



# Restorative Justice Policy and Practice Framework:

The development of the national restorative justice policy  
and practice framework

March 2026

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We are grateful to The Resilience Learning Partnership, Safe Lives and The Wise Group for their invaluable support throughout the research process. Their efforts in bringing groups together, providing trauma-responsive care to participants, and fostering a safe space for exploring new ideas were instrumental to this work.

We also thank all the stakeholders who contributed thoughtful and constructive feedback, helping to ensure the resulting framework is both practical and rights-based.

# Executive Summary

This report outlines the development of Scotland's National Restorative Justice (RJ) Policy and Practice Framework, a major step toward making restorative justice available across the country in a safe, consistent, and trauma-informed way.

Restorative justice is a process that brings together people who have been harmed and those responsible for harm, helping to support healing, accountability, and meaningful dialogue. In Scotland, interest in RJ has grown, leading to the creation of [guidance for practitioners](#) in 2017, a national [Action Plan](#) in 2019 and, later, the need for a more detailed framework to guide practice across sectors.

Community Justice Scotland (CJS) led the development of this framework, working closely with the Scottish Government and a wide range of stakeholders, including RJ practitioners and researchers, statutory and third sector organisations. The process was co-productive, including direct input from people with lived experience of harm.

Key stages of the framework's development included:

- **Identification of systemic gaps**, including inconsistencies in referral pathways, roles and responsibilities, and ethical considerations.
- **Consultations** with experts by lived experience through participatory group discussions (World Cafés) and one-to-one interviews.
- **Consultations** with justice partners, practitioners, and third sector organisations.
- **Drafting and co-production**, incorporating feedback from stakeholders and government officials.
- **Publication** of the framework as a living document, subject to ongoing refinement based on real-world use.

The framework is designed to be trauma-informed, rights-respecting, and person-centred, ensuring that those affected by harm are at the heart of the process.

# 1. Background

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of how Scotland's National Restorative Justice Policy and Practice Framework evolved and the role Community Justice Scotland's contribution played in shaping a trauma-informed and rights-respecting approach to restorative justice. It outlines each stage of the framework's development, from early evidence-gathering to co-creation with lived experience experts and other stakeholders.

Restorative justice (RJ) has increasingly gained attention in Scotland as an approach that supports healing, accountability, and meaningful dialogue between those who have been harmed and those responsible for harm.

In 2017, the Scottish Government published statutory guidance for RJ practitioners and facilitators and RJ service providers to ensure that, where restorative justice processes are available, these are delivered in a coherent, consistent, victim-focused manner across Scotland, and are in line with the EU Victims' Rights Directive. It aimed to provide both an overview of restorative justice principles and key factors which should be considered by practitioners and more detailed best practice guidance regarding the provision of restorative justice services.

In 2019, the Scottish Government published [Justice in Scotland: Rapid Evidence Review – Uses of Restorative Justice](#) to inform policy development and support the delivery of Scotland's national RJ vision and strategy. The paper offers a broad overview of how RJ is implemented in other countries, taking into consideration offence types, the effectiveness of RJ for people harmed and people who cause harm, and how it is offered at varying stages of the justice system.

This was followed by the launch of the [Restorative Justice Action Plan](#), also in 2019, which sets out a clear ambition for RJ to be available across Scotland to all those who wish to access it, and at a time that is appropriate to the people and cases involved. The approaches taken must be consistent, evidence-led, trauma-informed and of a high standard, ensuring the needs and voices of those harmed are at the centre of any process as well as supporting a reduction in harmful behaviour across our communities.

Although the Action Plan set out a strategic vision, implementation revealed the need for national guidance to ensure system-wide alignment. This need was driven by recognition of significant gaps in existing policy, operational inconsistencies across Scotland, and sustained calls from both statutory and third sector justice stakeholders for clearer national direction and evidenced position on which to build their support for RJ.

