



HM Inspectorate  
of Prosecution in Scotland

# Responding to enquiries: service delivery through National Enquiry Point

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Terms of Reference

July 2024

## About us

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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 inspection

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### Aim

1. The aim of this inspection is to assess the service delivered by COPFS in response to members of the public and organisations making contact with National Enquiry Point, COPFS's customer contact centre. We will assess how efficiently and effectively such contact is addressed, including where enquiries are resolved by National Enquiry Point at the first point of contact and where they are transferred to other teams within COPFS for action.

### Background

2. National Enquiry Point is COPFS's customer contact centre. Many members of the public or organisations wishing to contact COPFS will call or email Enquiry Point in the first instance. It deals with enquiries from victims, witnesses, next of kin, accused, defence agents, other professionals and partner organisations seeking information or advice from or providing information to COPFS.
3. Enquiry Point's aim is for its own operators to resolve enquiries at the first point of contact wherever possible. Where they are unable to do so, operators pass enquiries to other teams within COPFS for action.
4. Enquiry Point deals with a range of enquiries, reflecting the breadth of work undertaken by COPFS. Typical enquiries include:
  - a victim seeking an update about their case
  - a victim wishing to speak to the prosecutor dealing with their case
  - a witness enquiring about giving evidence at court
  - a vulnerable witness looking for information about the support available to help them give evidence at court
  - a bereaved relative seeking information about the cause of death of a family member and whether they can proceed with funeral arrangements
  - an accused seeking the return of property seized by the police as evidence
  - a defence agent trying to find out details of all their client's outstanding cases
  - a police officer seeking guidance from a prosecutor
  - a doctor wishing to discuss a sudden death
  - a victim support organisation calling on behalf of a victim of crime
  - a member of the public seeking to make a complaint about COPFS.
5. Enquiry Point responds to enquiries made by both phone and email. Alternative arrangements are in place for those who need additional assistance to access Enquiry Point. This includes a text service for those who are Deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired; a video relay service for those who use British Sign Language; and a telephone interpreting service for those whose first language is not English.

6. The current staffing allocation for Enquiry Point is 40.90 full-time equivalents. This is made up of 34.15 operators whose role is primarily dealing with enquiries, as well as 6.75 staff operating in some form of quality assurance, supervisory or management role. Within COPFS, responsibility for Enquiry Point currently lies with the Deputy Crown Agent leading on operational support.
7. Enquiry Point is a national service based in Dumbarton. Later in 2024, a second site for Enquiry Point will be established in Glasgow. Some managers and staff will move to the new site. New staff have also been recruited and are due to commence their training in the summer of 2024. Operating from a second site in Glasgow is intended to, amongst other benefits, increase Enquiry Point's resilience and allow for improved business continuity; and facilitate recruitment and retention of staff.

Enquiry Point can be reached by:

Phone – 0300 020 3000

Email – [enquirypoint@copfs.gov.uk](mailto:enquirypoint@copfs.gov.uk)

Currently, Enquiry Point's phone lines are open:

Monday to Thursday from 8.30am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 4.30pm

Friday from 8.30am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 4.00pm

## Data

8. In 2023-24, Enquiry Point handled 135,890 calls. Operators handled an average of 546 calls each day that the Enquiry Point service was open.
9. Enquiry Point has a key performance indicator to handle 90% of inbound calls presented to operators. In 2023-24, it was able to do this for only 72% of calls. Enquiry Point's performance has been affected by a range of issues including:
  - resourcing issues, including challenges in recruiting and retaining staff, and newly appointed staff who are not yet performing at the level of an experienced operator and who require support from experienced colleagues
  - difficulties transferring callers to other teams within COPFS or obtaining information from those teams, resulting in longer call handling times and longer queuing times for those waiting for their call to be answered
  - system issues, such as outages in the telephony system or slow case management systems.
10. Currently, Enquiry Point is not able to easily quantify the number of email enquiries it receives. This was previously possible, however, its ability to gather data on emails was affected by a change to systems in early 2022. The most recent data available shows that in the year between February 2021 and January 2022, Enquiry Point received 75,456 emails. The average number of emails received per month was 6,288.

11. The volume of emails increased significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic, as Enquiry Point sought to encourage enquiries to be made via email rather than phone. This was because operators could easily work from home to respond to emails, but the service's call handling capability was reliant on operators being office-based. The number of operators attending the office was at first hampered by lockdown, and later by social distancing requirements. In the months prior to the pandemic, the number of email enquiries was around 4,000 per month.

