

# **Prison population projections: February 2024 edition**

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This report presents short term prison population projections for the six month period from January to June 2024<sup>1</sup>. This is the third issue of projections to be published. They have been produced using ‘microsimulation’ scenario modelling which simulates prison arrivals and departures, to estimate the number of individuals in prison on a particular date in the future. The first issue of the Scottish prison population projections<sup>2</sup> provided a detailed overview of the modelling technique used.

The projections are produced to help inform decision making, planning and policy development. They do not take account of the complexity of the prison population (as this is not the intention) and are meant for high level policy development rather than for the day to day management of those in prison.

## 1 Key Points

The latest prison population projections to June 2024 show that:

- The overall prison population in Scotland is most likely to either remain stable or rise slightly between January and June 2024, with a projected range of between 7,350 and 8,450 for the average daily prison population in June 2024. On 5<sup>th</sup> February 2024, the prison population was around 7,900.
- It is most likely that the remand population will remain stable between January 2024 and June 2024. If it decreases because of enhanced monthly case conclusions, this may contribute to an increased sentenced population as more individuals transition from remand.
- It is most likely that the sentenced population will either remain stable or rise slightly; it may rise if 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 into the sentenced population.

There is uncertainty in the prison population projections over the next six months due to several factors, including variability in court case registrations and throughput.

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<sup>1</sup> The projections start at the beginning of January because data available to us on cases progressing through courts only currently extends up to the end of December 2023 (due to a time lag on receiving the processed data). As a result, the initial prison population used for the modelling is from 1st January 2024.

<sup>2</sup> For more information, refer to [Scottish prison population projections - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/prison-population-projections-2024-02/pages/1-introduction.aspx).

## 2 Background

The ‘microsimulation’ scenario modelling approach simulates arrivals and departures of individuals to and from the prison population to help estimate the number of individuals in prison on a particular date in the future. The microsimulation model uses individual-level data to construct a representation of the population of interest. The model can simulate, using known probabilities, changes in individuals’ status over time<sup>2</sup>.

To produce outputs, the model draws on particular court activity data, for example, levels of court hearings at different stages (pre-trial/trial) in High Court, Sheriff Court Summary and Sheriff Court Solemn. This data is also used to estimate levels of remand arrivals in the coming months. The model includes assumptions on future court capacity, as these are currently the most important factor that is likely to impact on prison population changes in the short/medium term. The model does not currently simulate flows for different crime-types, so crime-based trends are not explicitly modelled. As the model can be validated against historical data and can reflect a wide variety of dynamics, it is suitable for forecasting both in the short and medium term. However, due to uncertainty underlying the justice system’s recovery (e.g., the rate at which court backlogs can be tackled) which impacts the model’s assumptions and longer-term predictive power, currently only a 6-month projection is provided.

The rest of this report is organised as follows. Section 3 provides a brief overview of the prison population from 2020 to 2023 and court demand trends from 2014 to 2023. Section 4 provides an overview of the assumptions used to project the prison population and explains how the model’s previous projections are validated for robustness against the actual prison population in recent months. Section 5 summarises the population projection results for the period from January to June 2024. Section 6 concludes the report and briefly discusses factors which may influence the size of the prison population in the longer term.

## 3 Overview of Scottish Prison Population and Court Demand Trends

Figure 1 shows that since 2020 there have been substantial changes to the total, remand, and sentenced populations both during and after the pandemic.

### **Total population**

The prison population was relatively stable (within the range 7,350 to 7,650) from September 2020 until late 2022. Last year it rose substantially, especially between 1<sup>st</sup> February 2023 and 1<sup>st</sup> October 2023 when it increased by over 500 from 7,400 to almost 7,950. In the period from early October until late December 2023 the total population was relatively stable (between 1<sup>st</sup> October and 21<sup>st</sup> December it remained between 7,910 and 8,030). The daily prison population briefly exceeded 8,000 on a total of seven days in November and December 2023. The population reduced in late

December, reaching just over 7,800 on 23<sup>rd</sup> December, before rebounding slightly, as expected.

### **Remand population**

The remand population increased at the beginning of 2022, reaching a high of nearly 2,300 on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2022, then decreased gradually (other than around December 2022/January 2023), reaching just over 2,100 on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023. During April and May 2023 the remand population increased, to reach a peak of just over 2,300 in late May. From around August the remand population generally decreased gradually, reaching around 2,100 on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024. The outlook for the remand population in early 2024 remains uncertain and it is unknown whether it will follow the trends seen in the early parts of recent years.

### **Sentenced population**

The sentenced population decreased slightly during 2022, from around 5,350 in January to around 5,250 in December 2022. In contrast, during 2023 the sentenced population increased markedly, reaching a peak of nearly 5,900 in December 2023. The sentenced population reduced a little in late December but increased again slightly in early January<sup>3</sup>.

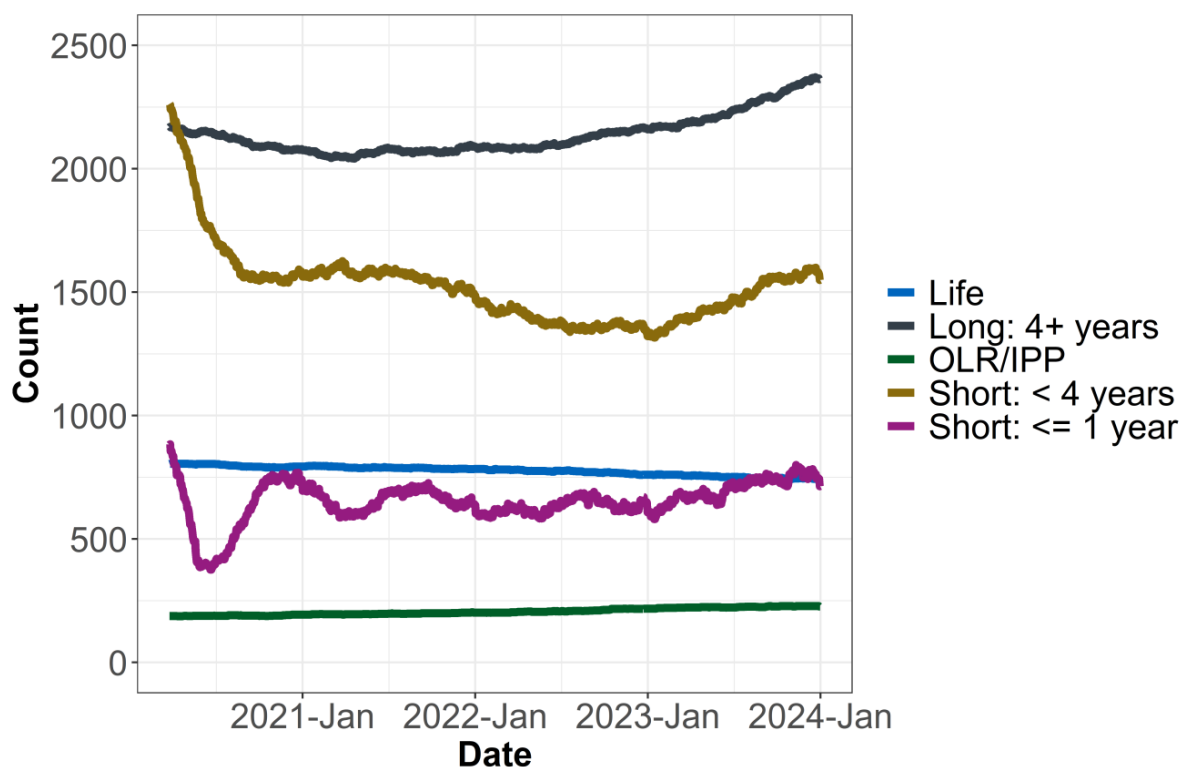
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<sup>3</sup> SPS Prison Population up to 26<sup>th</sup> January 2024, accessed 2024-02-05, [SPS Prison Population](#).