A key turning point in recognising the need for a broader framework was the collaborative development of the Codes of Practice for both adults and children and young people. Led by Community Justice Scotland (CJS) and the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ), this work brought together justice partners, RJ practitioners, third sector organisations and academics to define the practice standards for safe, high-quality, effective RJ delivery aligned with the wider justice system. The Code of Practice's development work highlighted the need for the following policy issues to be resolved:

- The roles and responsibilities of services in delivering RJ.
- Inconsistencies in referral pathways across Scotland.
- How RJ operates in parallel with the criminal justice system.
- Legal and ethical considerations, cross-agency working, including information sharing.

To help address the gaps identified by the Code of Practice documents, CJS and CYCJ undertook further work to inform national policy and resourcing decisions. In 2022, CJS and Scottish Government colleagues presented international models of RJ delivery to the Criminal Justice Board on Restorative Justice, along with the challenges and opportunities presented for Scotland in offering the service nationally. CJS also produced a Sheriffdom Referral Pathways Proposal Paper to illustrate challenges and opportunities across referral pathways. To ensure the rights and needs of children and young people are incorporated, CYCJ published an [information sheet](#) focusing on RJ routes for children and young people. These efforts fed into formal presentations to the Criminal Justice Board in January 2023, outlining the need for a national RJ policy for Scotland, which was agreed by the Board.

In the coming years, CJS and CYCJ collaborated with stakeholders and the Scottish Government to develop a national framework that addressed operational gaps and set out minimum standards and expectations for delivery, supporting a consistent, person-centred approach aligned with evidence and best practice.

## 2. The Co-Productive Process

### DEVELOPMENT OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE POLICY AND PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

#### KEY PHASES (2022-2025)



Figure 1 Diagram of RJ Policy and Practice Framework Key Phases

### 2.1 Initiation

To ensure the framework is responsive to the needs of those it is intended to serve, Community Justice Scotland spoke to people with lived experience of harm, seeking their perspectives on how restorative justice should be designed and delivered in Scotland as a trauma-responsive approach to supporting their recovery from harm.

### 2.2 Engagement and Evidence Gathering

Engagement methods combined participatory and qualitative approaches, including *World Cafés* – structured community dialogue events – and one-to-one interviews for participants preferring an individual setting. To ensure that the research was

conducted fairly, respectfully, and in line with best practice, the proposed approach was reviewed and approved by Community Justice Scotland's (CJS) Research and Ethics Committee. The committee worked closely with the national RJ team to refine the discussion scripts, ensuring they aligned with trauma-informed and restorative justice principles.

Following preparation and approval by the Committee, CJS contacted a number of agencies to collaborate by inviting participants. Where possible, existing relationships between participants and service providers were used to build trust ahead of consultations. Participants received the full list of questions in advance, along with an outline of the session structure, so they could make informed choices and manage expectations. Agencies were also encouraged to assess participant readiness and advise against involvement where recent trauma, legal proceedings, or personal instability could increase risk.

### 2.2.1 World Café Approach

[The World Café method](#) was selected for its ability to create a safe, inclusive, and participatory environment. The process followed established Café guidelines:

- Clarifying the purpose
- Creating a safe and hospitable place
- Exploring questions that matter
- Encouraging everyone's contribution
- Connecting diverse perspectives
- Listening for insights and shared discoveries

Group engagement activities were held in familiar, supportive spaces provided by partner agencies. This ensured participants had continuous access to trusted support before, during, and after each event. Where possible, sessions were integrated into existing participation group meetings to reduce barriers to involvement.

Spaces were arranged to resemble a café, with refreshments, table decorations, and comfortable seating. Each table was equipped with flip charts, stationery, stress balls and "talking stick" pens to enable contributions both verbally and in writing. Facilitators encouraged open discussion and sharing of ideas, allowing individuals a choice in how much they input and when. This approach is more restorative, trauma-informed and less scripted than more 'traditional' research methods. Participants also received a pack containing project information, a list of support services, and a pre-

paid voucher in recognition of their contribution. CJS provided the same information and aftercare to participants who chose to engage via one-to-one interviews.

