

By [announcing hundreds](#) of new oil and gas licences, the prime minister, Rishi Sunak, has become a "dangerous radical" pursuing "moral and economic madness". That is not the judgment of Just Stop [Oil](#), or any other environmental campaign group, but the United Nations secretary general, António Guterres. - Read more [here](#).

## **Weed-choked pavements anger residents as 'rewilding' divides UK towns and cities**

Brighton is home to the UK's only Green member of parliament and is outwardly a bastion of progressive politics. Wild spaces here are not only the rolling hills of East Sussex or the beachfront but the smaller, often overlooked, green areas within residential neighbourhoods.

These untamed enclaves are full of nature's drama, but another kind of drama is playing out among residents who feel that rewilding in the city's backyard has gone too far. - Read more [here](#).

83 Princes Street  
Edinburgh, EH2 2ER  
0131 225 8700/7772

Email: [info@scsn.org.uk](mailto:info@scsn.org.uk)  
Company Ltd. SC357649  
Charity No. SC040464

[www.safercommunitiesScotland.org](http://www.safercommunitiesScotland.org)