The sentenced prison population from 2020 to 2023, sub-divided by sentence length is shown in Figure 2 below. The population serving sentences of less than or equal to one year in length increased in 2023<sup>5</sup>. The population serving sentences of one to four years also increased during 2023. The population serving overall sentences of more than four years, as well as those serving Orders of Lifelong Restriction, have seen continuous increases over several years and now exceed pre-pandemic levels. The population serving life sentences has seen a small gradual decline since 2020 (which continued in 2023).

**Figure 2.** Prison populations by overall sentence, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2020 to 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024<sup>6</sup>.



The growth in the total prison population during 2023 was driven by a rise in both remand and sentenced arrivals to custody<sup>4</sup>. The remand population is influenced by the level of new cases registered and cases concluded in Scottish Courts<sup>7</sup>. The level of court throughput (case conclusions) also has implications for the flow into the sentenced population. The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service (SCTS) frequently

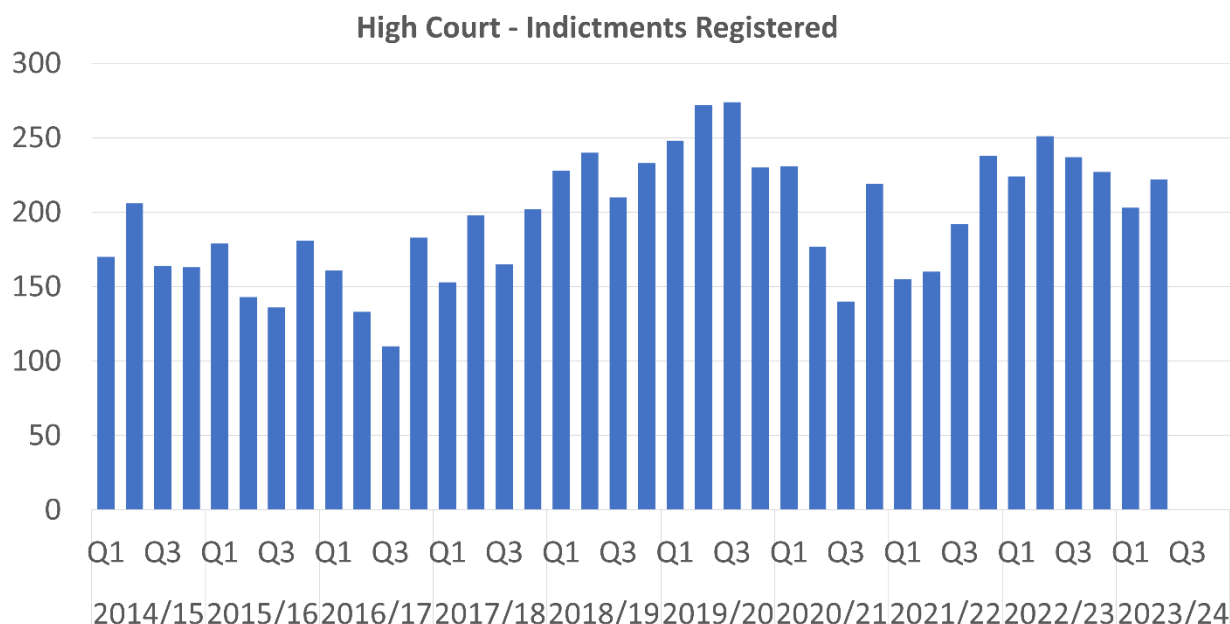
<sup>5</sup> Prison population monthly report, January 2024, [Justice Analytical Services \(JAS\) Safer Communities and Justice Statistics Monthly Data Report: January 2024 edition - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#).

<sup>6</sup> Prison population sentence, January 2024, [Justice Analytical Services \(JAS\) Safer Communities and Justice Statistics Monthly Data Report: January 2024 edition - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#).

<sup>7</sup> 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 37.0% and 5.7 to 6.0% respectively during the past three years.

publish information on the level of registrations and conclusions across all courts<sup>8</sup>. The charts in Figures 3 to 8 below show registrations and conclusions for High Court, Sheriff Court Solemn and Sheriff Court Summary. Figure 3 shows the number of High Court indictment registrations between 2014/15 Q1 (covering April to June 2014) and 2023/24 Q2 (covering July to September 2023)<sup>9</sup>. There were 939 High Court indictments in 2022/23, which was an increase of 26% compared to 745 in 2021/22. As shown in figure 4 the introduction of a further 2 additional High Court courtrooms in April 2023<sup>10</sup> was followed by two quarters (Q1 and Q2 2023/24) when the conclusions were higher than in any other quarter since the first COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020. Similarly, as shown in figure 6, following the introduction of 6 further Sheriff Court Solemn trial courts in April 2023, conclusions in 2023/24 Q1 and Q2 were higher than at any time since at least 2014/15 Q1. Case registrations (see figure 5) in Sheriff Solemn have also been high recently; the levels in 2023/24 Q1 and Q2 of over 1,850 indictments each were both higher than in any other quarter since at least 2014/15 Q1.

**Figure 3.** High Court Indictments registered<sup>11</sup>.



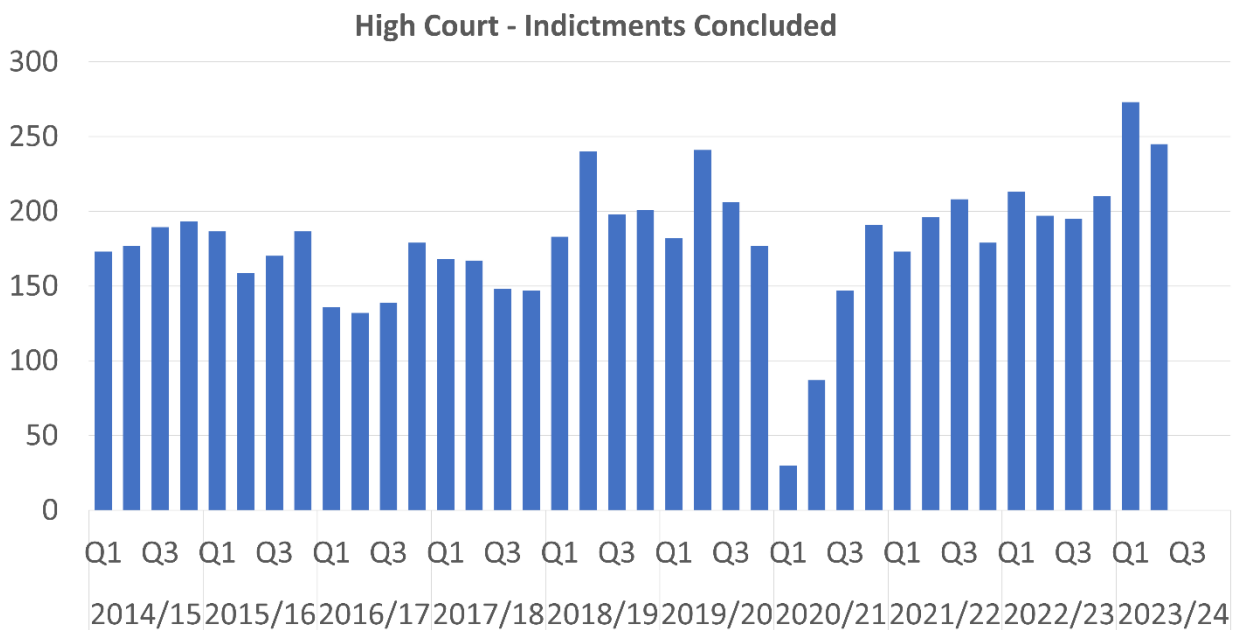
<sup>8</sup> SCTS official statistics, MI and analysis, [SCTS Official Published Statistics \(scotcourts.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/scts-official-published-statistics).