Each World Café began with a co-created set of ground rules, giving participants ownership of the day. This was followed by a short input on restorative justice awareness, including an animation explaining what RJ is and is not, and its underlying principles. The café script engaged participants in three themed discussion rounds on the following:

- **Language** used in RJ.
- Introduction to **trauma-informed principles** and discussion on the **5 Rs of trauma-informed practice**, reflecting on how these principles could be experienced in a truly trauma-informed and responsive RJ service.
- Safety and needs: **overview of the risk and strengths framework**, focusing on each trauma-informed RJ principle in the fusion model: choice, safe, individual, preparation, and together.

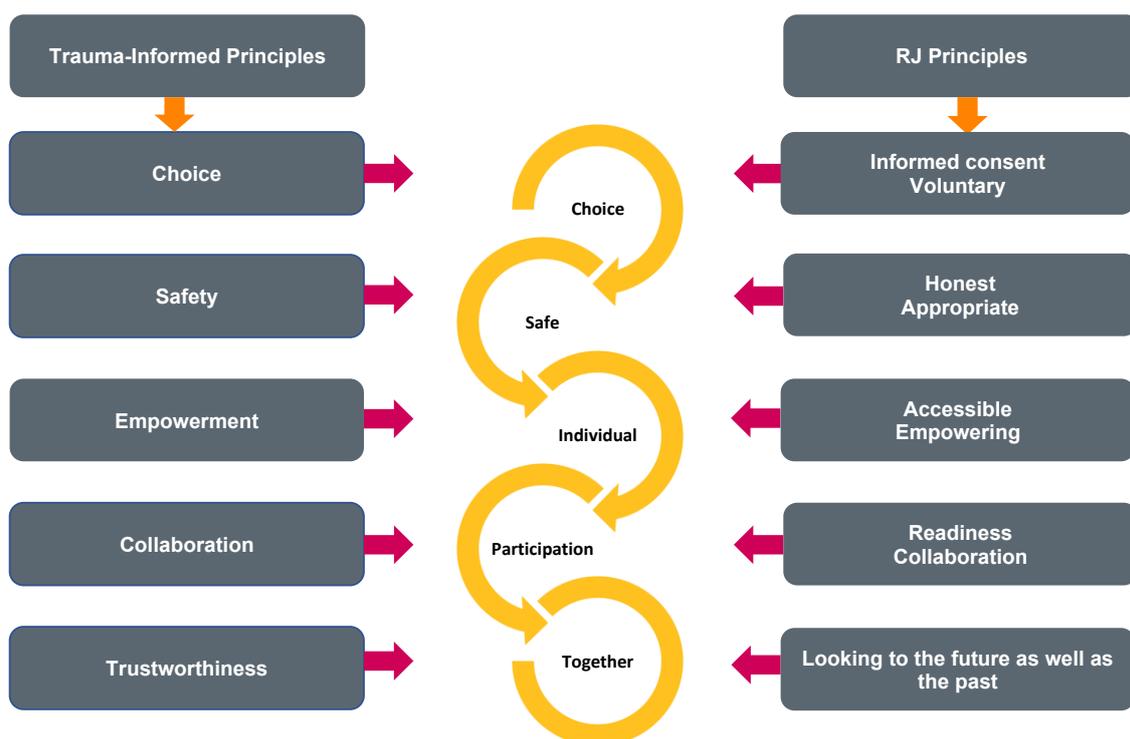


Figure 2 Fusion of trauma informed and restorative justice principles

The RJ national team held three group sessions, hosted by different partner organisations. The sessions were held separately with individuals who had experienced harm and those who caused harm however recognition was given that these groups are not binary – people who cause harm are likely to have experienced harm themselves, and thus discussions provided an opportunity to speak about harm from both perspectives. In Alloa, [Resilience Learning Partnership](#) supported the RJ team to engage with participants with lived experience across a range of harm types. The collaboration with [Safe Lives](#) in Dundee allowed for discussions centred on the experiences and needs of those affected by domestic abuse. [The Wise Group](#) hosted the team in Glasgow for a World Café with people who have caused harm. The contributions from all sessions were captured through notes, audio recordings, and live graphic illustrations.

