



HM Inspectorate
of Prosecution in Scotland

Strategic Plan

2026-29

June 2026

Strategic Plan 2026-29

Our Strategic Objectives

- 
- 1. We will inspect the operation of COPFS and report publicly
 - 2. We will increase awareness of and engagement and confidence in our inspection activity
 - 3. We will review our organisational structure and resilience and invest in our people
 - 4. We will invest in our continuous improvement
 - 5. We will work with our partners to maximise the impact of our work

Foreword

I am pleased to introduce HM Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland's (IPS) Strategic Plan for 2026-29 which is my first as HM Chief Inspector.

Our new three-year strategic plan sets out who we are and what we do, and how we will continue to support continuous improvement in the service provided by the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) and help strengthen public confidence in the justice system by ensuring transparency and accountability. We will keep our strategic plan under review and update it if necessary to take account of any significant changes or feedback which we receive.

We have considered our existing vision and values and concluded that they should remain unchanged from those published in our first strategic plan as they continue to reflect our purpose and approach. Again, the five current strategic objectives which underpin our actions remain largely unchanged though it is important to acknowledge the need to take a trauma-informed approach across our work, not least within user-focus, and the need to take account of improved technology, in particular AI, and how it can support our work.

As set out in our 2024-25 annual report,¹ my priorities for IPS are as follows:

1. **People** – the need for COPFS, as the sole prosecution and deaths investigation authority in Scotland, to have people at its heart.
2. **Practical** – IPS requires to make recommendations that are realistic and achievable which will improve COPFS and help to bring about meaningful change for victims, witnesses, next of kin and wider service users, including the accused, the public and COPFS staff as quickly as possible.
3. **Process** – IPS requires to undertake effective consideration of existing COPFS processes, identifying what works well and where there is scope for improvement. This is vital given the number of significant legal, structural and process changes COPFS is undergoing and will continue to experience for the foreseeable future as reflected in our annual reports.
4. **Primary** – through our inspection activity, identifying and addressing ‘failure demand’ to ensure that COPFS is getting it right first time and providing a high standard of service delivery.
5. **Progress** – ensuring that we are keeping abreast of legal changes, including in prosecution policy and technological developments, to provide an informed approach that adds value to COPFS throughout our inspections.

¹ [IPS Annual Report 2024-25](#)

6. **Public** – IPS requires to be transparent and accessible to the public, as do COPFS. Lived experience and user perspective is key and it will be vital across our inspection activity to make recommendations that will assist COPFS in de-mystifying the role of the Procurator Fiscal.

My 6 priorities for IPS also chime with our strategic objectives.

Our strategic plan also continues to reflect the inspectorate's commitment to our own continuous improvement. We require to fulfil our statutory purpose at a time of reduced fiscal spending and to build on our achievements, particularly raising awareness about our work and role. We have considered what the inspectorate does well and where we can develop and improve. It is important for us to ensure we deliver an independent, credible and meaningful inspection programme that adds value and can bring about tangible change for COPFS, its stakeholders and the wider criminal justice system as promptly as possible. This is why, going forward, some of our recommendations will have timescales for implementation. We will work with COPFS to monitor implementation of our inspections and consider more focused follow-up inspections when there is clear merit and public interest in effective implementation of our recommendations, but there is limited evidence to demonstrate that COPFS is achieving them.

One of our biggest challenges over the next three years will be significant changes in the staffing profile of our small team. We will take this as an opportunity to reconsider and modernise our existing staffing structure.

My thanks to the inspectorate team and all those who participate in and support our scrutiny activity. Their contribution helps us to fulfil our purpose, vision and values and meet our strategic objectives – to inspect the operation of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service through credible, independent, evidence-based scrutiny.

Deborah O'Brien Demick
HM Chief Inspector of Prosecution in Scotland

About us

HM Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland (IPS) is led by HM Chief Inspector of Prosecution who is appointed by the Lord Advocate to inspect the operation of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS). COPFS is the sole prosecuting authority in Scotland and is also responsible for investigating sudden, unexplained or suspicious deaths and criminal allegations against the police.

IPS was first established in 2003, following an independent inquiry by Dr Raj Jandoo into the liaison arrangements between the police, COPFS and the family of Surjit Singh Chhokar, following the murder of Mr Chhokar and related prosecutions. One of the recommendations of the inquiry was that an inspectorate of COPFS be established, 'to introduce a measure of accountability, which is essential for public confidence'. After initially operating as a non-statutory body, IPS was placed on a statutory footing in 2007.