<sup>9</sup> The SCTS Quarterly Criminal Court Statistics provide quarterly Official Statistics on criminal case activity in Scotland. They follow an annual cycle which begins on 1<sup>st</sup> April, hence Q1 covers April to June, Q2 covers July to September, Q3 includes October to December and Q4 runs from January to March. For further information see [latest quarterly criminal court figures show progress in Sheriff solemn backlogs \(scotcourts.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/latest-quarterly-criminal-court-figures-show-progress-in-sheriff-solemn-backlogs).

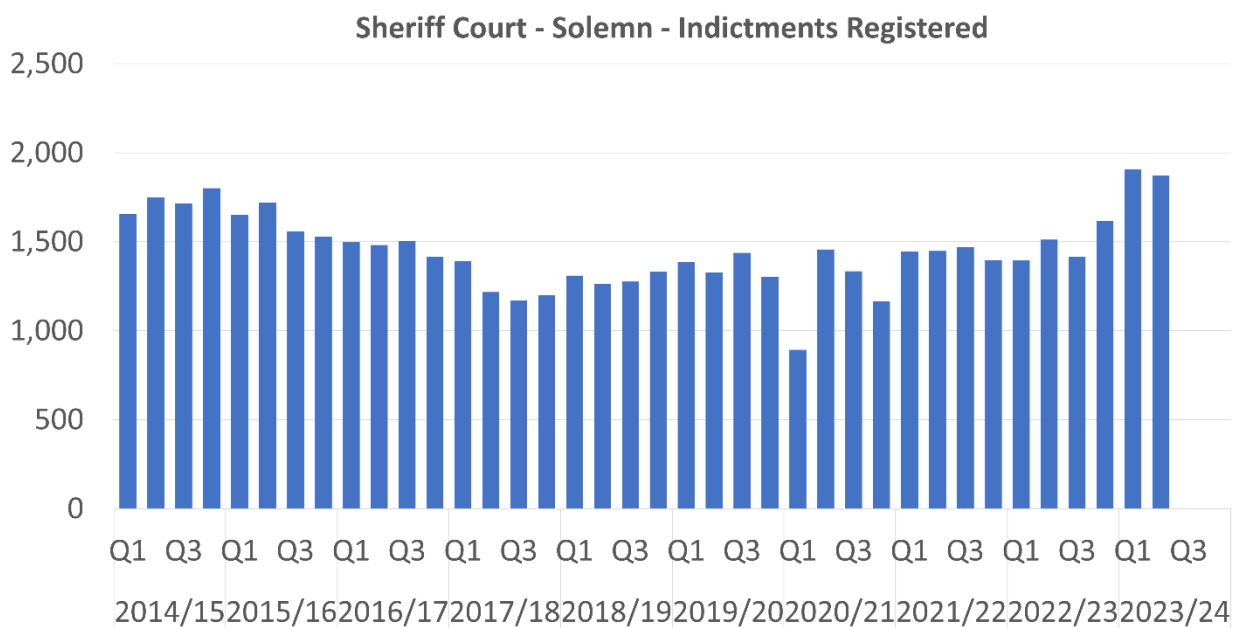
<sup>10</sup> April 2023 SCTS switch of court recovery resources from summary to solemn, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2023, [Monthly information on Criminal Case Throughput for March 2023 \(scotcourts.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/monthly-information-on-criminal-case-throughput-for-march-2023).

<sup>11</sup> SCTS QCC bulletin, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023, High Court (QCC 2b), [SCTS Official Published Statistics \(scotcourts.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/scts-official-published-statistics).

**Figure 4.** High Court Indictments concluded<sup>12</sup>.



**Figure 5.** Sheriff Court Solemn Indictments registered<sup>13</sup>.

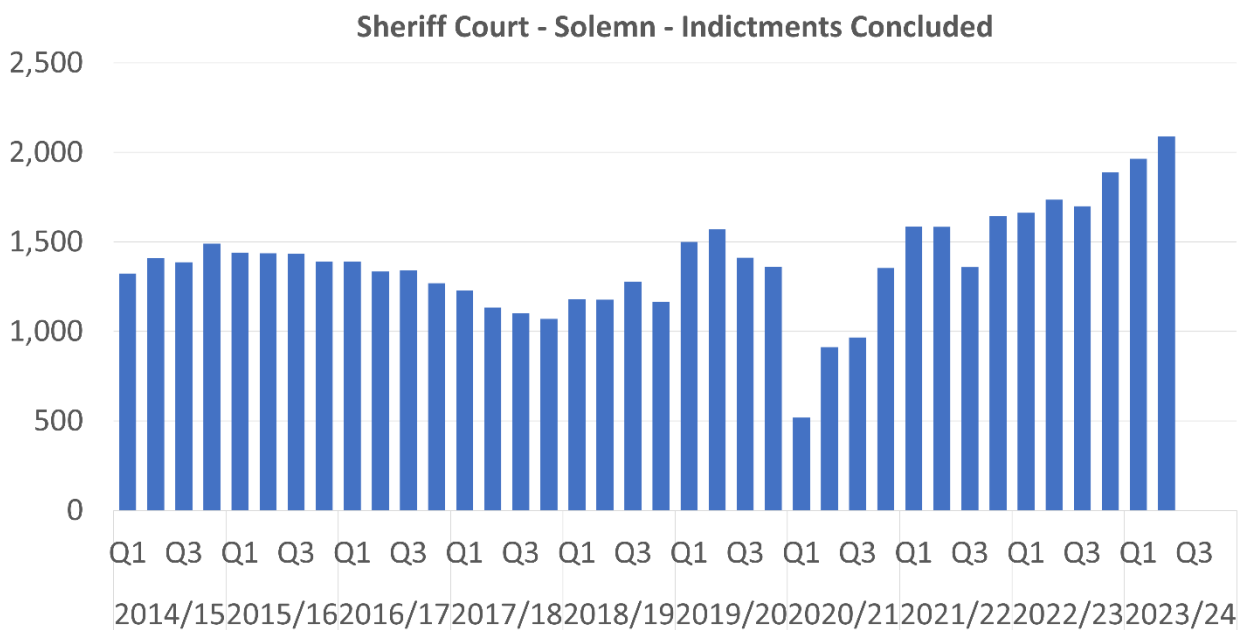


<sup>12</sup> SCTS QCC bulletin, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023, High Court (QCC 2b), [SCTS Official Published Statistics \(scotcourts.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk).

<sup>13</sup> SCTS QCC bulletin, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023, Sheriff Court Solemn (QCC 3b), [SCTS Official Published Statistics \(scotcourts.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk).

