



Responding to enquiries: service delivery through National Enquiry Point



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Introduction

The aim of this inspection was to assess how the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) responds to enquiries received by National Enquiry Point, its customer contact centre. Enquiry Point deals with call and email enquiries from victims, witnesses, next of kin and accused, as well as professionals working in the justice system. We assessed how efficiently and effectively enquiries are addressed, whether they are resolved by Enquiry Point at the first point of contact or transferred to other teams within COPFS for action.

As the first point of contact for many who are seeking information or advice from or providing information to COPFS, Enquiry Point plays a key role in delivering COPFS's obligations towards victims and witnesses.

We found that the quality of enquiry handling by Enquiry Point operators was generally good. Operators were polite, respectful and empathetic. They recognised that members of the public using the service may be doing so at some of the most difficult moments in their lives and that a compassionate response is needed. We observed operators reassuring those who were anxious, and remaining professional with those who became angry or abusive. Operators and their managers were committed to delivering the best service possible, and their work was well understood and highly valued by senior leaders within COPFS. However, this understanding of the role of Enquiry Point was not shared across COPFS. Many staff had low awareness of the volume and range of enquiries resolved by Enquiry Point.

The quality of enquiry handling could be improved even further with better guidance, training, systems and processes for operators. Critically, enquiry handling could also be improved if more staff across COPFS:

- recognised their own role in responding to enquiries
- had a greater focus on customer service
- had the skills, confidence and capacity to assist Enquiry Point where operators have been unable to resolve enquiries at first point of contact.

When seeking assistance from colleagues, operators can make many unsuccessful attempts to transfer callers. This prolongs the call for the person making the enquiry and extends the waiting time for all other callers in the Enquiry Point queue. When calls are successfully transferred or email enquiries are forwarded to other teams for action, we found that the quality of enquiry handling by those teams is not as good as when enquiries are managed entirely by operators.

While enquiries are generally handled well once they reach an operator, a key concern is the unmet demand for the Enquiry Point service. In the year to September 2024, 19% of callers were turned away because call queues were full. A further 50% of callers abandoned their call before it was answered. When we invited views on how well COPFS responds to enquiries, some of those who responded said they had abandoned calls to Enquiry Point because they were frustrated they were not answered in a reasonable time. Respondents also highlighted delays in email enquiries being dealt with.

COPFS should look afresh at Enquiry Point's demand and consider what levels of service it aims to provide to those who call and email. It should ensure that Enquiry Point is appropriately staffed and supported by the wider organisation, and that all staff have the tools to do their jobs well.

This inspection has reinforced the need for COPFS to urgently address a previous recommendation that it identifies and reduces failure demand. We estimate that almost a quarter of enquiries received each year are a result of COPFS failing to do something correctly or at all. The failure to get it right first time tends to happen outwith Enquiry Point, but it is Enquiry Point that is often the recipient of the resulting failure demand. Failing to get it right first time not only causes additional and unnecessary work for COPFS, but damages confidence in the service. If COPFS were to achieve a right first time approach, significant savings could be made that could be reinvested elsewhere or in further improving the quality of its service.

During our inspection, we spoke with another public sector contact centre. We were impressed by the quality of service being delivered in terms of the timeliness of response, the high levels of customer satisfaction and the focus on using technology to support further service improvements. This is the level of service to which COPFS should be aspiring, particularly given that many of those making enquiries are victims and witnesses who deserve the best service the public sector has to offer.

We have made 18 recommendations designed to support improvement in how COPFS responds to enquiries. This report also features a range of other suggestions for how the service delivered to the public and partner organisations can be developed and improved. We did not consider these suggestions reached the threshold of a recommendation, but we nonetheless expect them to be taken into account by COPFS in its response.

Laura Paton
HM Chief Inspector of Prosecution in Scotland
January 2025

Key findings

Outcomes

The quality of enquiry handling by Enquiry Point operators was generally good. Operators were polite, respectful, professional and empathetic. In most cases, they provided accurate information to those making enquiries and resolved enquiries appropriately.

Operators and their managers are committed to delivering the best service possible but could be better supported by the wider organisation. Operators require better guidance, training, systems and processes.

Between October 2023 and September 2024, Enquiry Point received 343,205 calls. 19% of these calls were not admitted to the call queue because it was full. 50% of calls admitted to the queue were abandoned before the caller spoke to an operator.