Mandate

The functions and powers of HM Chief Inspector are set out in the Criminal Proceedings etc. (Reform) (Scotland) Act 2007. The role of the Chief Inspector is to:

- secure the inspection of the operation of COPFS
- submit a report to the Lord Advocate on any particular matter connected with the operation of COPFS which is referred by the Lord Advocate
- submit to the Lord Advocate an annual report on the exercise of the Chief Inspector's functions, which the Lord Advocate must lay before the Scottish Parliament.

The 2007 Act makes clear that in the exercise of any of the functions conferred by the Act, the Chief Inspector acts independently of any other person. When inspecting COPFS, the Chief Inspector may require any person directly involved in the operation of the service to provide her with information.

As well as the 2007 Act, there are a range of other duties to which IPS is subject, including duties of user-focus and co-operation with other scrutiny bodies under the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010, and duties derived from the Human Rights Act 1998 and Equality Act 2010.

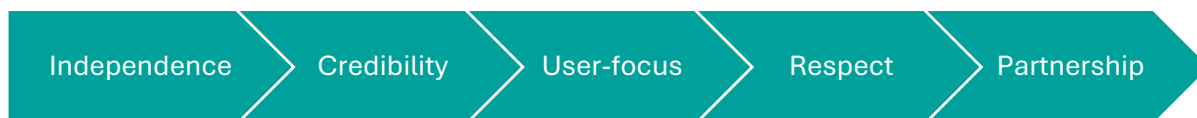
Our purpose

Our statutory purpose is to inspect the operation of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service.

Our vision

Our vision is to promote excellence and confidence in Scotland's prosecution service through independent, evidence-based scrutiny.

Our values



Our values underpin our approach to scrutiny. We always seek to demonstrate our values in the way that we work.

Independence – We act independently in all we do, providing impartial and objective scrutiny of the service provided by COPFS.

Credibility – We deliver high quality, evidence-based scrutiny and report publicly on our findings. Our approach is rigorous but fair and proportionate.

User-focus – The views and experiences of those individuals and organisations who are affected by the work of COPFS are central to our scrutiny activity. This includes victims, witnesses and next of kin as well as those who advocate on their behalf. We are also mindful of the experience of accused persons and those who represent them. We ensure a trauma-informed approach across our work.

Respect – Respect and professionalism are at the heart of what we do. We support equal access to justice. We engage constructively with those we inspect and we value the contribution they make.

Partnership – We work in partnership with others. We support continuous improvement in COPFS, and we work with our scrutiny partners to support improvement across the criminal justice system.

Who we are

IPS comprises the Chief Inspector, Assistant Inspector of Prosecution, Legal Inspector, Business Inspector and a Personal Assistant. As at 31 March 2026, the staff of IPS was 4.57 full-time equivalent staff. The current Chief Inspector, Deborah O’Brien Demick, was appointed in July 2025 to serve a three-year term.

The Assistant Inspector of Prosecution post was made permanent in 2023. Having previously been on a secondment basis this now affords some stability and continuity in the small team. The Legal Inspector is a prosecutor seconded from COPFS. This arrangement allows IPS to draw on the current operational expertise and skills of the secondee as well as their familiarity with COPFS systems and processes. Secondments also provide a development opportunity for prosecutors. The current Legal Inspector’s secondment will come to an end in March 2027. This will coincide with the retirement of the Personal Assistant who has worked at IPS since it was established. The Business Inspector who has been at IPS since 2005 will retire in late 2026. These anticipated staff changes will afford us the opportunity to consider our staffing model. A business case will

be submitted to the Scottish Government mid-2026 with a view to ensuring timely recruitment and modernisation of our organisational structure along with enhancing our resilience and capacity.

The IPS budget is allocated annually by the Scottish Government. In 2024-25, the budget was £463,000 increasing to £483,000 in 2026-27 to take account of rising staff costs. In 2024-25 staffing costs accounted for 98% of our annual spend. In 2025-26 our staffing costs took up almost 95% of our annual spend, though this was largely owing to no Chief Inspector being in post from March – July 2025 otherwise there would have been an overspend on staff costs. We began 2026-27 in the knowledge that we will overspend on that basis which necessarily restricts the ability of IPS to achieve its statutory function.