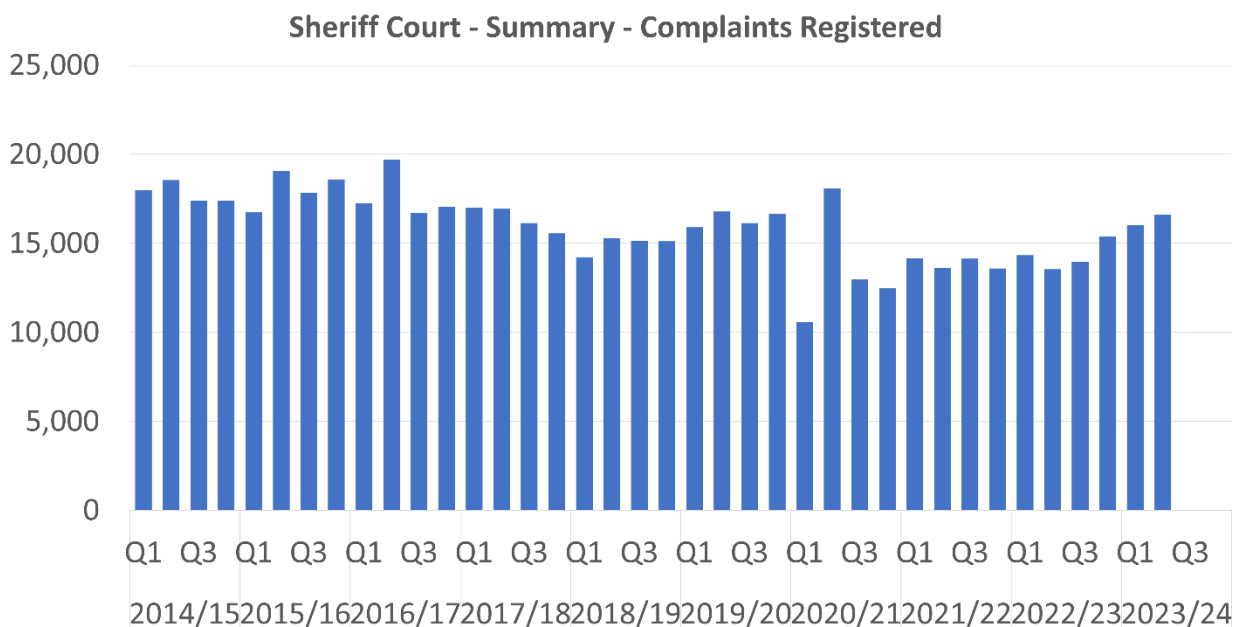


**Figure 6.** Sheriff Court Solemn Indictments concluded<sup>14</sup>.



The level of complaints registered in Sheriff Summary Courts has been increasing in recent quarters (see figure 7), and was at its highest level in 2023/24 Q2 since 2020/21 Q2. Sheriff Court Summary conclusions are down compared to last year. At 15,566, the number of Sheriff Summary complaint conclusions (see figure 8) was around 7% lower in 2023/24 Q2 than in 2022/23 Q2 (16,778).

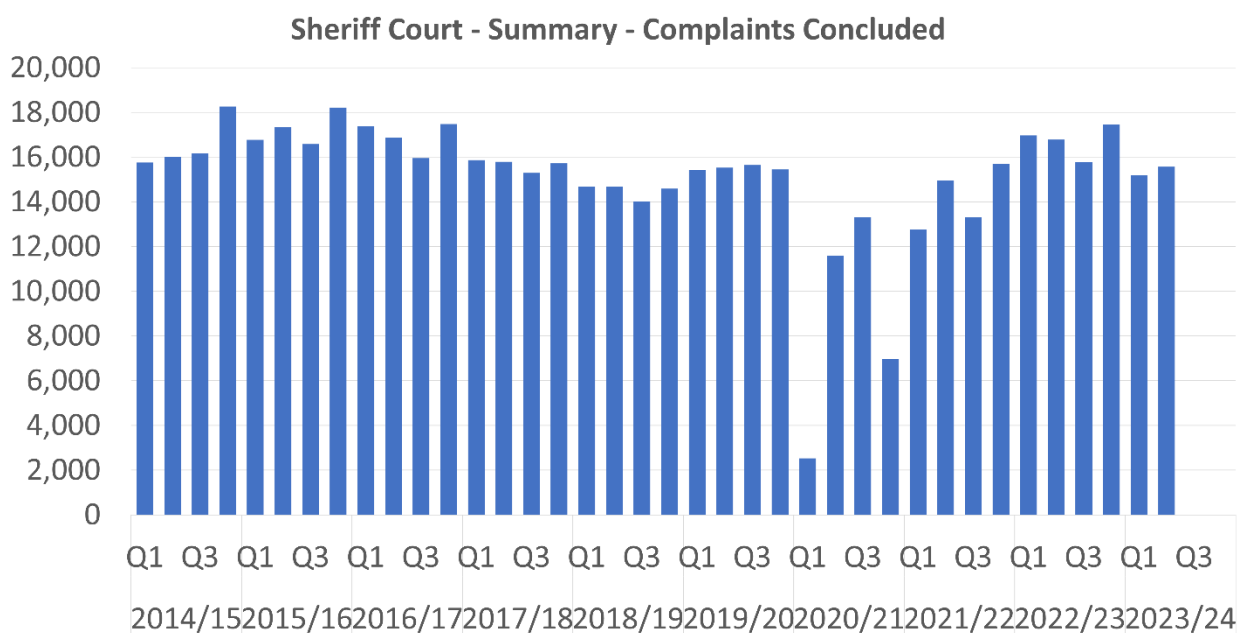
**Figure 7.** Sheriff Court Summary complaints registered<sup>15</sup>.



<sup>14</sup> SCTS QCC bulletin, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023, Sheriff Court Solemn (QCC 3b), [SCTS Official Published Statistics \(scotcourts.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk).

<sup>15</sup> SCTS QCC bulletin, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023, Sheriff Court Summary (QCC 4b), [SCTS Official Published Statistics \(scotcourts.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk).

**Figure 8. Sheriff Court Summary complaints concluded<sup>16</sup>.**



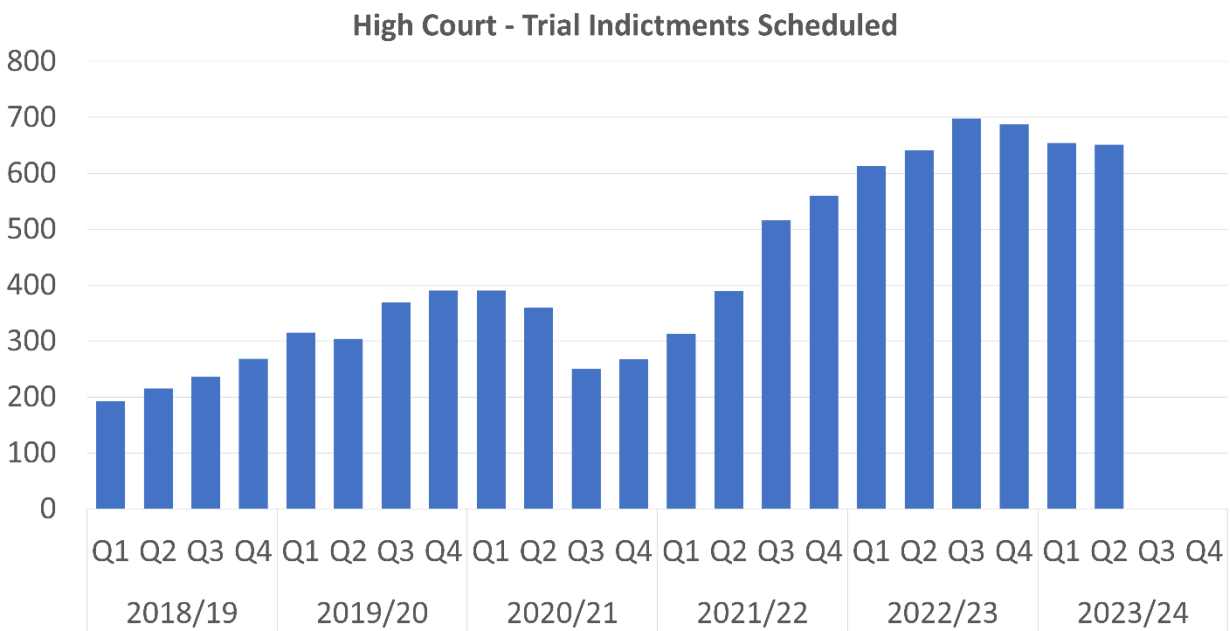
Taking all courts into consideration, the levels of case registrations and throughput contributed to an elevated level of remand and sentenced arrivals in the first half of 2023/24.