The average time callers waited to speak to an operator was eight minutes and 34 seconds.

COPFS requires to look afresh at Enquiry Point's demand, to consider what level of service COPFS aims to provide to those who call and email, and to set measurable targets that support delivery.

COPFS does not currently gather user feedback about how it responds to enquiries. This is a missed opportunity to hear from members of the public and partner organisations about how it can improve its service.

Direction

The work of Enquiry Point was well understood and highly valued by senior leaders within COPFS. This understanding was not shared across the organisation. Many staff had low awareness of the volume and range of enquiries resolved by Enquiry Point.

There is a need to clarify the purpose and remit of Enquiry Point.

Governance and oversight of how COPFS responds to enquiries could be improved.

There is a lack of data about who makes enquiries and what they are about. This hampers efforts to make service improvements and meet the needs of users.

We found that 22% of calls and emails to Enquiry Point represented failure demand. There is scope to pre-empt, divert and reduce demand on Enquiry Point.

Delivery

There is a gap in corporately approved guidance to help all staff respond to enquiries.

Teams across COPFS organise their business in a way that takes account of local needs, resources and case volumes. However, these local variations present challenges when they interact with a national service such as Enquiry Point. Identifying the correct team or person to contact, and the correct method of contact, is a challenging and time consuming task for operators.

While Enquiry Point managers have done their best to develop the training programme for operators, there is scope for improvement. There is an imbalance between shadowing, e-learning and other forms of learning, and inconsistency in delivery due to operational demands.

Many enquiries provide information that is relevant to the management of cases. This information is not always recorded or easily accessible to those who may require it.

The transfer of callers to other teams within COPFS is one of the most significant challenges faced by Enquiry Point. Operators make many attempts to transfer callers that do not succeed. Either the transfer does not succeed at all and operators require to take other steps to deal with the enquiry, or there are multiple attempts to transfer before transfer is eventually achieved.

Operators noted that some individuals and some teams are more than willing to accept calls. This included teams that had a strong sense of ownership of their cases or teams that recognised they had specialist expertise unavailable to Enquiry Point.

Transfer difficulties affect the overall quality of and public confidence in the service delivered by COPFS. We welcome new initiatives to address these difficulties.

It appeared that Enquiry Point was prioritising calls over email enquiries. Enquiry Point should be looking to provide comparable levels of service, regardless of whether an enquiry is made by phone or email.

COPFS requires to identify the appropriate level of staffing for Enquiry Point, taking into account demand, the level of service it aspires to deliver, and the financial resources available to it.

Operators have a high level of productivity and work diligently throughout the day responding to call and email enquiries with little downtime.

The high turnover of operators means the recruitment, induction and training of staff is an almost continuous endeavour.

Recruiting appropriate candidates has been challenging but the opening of a second site in Glasgow for Enquiry Point offers opportunities to address this.

Staff across COPFS said IT systems did not help them do their job well.

A new contact centre application for Enquiry Point was introduced in 2022. This caused challenges, and the anticipated benefits of the application have not been fully realised.

Poor project governance meant there was insufficient oversight of the challenges associated with implementation of the contact centre application.

Generally, more consideration needs to be given to the specific needs of Enquiry Point in terms of the systems it requires to deliver an effective enquiry handling service.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

COPFS must ensure that there is a clearly defined and widely understood purpose, remit and vision for Enquiry Point, as well as a plan for how this will be delivered. COPFS should also publish commitments about the service the public can expect to receive.

Recommendation 2

COPFS should ensure there is effective governance and oversight of Enquiry Point and its performance.

Recommendation 3

COPFS should gather the data needed to inform the design and delivery of an improved enquiry handling service.

Recommendation 4

COPFS should explore opportunities to pre-empt, divert and reduce demand on Enquiry Point.

Recommendation 5

COPFS should seek feedback from service users about how well it responds to their enquiries and how best it can meet their needs. This feedback should be analysed and used to inform service improvements.

Recommendation 6

In relation to guidance, COPFS should:

- (a) review Chapter 8 of its Victim and Witness Manual, ensuring it is up to date and clearly sets out COPFS's duties and expectations of staff, including those working in Enquiry Point. The review of Chapter 8 should take into account current working practices
- (b) review the guidance used internally by Enquiry Point to ensure it is accurate, consistent with COPFS policy and procedures, and corporately approved. Consideration should be given to the process by which future changes will be made.