In addition to group consultations, CJS conducted three one-to-one interviews with individuals, which provided a deeper understanding of the additional support people may require to participate in RJ. The interviews took place both in person and online at the request of the participants. Interviews followed the same script as the cafes.

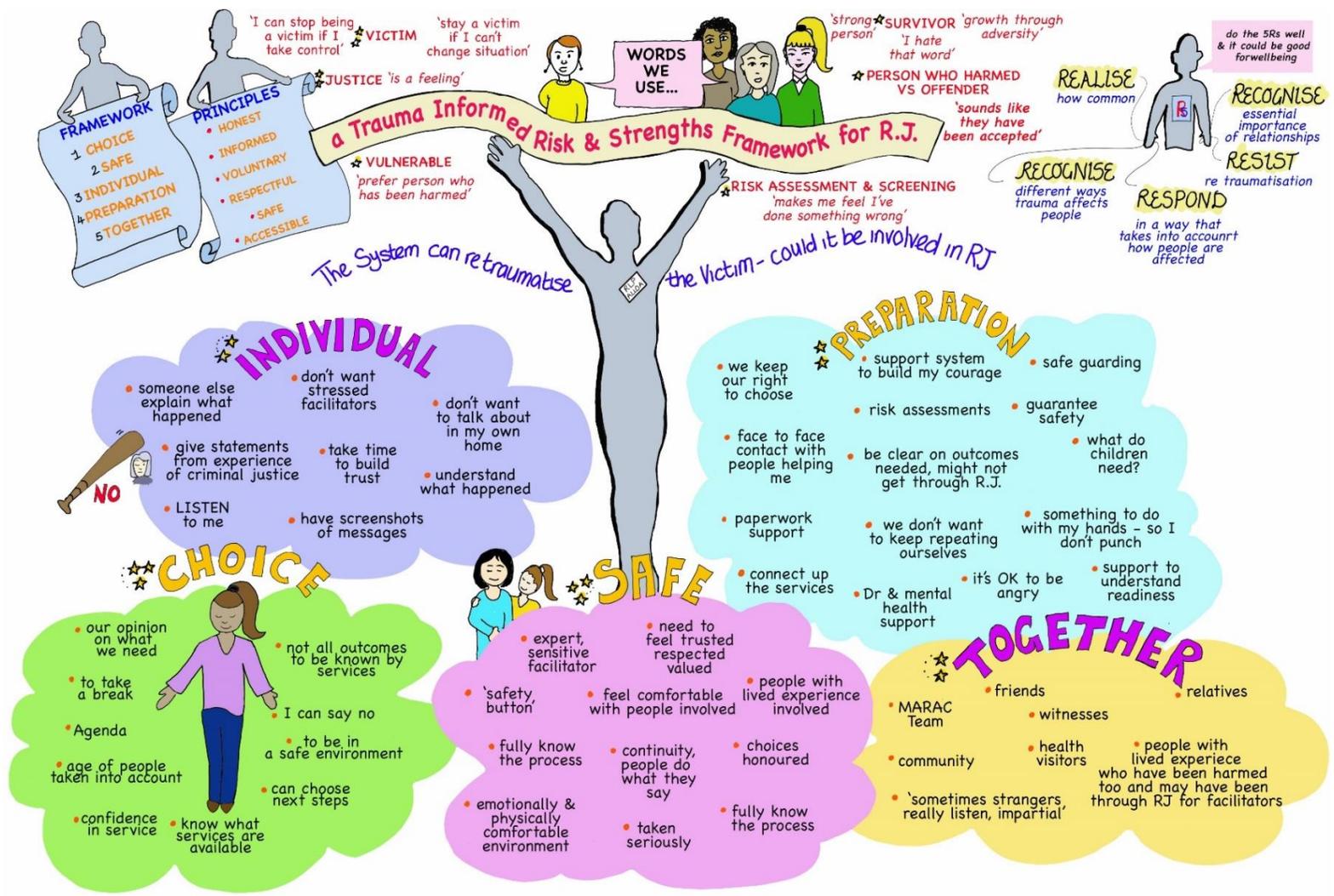


Figure 3 Live graphic drawing from Resilience Learning Partnership focus group



Figure 4 Live graphic drawing from Safe Lives focus group

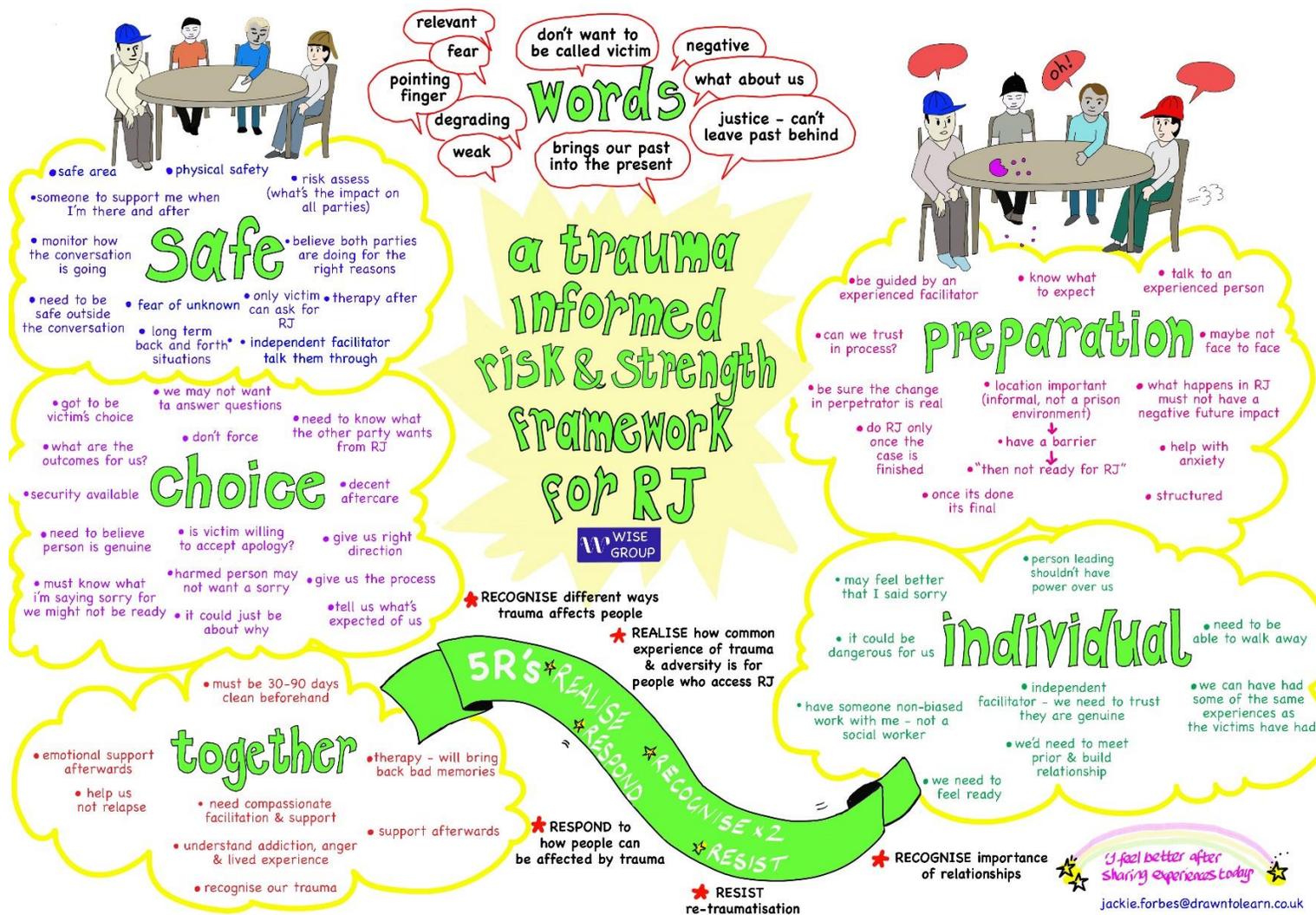


Figure 5 Live graphic drawing from The Wise Group focus group

## 2.2.2 Summary of findings and key themes

Research participants highlighted that trauma-informed services must prioritise safety at all times, using safe language and avoiding threat, judgement, or punishment. They stressed the importance of being free from stigma and labelling, of feeling validated and believed, and of being treated as a human being rather than as part of an “us and them” dynamic.



Figure 6 Quotes from research participants on what trauma-informed should feel like

Trust was seen as something that must be built over time, supported by clear communication, honesty, and a transparent sense of direction. Participants spoke of the need for realistic and achievable outcomes and for services to recognise and respond flexibly to individual needs. The experience of trauma-informed services, they suggested, should feel protective – “like cotton wool around you” – and should communicate consistently that “you matter.” Much of the dialogue also focused on broader system change across both criminal and civil justice contexts.

Community Justice Scotland analysed the outputs from the consultations and identified the following key findings:

- People wish choice and agency in service contact and engagement.
- RJ availability is important to both those who cause harm and experience this.

- Safety is extremely important, and this includes the protection of other recovery goals and ambitions.
- No time limit can be applied on RJ process and/or its conclusion.
- The civil and criminal justice system can cause further harm to those who experience it.
- Communication, clarity and honesty is important throughout.
- Support should be available from people who have similar experiences in both harm and RJ, as mentors and facilitators.
- Facilitation of RJ should be independent of both the criminal and civil justice systems.

The national team shared these research findings with the Restorative Justice Stakeholder group to inform policy, ensuring voices of individuals affected by harm are embedded throughout the development process.

### **2.3 Co-Production and Drafting**

Drafting of the National Restorative Justice Policy and Practice Framework, led by Community Justice Scotland, was underpinned by co-production: inputs from people with lived experience ensured that the framework focused not only on operational requirements to keep the process safe and appropriate but was also meaningful and responsive to those directly affected by harm.

To produce this document, CJS worked in close partnership with the Scottish Government, the Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice (CYCJ), Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), Police Scotland, Victim Support Scotland, RJ researchers and practitioners, Action for Children and Scottish Women’s Aid. Initial drafts were shared in early 2023, with feedback from government officials, specialist partners, and the RJ Stakeholder Group gathered through structured consultations. Key RJ Stakeholder Group meetings in 2024, and early 2025, provided opportunities to review progress, address comments, and refine the content.