SCTS monthly management information<sup>17</sup> shows that the national total trials scheduled across all criminal courts increased steeply, due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, by around 140% from 18,100 in April 2020 to over 43,600 at its peak in January 2022. By the end of November 2023 it had fallen to less than 28,000. Recently, the number of outstanding trials in High Court (see figure 9) decreased by 5% from 687 to 651 during the first 6 months of 2023/24. In addition, the number of Sheriff Solemn outstanding trials (figure 10) decreased by 14% over the course of the first 6 months of 2023/24. As figure 11 shows, the number of Sheriff Summary trials outstanding increased slightly between the end of 2022/23 Q4 and the end of 2023/24 Q2.

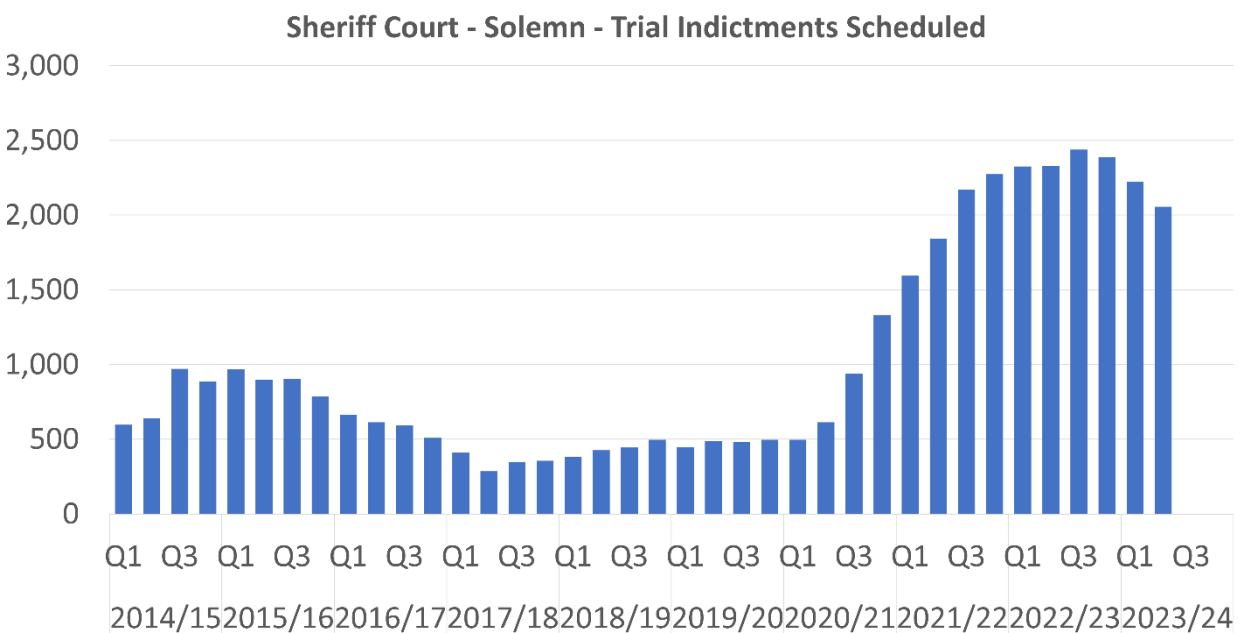
<sup>16</sup> SCTS QCC bulletin, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023, Sheriff Court Summary (QCC 4b), [SCTS Official Published Statistics \(scotcourts.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/statistics).

<sup>17</sup> SCTS QCC bulletin, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023, National Overview of criminal court cases in Scotland (QCC 1a), SCTS Management Information, [SCTS Official Published Statistics \(scotcourts.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/statistics).

**Figure 9.** High Court scheduled trials at end of period<sup>18</sup>.



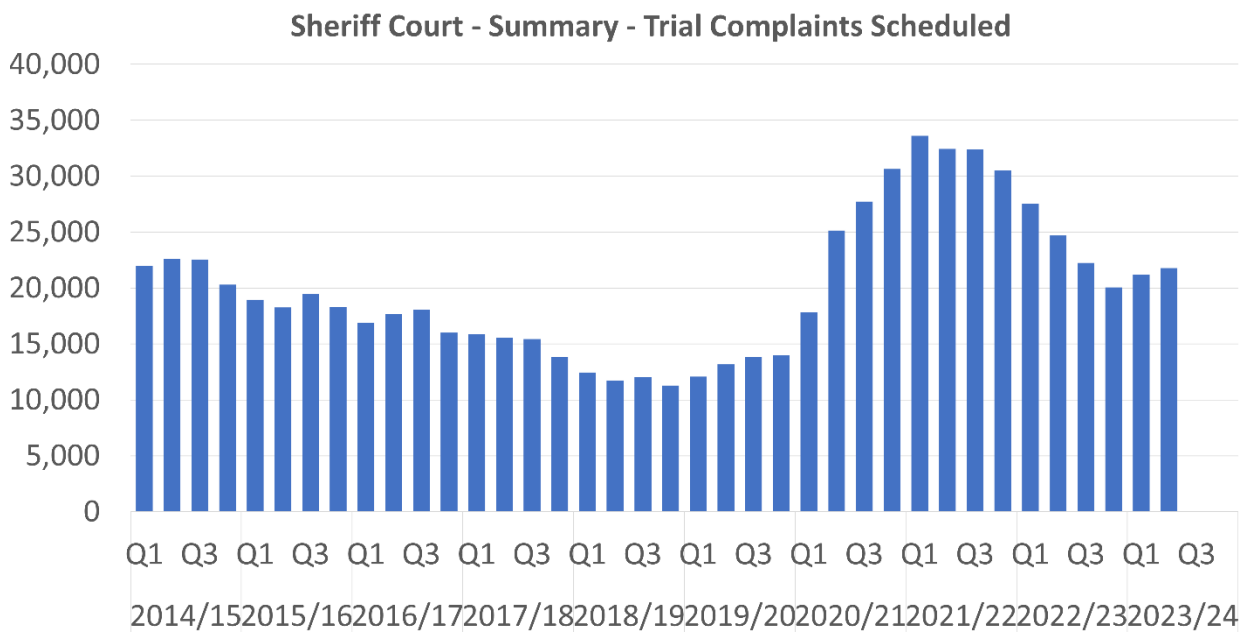
**Figure 10.** Sheriff Court Solemn scheduled trials at end of period<sup>19</sup>.



<sup>18</sup> SCTS QCC bulletin, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023, High Court trial indictments scheduled (QCC 2b), [SCTS Official Published Statistics \(scotcourts.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/scts-official-published-statistics).

<sup>19</sup> SCTS QCC bulletin, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023, Sheriff Court Solemn trial indictments scheduled (QCC 3b), [SCTS Official Published Statistics \(scotcourts.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/scts-official-published-statistics).

**Figure 11.** Sheriff Court Summary scheduled trials at end of period<sup>20</sup>.



<sup>20</sup> SCTS QCC bulletin, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023, Sheriff Court Summary trial indictments scheduled (QCC 4b), [SCTS Official Published Statistics \(scotcourts.gov.uk\)](https://scotcourts.gov.uk).