Recommendation 7

To improve the efficiency of enquiry handling, COPFS should explore the feasibility of standardising how Enquiry Point contacts local offices and specialist teams. Where local offices and specialist teams restrict their availability to Enquiry Point, there should be oversight at a senior level.

Recommendation 8

COPFS should consider designating a prosecutor who can be readily available to support Enquiry Point with legal support and advice.

Recommendation 9

COPFS should review the training provided to Enquiry Point operators. The review should take account of all the training-related issues highlighted in this report.

Recommendation 10

To ensure a more customer-focused and efficient enquiry handling service, COPFS should:

- (a) review the information it publishes about contacting Enquiry Point so those making enquiries can choose the method and timing of contact that best meet their needs and have information to hand that will help their enquiry be dealt with more quickly
- (b) review Enquiry Point's recorded welcome message and provide information to callers about the expected wait or their position in the queue.

Recommendation 11

COPFS should ensure that:

- (a) prior to giving out information to those making case-related enquiries, all staff carry out appropriate identity checks
- (b) appropriate arrangements are in place that allow advocacy workers providing support to victims and witnesses to easily access relevant information on their behalf.

Recommendation 12

COPFS should ensure that Enquiry Point has appropriate systems and processes in place that support the recording of all types of enquiry and that this information is accessible to all those who may require it.

Recommendation 13

COPFS should work to understand and address the reasons that staff across the organisation are unwilling or unable to answer calls from Enquiry Point.

Recommendation 14

COPFS should review how Enquiry Point responds to emails, ensuring that those who make email enquiries receive a comparable level of service to those who make enquiries by phone.

Recommendation 15

COPFS should develop a workforce plan for Enquiry Point. It should ensure Enquiry Point is sufficiently staffed to meet demand and deliver the desired level of service.

Recommendation 16

COPFS should explore the reasons for poor staff retention in Enquiry Point and take action to address them. It should consider what changes can be made to its recruitment process for operators to better identify the most appropriate candidates and to improve retention in the longer term.

Recommendation 17

COPFS should ensure that the governance of digital projects is sufficiently robust.

Recommendation 18

COPFS should ensure that it has a contact centre application and other associated systems that help it deliver an effective and efficient Enquiry Point service.

Context

What is National Enquiry Point?

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. Enquiry Point is a national service based in Dumbarton. During the course of our inspection, in August 2024, a second site was established in Glasgow. The two sites deal collectively with all calls and emails to Enquiry Point.
5. Between April 2023 and March 2024, Enquiry Point handled 135,890 calls. Operators handled an average of 546 calls each day that the Enquiry Point service was open.
6. 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 of systems in 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.
7. We estimate that, taking into account both calls and emails, Enquiry Point deals with over 200,000 enquiries each year.

Operating context

8. In its Strategic Plan 2023-27,¹ 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.
9. In its service improvement plan, COPFS cites the Institute of Customer Service's definition of good customer service: 'doing best what matters most for customers'.²

¹ COPFS, [Strategic Plan 2023-27](#).

² COPFS, [Improving our service strategy 2023-2027](#).

10. 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.
11. 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 a victim or witness should have access to appropriate support during and after the investigation and proceedings.
12. Section 1A of the 2014 Act sets out further general principles to which the Lord Advocate must have regard specifically in relation to victims. These include:
 - that victims should be treated in a respectful, sensitive, tailored, professional and non-discriminatory manner
 - 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.
13. 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 labelled, or the stage that proceedings have reached.
14. The 2014 Act also places an obligation on Scottish Ministers to publish a Victims' Code for Scotland³ 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.⁴ 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.
15. 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

16. HM Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland (IPS) previously inspected the operation of Enquiry Point in 2013.⁵ 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. Following the publication of our inspection report, COPFS advised us of work being

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

⁴ 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.

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

done to address the recommendations. The recommendations were not formally followed up however, as that was not part of the inspectorate's approach to scrutiny at that time.

17. 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 2024.⁶ 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 explore those issues further in this report.