## Context

12. In its Strategic Plan 2023-27,<sup>1</sup> COPFS identifies three transformation priorities, one of which is to improve how it communicates with its customers and partners. The strategic plan sets out COPFS's intention to provide meaningful, consistent and more frequent contact specifically for victims and bereaved relatives to help reduce uncertainty throughout the prosecution or death investigation process. The plan also commits COPFS to delivering a compassionate, trauma-informed service. While COPFS communicates with its customers and partners in a range of ways, as the first point of contact for many, Enquiry Point is key to the delivery of this transformation priority.
13. In its service improvement plan, COPFS also states that it is a member of the Institute of Customer Service which defines good customer service as, 'doing best what matters most for customers'.<sup>2</sup>
14. In its various plans, COPFS notes the need to improve communication with its customers and partners generally, while also noting its specific obligations towards victims and witnesses.
15. Section 1 of the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland ) Act 2014 sets out general principles to which the Lord Advocate (and, consequently, COPFS) must have regard. These include:
  - that a victim or witness should be able to obtain information about what is happening in the investigation or proceedings
  - that the safety of a victim or witness should be ensured during and after the investigation and proceedings
  - that a victim or witness should have access to appropriate support during and after the investigation and proceedings
  - that, in so far as it would be appropriate to do so, a victim or witness should be able to participate effectively in the investigation and proceedings.
16. Section 1A of the 2014 Act sets out further general principles to which the Lord Advocate must have regard specifically in relation to victims:
  - that victims should be treated in a respectful, sensitive, tailored, professional and non-discriminatory manner

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<sup>1</sup> COPFS, [Strategic Plan 2023-27](#).

<sup>2</sup> COPFS, Improving our service strategy 2023-2027.

- that victims should, as far as is reasonably practicable, be able to understand information they are given and be understood in any information they provide
  - that victims should have their needs taken into consideration
  - that, when dealing with victims who are children, the best interests of the child should be considered, taking into account the child's age, maturity, views, needs and concerns
  - that victims should be protected from secondary and repeat victimisation, intimidation, and retaliation.
17. The 2014 Act also sets out a range of victims' rights, such as the right to receive information (section 3C); the right to understand and be understood (section 3E); and the right to interpretation and translation (section 3F). Section 6 of the 2014 Act imposes a duty on COPFS, amongst others, to disclose information about criminal proceedings, such as a decision not to institute criminal proceedings, the nature of charges libelled, or the stage that proceedings have reached.
18. The 2014 Act also places an obligation on Scottish Ministers to publish a Victims' Code for Scotland<sup>3</sup> and on the Lord Advocate, as well as other justice agencies, to publish standards of service relating to the investigation and prosecution of crime and the procedure for making and resolving complaints.<sup>4</sup> The Victims' Code and the Standards of Service for Victims and Witnesses reflect the provisions of the 2014 Act, emphasising the importance of effective communication and access to information.
19. Enquiry Point plays a key role in delivering COPFS's obligations and commitments under the 2014 Act, the Victims' Code and the Standards of Service, whether it is responding directly to enquiries from victims and witnesses or acting as the gateway through which they make contact with staff working in other COPFS teams.

### Previous scrutiny

20. HM Inspectorate of Prosecution previously inspected the operation of Enquiry Point in 2013.<sup>5</sup> At that time, the inspectorate concluded that COPFS was committed to meeting the information needs of its customers, that Enquiry Point was performing well in some areas and that customer feedback was generally positive. We also found several areas for development and made 15 recommendations. Those recommendations were not formally followed up, as that was not part of the inspectorate's approach to scrutiny at that time.

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<sup>3</sup> Scottish Government, [Victims' Code for Scotland](#) (2018).

<sup>4</sup> The [Standards of Service for Victims and Witnesses](#) are published annually and in partnership by COPFS, Police Scotland, the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service, the Scottish Prison Service and the Parole Board for Scotland.

<sup>5</sup> IPS, [Thematic report on COPFS Enquiry Point](#) (2013).

21. Since that inspection in 2013, the operation of Enquiry Point will have significantly changed, not least in response to the legislative developments outlined above, but also in response to:
- broader developments in criminal justice policy
  - improved understanding of the impact of trauma on those affected by crime
  - changes in the profile of the work undertaken by COPFS
  - changes in COPFS's working practices, including increased specialisation and the greater use of flexible working
  - changes in public expectations of services.
22. More recently, we considered the role of Enquiry Point in our inspection of the prosecution of domestic abuse cases at sheriff summary level, published in April 2024.<sup>6</sup> We noted the substantial role that Enquiry Point can play in COPFS's communication with victims in domestic abuse cases. We were concerned, however, that Enquiry Point was taking on work that would traditionally have been carried out by COPFS's Victim Information and Advice (VIA) service, and that this did not appear to have been planned for or been supported through additional training or guidance. We also noted the difficulties Enquiry Point operators faced when seeking to transfer callers to VIA and our concerns that contact with victims was not recorded in one centralised place by all staff, meaning that some contact was going unnoticed and unactioned by those managing and prosecuting cases. We will explore those issues further in our planned scrutiny of the service delivered by Enquiry Point.