# 4 Introduction to Prison Population Projections

This section provides an overview of the assumptions and scenarios developed to project the prison population and explains how the model's previous projections are validated for robustness against actual prison population figures in recent months. The first issue of the Scottish prison population projections<sup>21</sup> provides a more detailed overview on the modelling technique used.

## Model Assumptions and Scenarios

The scenarios on which the projections are based on a variety of assumptions about how the rate of transitions into and out of the prison population might change. These can be influenced by trends and planned changes to the court system, including: court capacity changes, increased court conclusions rate, increased remand arrivals, remand/bail mix and 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.

Due to the level of the inflows and outflows which contributed to growth in the sentenced and remand populations in early 2023, and the abrupt seasonal population changes which usually occur between December and the beginning of January<sup>22</sup>, additional scenarios were developed and added to the November 2023 projections. In the first issue of the Scottish prison population projections<sup>23</sup> publication only low, central and high court throughput scenarios were considered. In addition to these three court throughput scenarios, six new scenarios featuring varying remand arrivals (low, central and high) combined with court throughput variation were introduced in the last publication<sup>24</sup>. A full breakdown of all nine scenarios is given in table 1. This set of scenarios has been developed to account for uncertainty in future remand arrivals, especially in early 2024. Additionally, case registrations in Sheriff Summary and Sheriff Solemn were higher in Q2 2023/24 (July to September 2023) than during Q2 2022/23<sup>7</sup> (July to September 2022) and increased case registration can contribute to elevated remand arrivals.

Three variations of remand arrivals assumptions have been used for the scenarios:

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<sup>21</sup> Scottish Government Prison Population projections, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2023, [Scottish prison population projections - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/prison-population-projections-2023-06-01/pages/1-1-introduction.aspx).

<sup>22</sup> Seasonal trends for the prison population since the pandemic feature some general similarities around the turn of the year. The sentenced population around late November/early December tends to increase and then between Christmas and the first week of January decrease steeply. The remand population tends to reduce from late November/early December, tends to increase sharply and then stabilise between Christmas and the 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.

<sup>23</sup> For more information, refer to [Scottish prison population projections - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/prison-population-projections-2023-11-01/pages/1-1-introduction.aspx).

<sup>24</sup> Scottish Government Prison Population projections, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2023, [Prison population projections: November 2023 edition - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/prison-population-projections-2023-11-01/pages/1-1-introduction.aspx).

central, higher and lower. The central remand arrivals scenario assumes remand arrivals will be similar over the next few months to what they were between January 2023 and December 2023. The higher remand arrivals scenario assumes the rate will be similar to the levels from March 2023 to August 2023, and the lower scenario assumes remand arrivals around the lower levels between October 2022 and March 2023.

Furthermore, to help with understanding how sensitive the prison population may be to variations in court case conclusion rate, three variants have again been included in the modelling - central, higher, and lower. The “central” court throughput scenario variant assumes that the conclusion rate per court will be similar over the next few months as it has been between January 2023 to December 2023. The “higher” scenario assumes the average case throughput per court will be slightly greater than it has been over the same period, and the “lower” scenario assumes that the average case throughput per court will be slightly smaller. The nine scenario variants shown in table 1 include all the possible combinations of the above variations of court throughput and remand arrivals.

**Table 1.** Prison population scenario variants.

Scenario		Remand Arrival Rate		
		Central	Higher	Lower
Conclusion rate	Central	1. Sc1a Central Conclusions & Central Remand Arrivals	4. Sc2a Central Conclusions & Higher Remand Arrivals	7. Sc3a Central Conclusions and Lower Remand Arrivals
	Higher	2. Sc1b Higher Conclusions and Central Remand Arrivals	5. Sc2b Higher Conclusions & Higher Remand Arrivals	8. Sc3b Higher Conclusions and Lower Remand Arrivals
	Lower	3. Sc1c Lower Conclusions & Central Remand Arrivals	6. Sc2c Lower Conclusions & Higher Remand Arrivals	9. Sc3c Lower Conclusions and Lower Remand Arrivals

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 January 2024 to June 2024.

A review of previous trends shows that a general seasonal pattern tends to occur at the end of the year. This results in atypical court throughput and remand arrivals during the months of December and January. To account for this, in the latest projections the assumptions for the month of January 2024 are sampled from January 2023.

## Model Quality Assurance

The modelling scenarios from the previous publication can be compared against the actual population data to check the accuracy of the projections and confirm the model's suitability for providing reliable projections. Figure 12 shows the October 2023 projections from the microsimulation, which were published in November 2023<sup>25</sup>. Even after accounting for a wide variety of uncertain dynamics in the system, it may be seen in Figure 12 that the projected levels of remand, sentenced and total populations have reasonably accurately aligned with the actual numbers. It is important to note the projections cover the end of the year where a seasonal pattern in the populations is observed. In this case the sentenced and total populations both increased throughout December and then decreased toward the end of December. The remand population generally decreased throughout December but then increased as the month concludes.

Solemn procedure throughput was high in recent months<sup>26</sup> and contributed to the growth in the sentenced population in particular trending towards the upper projection bound during mid-December, before dipping towards the centre of the range at the very end of December.

The remand population ended December at a point which was slightly lower than the centre of the projection range.

The actual total population at the end of 2023 was close to the middle of the range (since the projected range and the actual population both fell in December). The data and assumptions, based on December 2022, were representative of actual demand and throughput for December 2023.

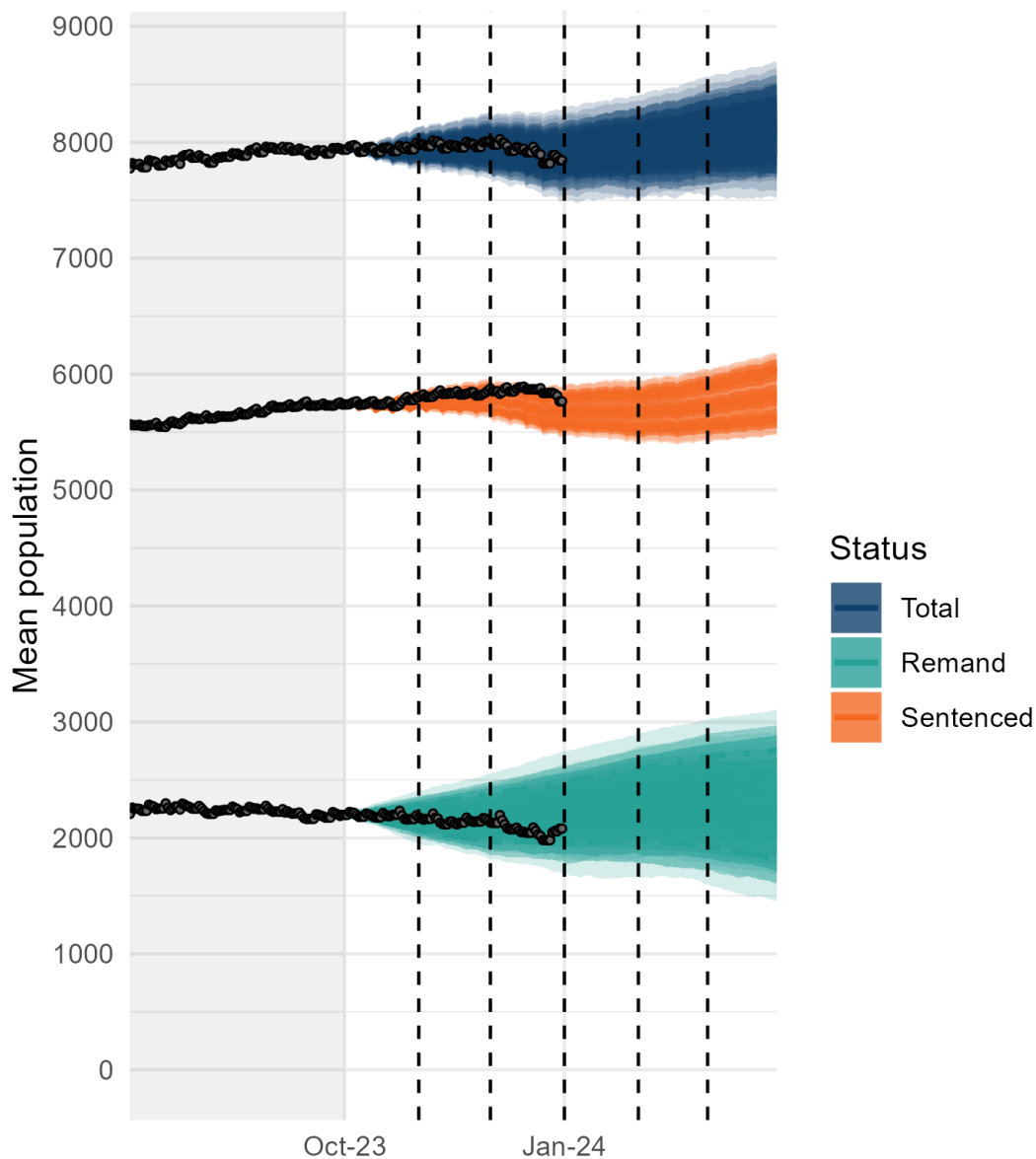
Several key modelling assumptions about inflows and outflows are defined as the average over a month and hence can't reflect the abrupt changes in the population which tend to occur from one day to the next around the end of December. Nevertheless, the model is suitable for projections over several months. The assumptions (e.g., remand arrivals) for December 2023 were modelled directly from the average of the previous December in 2022. The full projection period is still to be completed but so far it is aligning satisfactorily, inclusive of the seasonal effects.