What we do

Our focus is on the quality of the prosecution service being delivered to the public in Scotland. Our inspection reports highlight what is working well and identify areas for development and improvement. In all of our work, a key objective is to understand the experience of those for whom the service is provided. We make recommendations that, if implemented, will enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the service.

We seek to engage constructively with those inspected and to support them to deliver continuous improvement. We are mindful of the burden that scrutiny can impose on the organisation that we inspect and seek to take a proportionate approach, minimising our demand on COPFS staff and resources. We provide assurance to the Lord Advocate about the service being delivered by COPFS and our published reports help reassure the public that COPFS is independently scrutinised and held accountable, thereby enhancing public confidence in the justice system and improving the service provided by COPFS.

Issues for inspection are selected on the basis of risk and intelligence, and following consultation with the Law Officers, COPFS and stakeholders. The Lord Advocate has the authority to refer matters to IPS for inspection, meaning that a certain degree of flexibility in the programme is required to incorporate any issues that may emerge.

We carry out different types of inspection activity, including thematic reviews, follow-up inspections (including focused follow-up inspections) and collaborative reviews.

Thematic inspections

Thematic inspections look holistically at an issue or a service end-to-end. These inspections can focus on specific types of prosecutions, deaths investigations, or business processes. Our most recent thematic inspections have covered large areas of COPFS work with some recommendations taking several years to implement.

Follow-up inspections

We also carry out follow-up inspections, to assess the progress made in implementing our recommendations. Follow-up inspections can provide information and reassurance to the Lord Advocate and the wider public that action is being taken in response to our

inspection and that improvements in service delivery are being achieved. Due to our limited resources however, it is not possible to carry out follow-up inspections of all previous work. We have an agreed process with COPFS which ensures a more proportionate, risk-based and intelligence-led approach to following up previous inspections. In response to our recommendations, COPFS provide us with action plans which we use alongside supporting evidence about implementation to assess the progress being made and to inform decisions as to whether a follow-up inspection is merited.

In 2026 we decided to undertake our first focused follow-up inspection as two years after a thematic inspection report was published, we found insufficient evidence of progress in relation to particular recommendations and determined that it was in the public interest to do so. While previous follow-up inspections have revisited the entirety of the original inspection there is no impediment to a limited follow-up inspection focusing on particular aspects of the work of COPFS, if deemed necessary by the Chief Inspector. Focused follow-up inspections do not preclude a wider follow-up inspection on a thematic report if deemed appropriate in the future.

Collaborative inspections

We actively seek opportunities to carry out our inspection activity in partnership with other scrutiny bodies.² The effective operation of the justice system cannot be achieved by any one agency – it is dependent on a range of organisations working together at a strategic and operational level. When appropriate, a similarly collaborative approach should therefore be taken to independent scrutiny, to ensure that shared outcomes are being achieved.

Reporting publicly

All IPS thematic and follow-up inspection reports are published on our website. Implementation tables showing COPFS progress towards achievement of recommendations are published in our annual reports. We use these tables to assess COPFS implementation progress and to provide the rationale for our assessment. We do so to ensure accountability, transparency and provide reassurance to the public. The information in the implementation tables also provides guidance to COPFS about what evidence we require to satisfy our recommendations. During the lifetime of this strategic plan we will aim, subject to resources, to introduce live implementation tables on our website as other inspectorates do.

Inspection Framework

Our inspection activity is supported by an Inspection Framework, which helps ensure we take a consistent, professional and transparent approach to our work. Based on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model, our framework has three themes – direction, delivery and outcomes. The framework informs all of our scrutiny activity but is also sufficiently flexible so that bespoke key lines of enquiry can be developed for each inspection.

² Our most recently published inspection was a joint inspection with His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland - [Citing witnesses in the sheriff court](#)

Terms of reference

We publish the terms of reference for our inspections. These set out the issue we intend to inspect, the scope of the inspection, how we intend to gather evidence and the estimated timescales for the work. The terms of reference are drafted after initial scoping work has been carried out and following preliminary discussions with key stakeholders. By publishing terms of reference, we aim to increase transparency and promote awareness of our work. The terms of reference can also be used as a tool to engage those with an interest in the issue being inspected.