Other reviews

18. As well as our 2013 inspection of Enquiry Point, we became aware of two further reviews of Enquiry Point. The first was commissioned by COPFS and carried out by an external consultant in 2015. This review considered the operation of Enquiry Point, its performance and resourcing. It considered evidence from a range of sources and made a number of recommendations for short and long-term changes that would improve the service.
19. The second was an internal review carried out in 2016. This review was prompted by concerns about the disproportionate turnover of Enquiry Point operators compared to staff working in other teams within COPFS. It sought to establish the causes of operator turnover. Its findings were therefore based on interviews with Enquiry Point operators and managers, and their feedback about their role, the working environment and their terms and conditions. This review also made a number of recommendations.
20. Many of the findings and recommendations of our 2013 inspection and the 2015 and 2016 reviews of Enquiry Point remain relevant today. This suggests there is more COPFS must do to implement the recommendations it receives and to monitor the impact of action taken, to ensure intended outcomes are being achieved.

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

Scope and methodology

Scope

21. The aim of this inspection was to assess how COPFS responds to enquiries received by Enquiry Point. We sought to assess how efficiently and effectively enquiries are addressed, including where enquiries are resolved by Enquiry Point at the first point of contact and where they are transferred to other teams within COPFS for action.
22. While ‘customer’ is not a term usually used in the context of the criminal justice system, we essentially assessed COPFS’s ‘customer’ service. We sought to highlight effective practice and any areas for improvement.
23. In carrying out our inspection, we were guided by our Inspection Framework.⁷ 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:
 - Outcomes – What is the service achieving? What does it intend to achieve in the future?
 - Direction – Why does this service exist? What purpose does it fulfil?
 - Delivery – How does this service deliver on its purpose?
24. The key inspection questions we sought to answer were:
 - What is the role of Enquiry Point? What role will Enquiry Point play in the service delivered by COPFS in the future?
 - How well does COPFS support Enquiry Point and other teams within COPFS to respond to enquiries?
 - 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?
25. During our inspection, we considered how well COPFS understands and meets the needs of those who may require additional support to communicate with COPFS. We also considered the extent to which COPFS is meeting its commitments to deliver a compassionate, trauma-informed service.
26. As well as responding to enquiries, those working in Enquiry Point may also deal with complaints about COPFS and requests from victims to exercise their right to review decisions to take no proceedings or take no further action in a case. We chose to exclude these aspects of Enquiry Point’s work from our scope, given they have each been the subject of previous scrutiny by IPS.⁸

Methodology

27. To support our inspection, we gathered evidence from a range of sources including:
 - a review of COPFS strategies, policies, guidance, procedures and other documentation relating to the management of enquiries
 - analysis of available data about the service provided by Enquiry Point
 - observation of the work of Enquiry Point

⁷ IPS, [Inspection Framework](#) (2024).

⁸ IPS, [Thematic report on the Victims’ Right to Review and complaints handling and feedback follow-up report](#) (2018) and IPS, [Thematic report on complaints handling and feedback](#) (2015).

- interviews with more than 30 Enquiry Point operators and managers, as well as almost 40 staff from across COPFS who deal with enquiries passed on by operators or whose role is otherwise linked to the Enquiry Point service
 - interviews with key stakeholders, such as organisations whose staff and/or clients regularly contact Enquiry Point
 - a survey for those who had used the Enquiry Point service in the last two years (see from paragraph 29)
 - an audit of a random sample of 200 calls and emails received by Enquiry Point (see from paragraph 33).
28. We have also drawn on evidence previously gathered to support our inspection of how COPFS prosecutes domestic abuse cases at sheriff summary level.⁹ The issue of how COPFS responds to enquiries had been raised often during that inspection, including during interviews with domestic abuse victims and with the advocacy workers who support them.

