



HM Inspectorate
of Prosecution in Scotland

Focused follow-up inspection: communication with victims of domestic abuse in summary cases

Terms of Reference

May 2026

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. 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. The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (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.

About our follow-up inspection

Aim

1. In 2024 we published a thematic inspection report on the prosecution of domestic abuse cases at sheriff summary level by COPFS.¹ The aim of this focused follow-up inspection is to further consider COPFS communication with victims of domestic abuse in summary cases and in particular enhanced victim engagement. We will also consider the COPFS response to part (b) of recommendation 12 and part (a) of recommendation 19 of our 2024 report.

Recommendation 12

With regard to bail in domestic abuse cases, COPFS should:

(b) work with justice partners, particularly the police and the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service, to ensure that victims are informed of the outcome of the accused's first appearance on the same day, and update all guidance and protocols accordingly

Recommendation 19

In relation to communicating with victims in summary domestic abuse cases, COPFS should:

(a) take immediate steps to ensure that victims are receiving basic information about their case, including its outcome, timeously

Follow-up inspections

2. A strategic objective of HM Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland (IPS) is to report publicly on the inspection of the operation of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS). As part of this objective, we request action plans from COPFS in response to our recommendations, monitor progress and carry out follow up inspections where necessary.
3. In 2021 it was agreed that COPFS would produce action plans in response to our reports. IPS has stated that where there is insufficient evidence of progress, where intelligence or an assessment of risk suggest that it is necessary or where it is in the public interest that we will continue to carry out follow-up inspections.² A combination of these factors now leads IPS to conclude that a focused follow-up inspection is necessary and proportionate.

¹ [The prosecution of domestic abuse cases at sheriff summary level](#)

² [What we do | HM Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland](#)

4. Previous follow-up inspections conducted by IPS have revisited the entirety of the original inspection, however there is no impediment to a limited follow-up inspection focusing on particular aspects of the work of COPFS if deemed necessary by HM Chief Inspector of Prosecution in Scotland. While this follow-up inspection is limited in scope this will not preclude a wider follow-up inspection to the 2024 report if deemed appropriate in the future.

Background

5. In April 2024 IPS made 27 recommendations following an inspection on the prosecution of domestic abuse cases at sheriff summary level³ (the 2024 report). All recommendations were accepted by COPFS.
6. There were 63,867 incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police in 2023-24.⁴ In the same year 30,100 separate domestic abuse charges were reported to COPFS.⁵ Tackling violence against women and girls remains a strategic priority for COPFS⁶ and there is clear merit and public interest in the effective implementation of our recommendations.
7. In our 2024 report we found that communication from, and support by COPFS to victims of domestic abuse was inadequate. We reviewed communication for 61 victims and found the overall quality of communication to be unsatisfactory for 80% of those victims.
8. In our Annual Report 2024-25 published in November 2025 we reported on action taken by COPFS in response to the 2024 report⁷ and noted that while there had been a number of positive developments across COPFS there was no evidence of immediate steps to ensure that victims of domestic abuse are receiving basic information about their case, including its outcome, timeously. We expressed our disappointment at this lack of progress, and while we have since received some limited evidence that domestic abuse victims are receiving such information this was a key factor in the decision of IPS to initiate this focused follow-up inspection.
9. In September 2022 the summary case management (SCM) pilot scheme was introduced at the sheriff courts of Dundee, Hamilton and Paisley to manage cases at summary level. This has the aim of reducing the number of cases set down for

³ [The prosecution of domestic abuse cases at sheriff summary level](#)

⁴ [Safer Communities and Justice Statistics Monthly Data Report: January 2026](#)

⁵ More than one domestic abuse charge/offence can be reported against an accused person.

⁶ [Strategic Plan 2023-27 | COPFS](#)

⁷ [Annual report 2024-25](#)

trial unnecessarily and reducing the volume of late pleas of guilty and late decisions on discontinuation, thereby reducing the adverse impact on victims and other witnesses.

10. As part of the SCM process COPFS introduced enhanced victim engagement (EVE) which requires prosecutors to telephone victims in summary domestic abuse cases in the early stages of proceedings and offer an in person meeting to victims in summary cases where the complaint contains a charge of contravening section 1 of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018.⁸
11. SCM and enhanced victim engagement in summary domestic abuse cases is now the model of work across all COPFS offices. IPS has been advised by COPFS that in August 2025 74% of SCM domestic abuse cases had recorded prosecutor contact made with victims.⁹ This focused follow-up inspection will afford IPS an opportunity to assess and report on a key element of communication with victims of domestic abuse that is now the national model.

Scope

12. The scope of this follow-up inspection will be limited to aspects of communication by COPFS with victims of domestic abuse in summary cases specifically considering:
 - parts (b) of recommendation 12 and (a) of recommendation 19 of that report and;
 - enhanced victim engagement
13. We will consider whether COPFS is providing basic information to victims of domestic abuse about their case after the following key stages of a case:
 - first appearance of an accused in court
 - case management hearing or intermediate diet
 - trial diet
 - sentencing
 - when a case is concluded

14. In respect of enhanced victim engagement (EVE) we will consider:

⁸ Section 1 of the 2018 Act created an offence of engaging in a course of behaviour that is abusive of the accused's partner or ex partner. The abusive behaviour can include violent, threatening or intimidating behaviour, as well as psychological, emotional or financial abuse.

⁹ [Annual report 2024-25](#)

- whether EVE has taken place
- whether EVE has been recorded
- the quality of the EVE record

15. As COPFS continues to respond to recommendations in the 2024 report this follow-up inspection will focus on a recommendation which required immediate action and a way of working (EVE) that was a pilot scheme during our inspection.

Methodology

16. The principal source of information to inform our findings will be a randomised case review of summary domestic abuse cases from the Dundee, Glasgow, Hamilton and Paisley COPFS offices in which EVE has had time to become embedded. This will provide a snapshot of the level of basic communication provided by COPFS. We will also conduct a limited number of interviews with COPFS operational staff.

Reporting

17. We will publish a report of our follow-up inspection. The report will set out our findings and will be published on our website at www.prosecutioninspectorate.scot. We anticipate publishing our report by the end of 2026.

18. As part of our 2024 inspection, we had the benefit of the experiences of a number of victim-survivors of domestic abuse. We were immensely grateful for this input and considered replicating it for the purposes of this focused inspection however given the ongoing work by COPFS in response to the 2024 report and the limited scope of this short inspection concluded that it would be disproportionate to do so. This does not preclude victims of domestic abuse contacting us to share their experience of communication with COPFS in summary domestic abuse cases should they wish, as set out below.

19. For further information about our follow-up inspection, or if you have information or experience of communication with COPFS in summary domestic abuse cases that you would like to share with us, please contact us at ips@gov.scot.

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May 2026



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