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<sup>25</sup> Scottish Government Prison Population projections, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2023, [Prison population projections: November 2023 edition - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/prison-population-projections/November-2023-edition/pages/1-10.aspx).

<sup>26</sup> SCTS criminal court throughput information, [Monthly information on criminal court throughput for December 2023 \(scotcourts.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/throughput/monthly-information-on-criminal-court-throughput-for-december-2023).

**Figure 12.** Prison population projections and actual prison population beginning on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2023, based on courts and prison population data up to end of September 2023 (showing 50%, 75% and 95% confidence intervals). The actual population is shown as a series of black points.

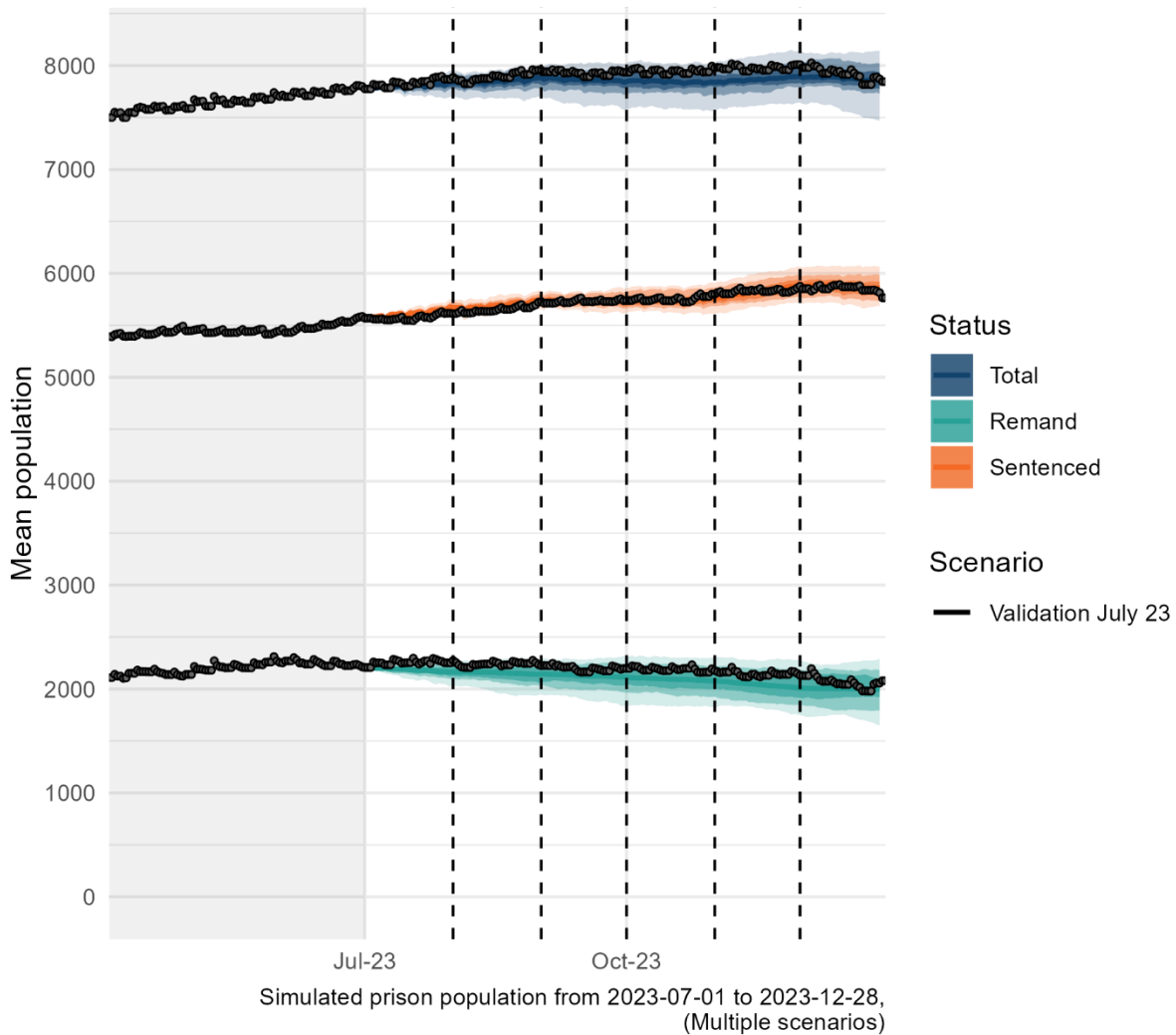


Simulated prison population from 2023-10-01 to 2024-03-29, (Multiple scenarios)

To check the model further, back-casting is used to retrospectively compare the actual prison population for the past few months against a projection generated by the model based on actual monthly court throughput data. The back-cast eliminates uncertainty about the majority of the assumptions, so if there was a difference between the back-cast and the actuals it may indicate technical deficiencies in the model. The recent back-cast projections presented in Figure 13, show that the back-cast from July 2023 to December 2023 is largely accurate.



**Figure 13.** The back-cast based on remand arrival and courts throughput data up to December 2023 (showing 50%, 75% and 95% confidence intervals). The actual population is shown as a series of black points.



## Microsimulation Model Limitations

The model relies on the availability of a large amount of frequently refreshed high-quality data about court activity and prison populations, some of which can be resource intensive to obtain and process.