Survey

29. We invited those who had contacted Enquiry Point in the last two years to respond to an online survey regarding their experience of and views on the service. We publicised the survey on our website and on social media channels, and distributed it to our networks and key stakeholder organisations. The survey was open between 27 August and 13 September 2024. We received 85 responses. Of those who responded:
- 33% were from an organisation providing support to victims and witnesses
 - 33% were from the police
 - 14% were a victim or a witness
 - 12% were a solicitor
 - 2% were from the Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration (SCRA).
30. The remaining 6% of responses included a family member of a victim, a social worker, a non-police reporting agency, a person working at the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service (SCTS), and a person working at a charity.
31. More than half (55%) of respondents said they had contacted Enquiry Point more than 10 times, while 6% said they had contacted the service only once.
32. Respondents chose whether to take part in our survey, meaning the results are not representative of all those who contact Enquiry Point. For example, the proportion of respondents who were victims or witnesses was likely smaller, and the proportion of professionals larger, than if the respondents had been representative. Nonetheless, their feedback has been invaluable and echoes much of the evidence we gathered from other sources. The results of the survey, as well as comments from respondents, are highlighted throughout this report.

Contact audit

33. By auditing calls and emails received by Enquiry Point, we sought to assess how well enquiries were responded to by COPFS. We assessed how the call or email was dealt with, whether it was resolved by Enquiry Point or passed to another team within COPFS for resolution. Monitoring how enquiries were handled from start to finish allowed us to better understand the enquiry handling process and to identify what works well and any areas for improvement.

⁹ IPS, [The prosecution of domestic abuse cases at sheriff summary level](#) (2024).

34. A secondary purpose of our contact audit was to gather information about calls and emails to Enquiry Point, including their nature and source. We gathered this data because it is not routinely collated by COPFS itself yet we consider it essential to understanding and developing the service.
35. We audited a random sample of enquiries received by Enquiry Point in the week commencing Monday, 22 April 2024. We carried out our audit in June and July 2024. By auditing enquiries received in April, we intended they would be sufficiently recent so as to provide information about current practice. We also hoped that sufficient time would have passed so that any enquiries that required more protracted work to address them would nonetheless be fully resolved by the time of our audit.
36. We were able to listen to calls from April as all calls to Enquiry Point are recorded and stored for a specified period. We were able to directly access the Enquiry Point email inbox to identify emails for audit. Inspectors had direct access to relevant COPFS systems, including its case management systems, to observe what action had been taken in response to an enquiry.
37. During the week commencing Monday, 22 April 2024, Enquiry Point received over 4,000 enquiries.¹⁰ Of these, 72% were received by phone and 28% by email. We audited a random sample of 200 enquiries, made up of 144 calls and 56 emails.¹¹ The calls were received between Monday and Friday of that week, during Enquiry Point's opening hours. The emails from which we selected our sample were received any time between Monday and Sunday.
38. We make reference to the findings of our audit throughout this report. We will sometimes refer to the results of the 'contact audit' – this means the overall findings from our audits of both calls and emails. We will sometimes refer specifically to the results of the call audit or the email audit. This will be done where the process for handling enquiries varies according to the means by which the enquiry was made, or where there is variation between the results of the call and email audits that is worth noting. For example, while 55% of all enquiries we audited were from victims or witnesses, this group were more likely to make an enquiry by phone rather than email. Victims and witnesses made 65% of the calls we audited but sent only 27% of the emails.

¹⁰ While the number of calls received is routinely collated, the number of emails is not. Inspectors required to manually count the emails received in the relevant week. This approach risked a small degree of human error, but allowed us to estimate the total number of enquiries received during the week and to estimate the proportion of emails and calls.

¹¹ The results of our contact audit are statistically significant with a confidence interval of 95% \pm 7%.

Outcomes

39. We sought to assess the quality of service provided by COPFS to those making enquiries. To do this, we considered evidence from a range of sources, including Enquiry Point performance data, the results of our contact audit, and service user feedback. We also considered whether COPFS itself understands how well it responds to enquiries.

Performance

40. As would be expected in a contact centre environment, a range of data is available about Enquiry Point's call handling. This data is discussed at Enquiry Point manager and team meetings. It is used to monitor the performance of the service and of individual operators.
41. The introduction of a new contact centre application in 2022 affected the range and quality of the data gathered by Enquiry Point.¹² The change in systems means it is difficult to compare data with previous years and to identify long-term trends. Difficulties encountered with the introduction of the new application resulted in a lack of robust data and a lack of capacity to analyse and monitor data for some months. For those reasons, the data presented in this report is limited. We have focused on call handling data for the year between October 2023 and September 2024. During this period, the application had begun to stabilise and there was greater confidence in the quality of the data.
42. Unfortunately, very limited data is available about enquiries received via email, meaning COPFS has only a partial picture of the service delivered by Enquiry Point. In addition, the call handling data relates only to the service provided by Enquiry Point. No data is available about the handling of enquiries if they are passed to another team within COPFS for resolution.¹³