## Scope

23. The focus of our inspection will be on the service provided by COPFS to those who contact its Enquiry Point service. While 'customer' is not a term usually used in the context of the criminal justice system, we will essentially be assessing COPFS's 'customer' service, where that service is provided by Enquiry Point or where Enquiry Point is the gateway to other teams within COPFS. We will assess the service delivered, highlighting effective practice and any areas for improvement.
24. In carrying out our inspection, we will be guided by our Inspection Framework. The framework provides a structure within which we ensure a consistent and professional approach to our work. Based on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Model, our framework has three overarching themes, each supported by a key question:
- Direction – Why does this service exist? What purpose does it fulfil?
  - Delivery – How does this service deliver on its purpose?
  - Outcomes – What is the service achieving? What does it intend to achieve in the future?

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<sup>6</sup> IPS, [The prosecution of domestic abuse cases at sheriff summary level](#) (2024), from paragraph 437.

25. For our inspection of how COPFS responds to those who contact its Enquiry Point service, our key inspection questions will be:

**(a)** What is the role of Enquiry Point? What role will Enquiry Point play in the service delivered by COPFS in the future?

This will include consideration of the leadership and governance arrangements for Enquiry Point, and the extent to which COPFS understands the needs of those who contact Enquiry Point and the demand for the Enquiry Point service, as well as the demand on other teams within COPFS to respond to enquiries.

**(b)** How well does COPFS support Enquiry Point and other teams within COPFS to deliver their role?

This will include consideration of the policy, guidance, processes and systems in place to support the work of Enquiry Point, the management of resources and the support provided to staff dealing with enquiries including through training and development.

**(c)** How well does COPFS meet the needs of those who contact Enquiry Point?

How well does Enquiry Point address enquiries at the first point of contact?

How well do other staff within COPFS address enquiries where they are passed on by Enquiry Point?

This will include consideration of the timeliness and accuracy of responses to those who contact Enquiry Point and whether enquiries are resolved to the service user's satisfaction, whether the response is provided by Enquiry Point itself at the first point of contact or following the enquiry being transferred to other staff within COPFS. We will also consider how efficiently and effectively information gathered by Enquiry Point is used in the management of cases and in communication with key service users such as victims, witnesses and next of kin.

26. Throughout our inspection, we will consider how well COPFS understands and meets the needs of those who may require additional support to communicate with COPFS. We will also consider the extent to which COPFS is meeting its commitment to deliver a compassionate, trauma-informed service.

27. We do not intend to follow up on recommendations made about Enquiry Point in our 2013 inspection, given the length of time that has passed since then and the significant changes that have occurred in the interim (see paragraph 21). Moreover, the focus of our planned inspection is different to that of the 2013 inspection.

## **Methodology**

28. Following an initial period of scoping and planning our inspection, we will seek to gather evidence from a range of sources. This will include:

- reviewing COPFS strategies, policies, guidance, procedures and other documentation relating to the management of enquiries
- analysing available data about the service provided by Enquiry Point



- observing the work of Enquiry Point
- auditing a random sample of calls and emails received by Enquiry Point and assessing the quality of the response, whether the enquiry is resolved by operators at the first point of contact or passed to other teams within COPFS for action
- interviewing Enquiry Point operators and managers, as well as staff across COPFS who deal with enquiries passed on by operators or who are otherwise involved in delivering the Enquiry Point service
- gathering the views and experiences of the users of the Enquiry Point service, including members of the public, professionals and stakeholders.

29. In carrying out our inspection, particularly in the planning and evidence gathering stages, we will consider our duty of user focus, as set out in the Public Services (Reform) Scotland Act 2010. This will help us ensure that the views and experiences of service users, and those who represent them, inform our work.

## Reporting

30. We will publish a report of our inspection. The report will set out our findings and any recommendations, and will be published on our website at [www.prosecutioninspectorate.scot](http://www.prosecutioninspectorate.scot). We anticipate publishing our report later in 2024.
31. For further information about our inspection, or if you have information or experience of the Enquiry Point service that you would like to share with us, please contact us at [ips@gov.scot](mailto:ips@gov.scot).

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 July 2024



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### **About HM Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland**

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