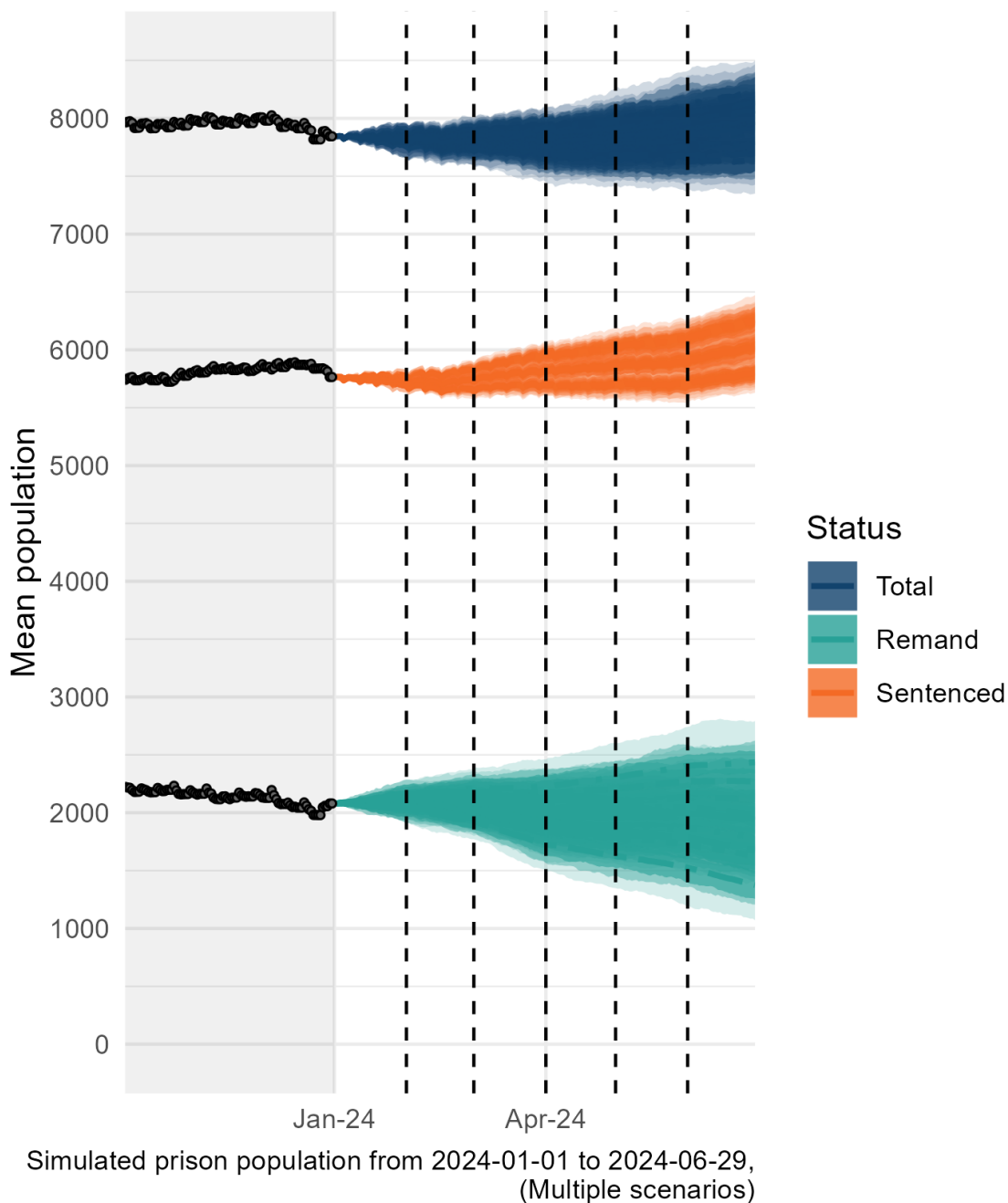
The model does not currently simulate flows for different crime-types, so crime-based trends are not explicitly modelled. However, there are plans to develop the model further and include case-mix in future modelling.

## **5 Microsimulation Model Results: January to June 2024**

The latest prison population projections are shown in figure 14 and table 2 below. These indicate that it is most likely that the overall prison population in Scotland will either remain stable or rise slightly between January 2024 and June 2024.

The results also show that it is most likely that the remand population will remain stable, but it could increase or decrease. If it 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. It is projected that the sentenced population will either remain stable or rise slightly; it may rise if 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.

**Figure 14.** Prison population projections for January 2024 to June 2024. Includes 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.



**Table 2.** Prison population projections upper/lower estimates for January to June 2024<sup>27</sup>. These ranges are based on the 95% confidence intervals across all scenario variants given in table 1.

Month	Remand		Sentenced		Total	
	Average Daily Population by Month - Lower estimate	Average Daily Population by Month - Upper estimate	Average Daily Population by Month - Lower estimate	Average Daily Population by Month - Upper estimate	Average Daily Population by Month - Lower estimate	Average Daily Population by Month - Upper estimate
Jan-24	2,000	2,200	5,700	5,800	7,750	7,900
Feb-24	1,850	2,350	5,600	5,850	7,600	8,000
Mar-24	1,650	2,400	5,600	6,000	7,500	8,050
Apr-24	1,400	2,550	5,600	6,100	7,450	8,150
May-24	1,300	2,650	5,550	6,250	7,400	8,300
Jun-24	1,150	2,800	5,600	6,350	7,350	8,450

The upper total population and upper remand range estimates are from the scenario variant with a low conclusion rate and high remand arrival rate. The lower range estimates for the total and remand populations are from the scenario with a high conclusion rate and a low remand arrival rate. Inclusion of these less likely scenarios for this update has resulted in a larger range than the previous publication. If the new scenario variants featuring higher or lower remand arrivals were removed so the projection only included scenarios featuring central remand arrivals, as in the first publication<sup>28</sup>, then in June 2024: the projected average daily total population would be in the range from 7,600 to 8,300; the remand population in the range from 1,450 to 2,600 and the sentenced population in the range from 5,600 to 6,300.

It should be noted that whilst the projections are based on recent trends, they do not explicitly model the impact of potential future policy or operational changes and their potential impact on the prison population.

<sup>27</sup> 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.

<sup>28</sup> Scottish Government prison population projections, 1st June 2023, [Scottish prison population projections - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/prison-population-projections/pages/2-introduction.aspx).

## 6 Conclusions

The modelling indicates a projected range of between 7,350 and 8,450 for the average daily total prison population in June 2024. As at 5<sup>th</sup> February 2024, the prison population was around 7,900.

In the first publication of June 2023, only low, central and high court throughput scenarios were reported. Since the November publication, six additional scenarios have been introduced<sup>29</sup>, which feature varying remand arrivals (low, central and high) combined with court throughput variations (also low, central and high). Over the course of the next few months remand arrivals, sentenced arrivals and case conclusion levels will be monitored to assess with which scenarios the actual prison population numbers are most closely aligned.

For several reasons, modelling the future prison population using the microsimulation becomes less accurate the further ahead it is projected (whether due to systematic errors in the model, inaccurate assumptions due to unforeseen circumstances, or due to changed circumstances that the model is not built to account for). Experience to date suggests that a maximum projection period of six months allows for reliable projections.

As previously highlighted, the key factors impacting changes in the prison population in the short term will be the flows into and out of the remand and sentenced populations. This is influenced by the court recovery programme, for example the resource re-allocation from summary to solemn which took place in April 2023 - it is assumed in the projections that the number of court rooms allocated to summary and solemn procedure will remain consistent until at least June 2024. SCTS reporting has indicated that recent elevated levels of summary demand has meant that the level of outstanding summary trials has stabilised rather than continuing to fall<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Scottish Government prison population projections, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2023, [Prison population projections: November 2023 edition - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/prison-population-projections/2023-11-14/pages/12.aspx).

<sup>30</sup> SCTS Courts modelling, 14<sup>th</sup> December 2023, [Updated modelling on criminal court backlog published today \(scotcourts.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/news/2023/12/14/scts-courts-modelling).



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