Performance data

43. While a range of data is available about Enquiry Point's call handling, we have focused only on some key measures, including:
- total volume of calls (also known as 'calls presented')
 - calls queued
 - calls abandoned
 - queue time
 - calls handled
 - call handling time.
44. Enquiry Point's performance is affected by a range of factors, including:
- the volume of calls, including fluctuations in demand according to the day of the week and time of day
 - the number of operators available to answer calls. This will be influenced by general resourcing for the service as well as operators taking annual or sick leave
 - staff turnover and the number of experienced operators available to answer calls versus those who are new and inexperienced. Even when experienced operators are available, their productivity will be reduced if they are training newer colleagues
 - system issues.

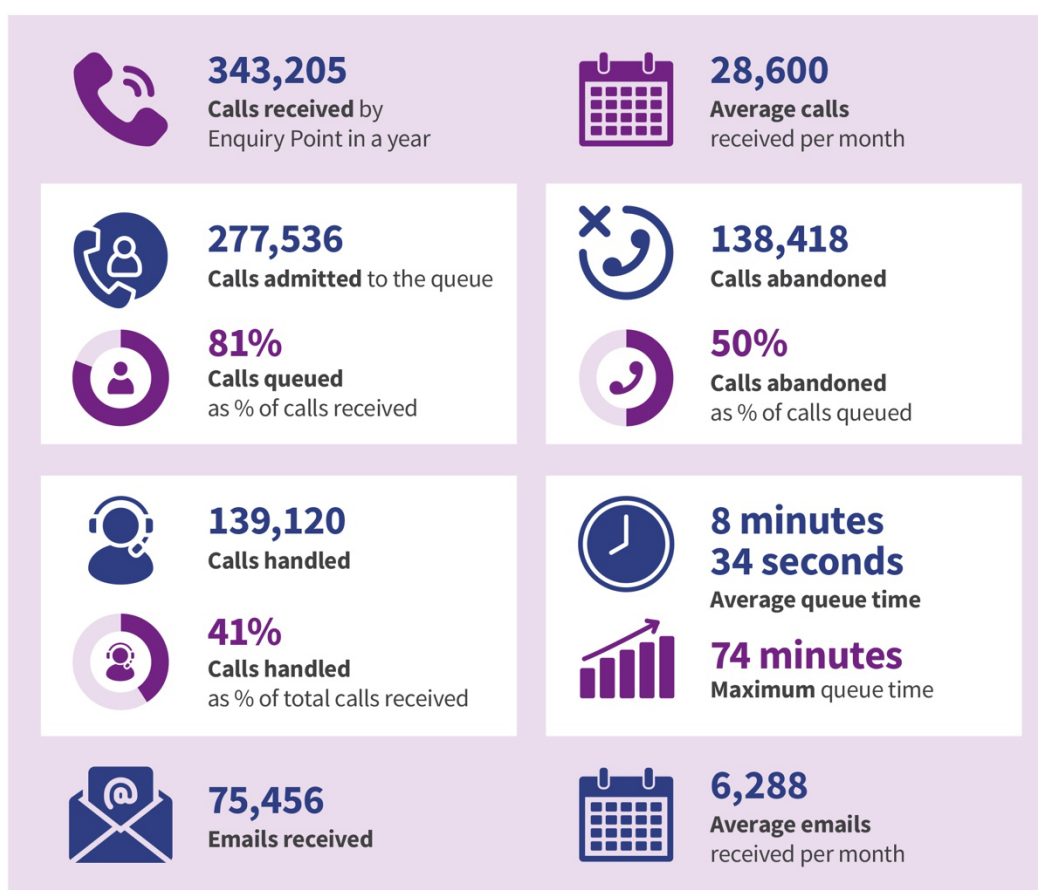
¹² For further information about the new contact centre application, see from paragraph 370.

¹³ With the exception of data that was manually collated during the Dundee pilot (see from paragraph 296).