### **2.4 Publication**

In March 2026, this work culminated in the publication of a [National Restorative Justice Policy and Practice Framework](#), co-produced by the Scottish Government, CJS,

CYCJ, and other partners. The framework offers practical guidance and outlines expectations for all organisations involved in the delivery or promotion of RJ, marking a significant milestone in the journey to embed restorative justice across Scotland in a consistent, safe, and person-centred way.

The framework includes the following sections:

- Language
- What is RJ?
- Objectives of RJ
- Who is RJ for?
- RJ and Gender-Based Violence
- RJ and Court Proceedings
- RJ and Children
- RJ and Alternatives to Prosecution
- RJ and Unreported Crimes
- Legislative Context
- Principles of RJ
- RJ and the Rights of the Child
- RJ Training, Supervision and Support
- The RJ Process
- RJ Outcomes and Agreements
- Data and Information Sharing
- Monitoring and Evaluation

*Figure 7 Restorative Justice (RJ) Policy and Practice Framework sections covering foundational concepts, legal and social contexts, and practical implementation areas*

It will remain a living document, continuously evolving through ongoing reflection, feedback, and input based on practice, including input from service providers, partner agencies and service users.

A PDF format of the document is also available and can be accessed on Scottish Government's website:

[Restorative Justice - Policy and Practice Framework](#)

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