Current and previous scrutiny

Our inspection activity reflects the broad range of work undertaken by COPFS. Examples of our previous inspections include:

Citing witnesses in the sheriff court

Responding to enquiries: service delivery through
National Enquiry Point

The prosecution of domestic abuse cases at sheriff
summary level

Joint review of diversion from prosecution

Inspection of COPFS practice in relation to s274 and
s275 of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995

Inspection of the management of criminal allegations
against the police by COPFS

Strategic objectives

In 2026-29, we will focus on five strategic objectives. To support the delivery of our objectives, we have identified specific actions which will continue to be taken forward over the next three years. We will monitor delivery of the actions and the overarching objectives.

(1) We will inspect the operation of COPFS and report publicly

- We will deliver high quality, evidence-based assessments of the operation of COPFS
- We will highlight what works well and areas of effective practice, as well as noting areas for improvement and recommendations
- We will report our findings publicly and in a clear and compelling way
- We will focus our inspection activity on those areas of greatest risk and which will add the most value
- We will request action plans in response to our recommendations, monitor progress and carry out follow-up or focused follow-up inspections where necessary
- We will publish implementation tables for all but our most recent inspection in our annual reports
- We will deliver our work in a way that is consistent with our values

(2) We will increase awareness of and engagement and confidence in our inspection activity

- We will promote transparency and engagement in our work by publishing terms of reference for our scrutiny activity as well as information about our inspection framework and methodology
- We will finalise our user-focus strategy, ensuring this approach is embedded in our work
- We will build our networks both within and beyond COPFS, ensuring that our scrutiny activity is informed by effective engagement and to expand our sphere of influence
- We will facilitate awareness sessions with COPFS staff and other agencies
- We will increase awareness of our work and our status as an independent body by increasing our use of the IPS website, and our use of media and social media and maintain a consistent approach to branding

(3) We will review our organisational structure and resilience and invest in our people

- We will review our staffing model to take account of planned staffing changes and to future proof our organisation and ensure we have sufficient organisational capacity to deliver our inspection programme
- We will ensure timely recruitment and modernisation of our organisational structure along with enhancing our resilience, independence and capacity. We will continue to encourage secondments so that our work is informed by both specific expertise and recent operational experience of COPFS

- We will continue to invest in the professional and personal development of all staff and enhance induction processes for new staff, ensuring that all have the necessary skills, knowledge and support to carry out their roles effectively

(4) We will invest in our continuous improvement

- We will keep our inspection framework and methodology under review, ensuring they are fit for purpose
- We will review the way in which our inspection programme is developed and consider how it can be better informed by stakeholder consultation
- We will keep our strategic plan and our objectives under review, and monitor progress against the underpinning actions
- We will seek feedback on our work and act on suggestions for development and improvement
- We will continue to achieve value for money
- We will take active steps to minimise our impact on the environment and to work in a more sustainable way
- We will consider how we can use improved technology in particular AI and how it can support our work

(5) We will work with our partners to maximise the impact of our work

- We will continue to develop effective working relationships with partners and stakeholders to gather information and harness expertise
- Recognising that effective public services cannot be delivered in isolation, we will work with our scrutiny partners to maximise the impact of our work and focus more sharply on an individual's journey through the criminal justice system
- We will share information with our scrutiny partners and others to better identify areas of risk and highlight effective practice
- We will identify joint training and development opportunities for staff, to share expertise and ensure value for money



HM Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland
5 Atlantic Quay
150 Broomielaw
Glasgow G2 8LU

Telephone: 0300 244 6940
E-mail: IPS@gov.scot

About HM Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland

HM Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland (IPS) is led by HM Chief Inspector of Prosecution who is appointed by the Lord Advocate to inspect the operation of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS). The functions of HM Chief Inspector are set out in the Criminal Proceedings etc. (Reform) (Scotland) Act 2007. The 2007 Act makes clear that in the exercise of any of the functions conferred by the Act, HM Chief Inspector is independent of any other person. COPFS is the sole prosecuting authority in Scotland and is also responsible for investigating sudden deaths and complaints against the police which are of a criminal nature.

© Crown copyright 2026

ISBN: 978-1-7394264-8-4 (web only)

<https://www.prosecutioninspectorate.scot/>

If you require this publication in an alternative format and/or language, please contact us to discuss your needs.