45. Changes in performance can be correlated to the number of operators available to answer calls and known system outages.
46. **Total volume of calls.** In the year between October 2023 and September 2024, the total number of inbound calls made to Enquiry Point during its opening hours was 343,205. The average for each month was 28,600. There are considerable fluctuations between months. This will be influenced by the number of days, weekends and public holidays in a month. The number of calls received each month ranged from 18,578 (in December 2023) to 35,616 (January 2024).
47. **Calls queued.** Enquiry Point limits the number of calls that enter its queue. This is to avoid callers joining a lengthy queue and having to wait too long for their call to be answered. When the queue is full, the caller is thanked for calling and asked to call back later or email and the email address is provided. The size of the call queue can be adjusted depending on staffing levels. We heard that the standard call queue size had previously been 50, but that this had been reduced to 30 in 2021.
48. In the year between October 2023 and September 2024, the number of calls admitted to the queue was 277,536. This means 81% of calls made were admitted to the queue. Again the number of calls admitted to the queue fluctuated each month. It ranged from 14,458 (December 2023) to 28,621 (January 2024). The average was 23,128 per month.
49. During that period, 65,669 calls were not admitted to the queue. This was an average of 5,472 calls per month. These were callers who were effectively turned away, albeit some may have called back another time or made their enquiry by email instead.
50. **Calls abandoned.** Once admitted to the queue, some callers hang up and abandon the call. Data on calls abandoned can be an indicator that the queue length is too long and that callers are looking for a quicker response. Among those who responded to our survey were those who abandoned their call because they were frustrated it was not answered in a reasonable time. Between October 2023 and September 2024, the number of calls abandoned was 138,418. This meant 50% of all calls queued were abandoned.
51. Of these abandoned calls, 80,437 were abandoned within 10 seconds (this was 29% of all calls admitted to the queue). Such calls may have been to a wrong number or, if to the correct number, it seems the caller hung up after not receiving an immediate response.
52. The number of calls abandoned each month ranged from 4,460 (December 2023) to 16,696 (August 2024). The average number of calls abandoned each month was 11,535.
53. **Queue time.** Enquiry Point monitors the average time callers spend in the queue as well as the maximum time a caller has spent in the queue before having their call answered by an operator. Between October 2023 and September 2024, the average queue time was eight minutes and 34 seconds. The average queue time per month ranged from five minutes (December 2023) to 13 minutes (July 2024).
54. The maximum time a caller spent in the queue during the year was 74 minutes. On the day this call was made, Enquiry Point experienced a failure in its contact centre application. Aside from this call, the longest time a caller spent in the queue during the year was 45 minutes.

55. The average queue time for calls that were abandoned during the year was two minutes. The longest a caller waited in the queue before abandoning their call was 62 minutes. This call took place on the same day that Enquiry Point experienced the system failure noted at paragraph 54. Aside from this call, the longest time a caller waited in the queue before abandoning their call during the year was 55 minutes.
56. **Calls handled.** This is the number of calls that are connected to an operator. Between October 2023 and September 2024, Enquiry Point handled 139,120 calls, an average of 11,593 calls per month. The highest number of calls handled in a month was 13,453 (November 2023) while the lowest was 9,998 (December 2023).
57. **Call handling time.** Enquiry Point measures the time it takes to handle calls. This is measured from the point the caller is connected to an operator, to the point the operator concludes the call. It does not include any time the caller spends talking to another member of staff if they are transferred to another team. During the year, the average call handling time was seven minutes and 15 seconds.

Enquiry Point Performance



Call data from October 2023 to September 2024. Email data from February 2021 to January 2022.

Key performance indicators and targets

58. Enquiry Point's call handling data is used to assess performance against the service's key performance indicators and targets. Enquiry Point has two key performance indicators (KPIs):
- to handle 90% of inbound calls presented (KPI 1)
 - to answer 80% of enquiries at first point of contact (KPI 2).
59. It also has two targets for operators:
- to handle 40 calls per day
 - to ensure callers are on hold for no more than three minutes when attempting to transfer them to another team, and for no more than five minutes when searching case management systems for information or seeking guidance to answer their query.
60. In relation to KPI 1 (handling 90% of inbound calls presented), this is a longstanding KPI that Enquiry Point has persistently been unable to meet. Between October 2023 and September 2024, Enquiry Point handled 71% of calls presented. The highest monthly performance was 80% in December 2023 while the lowest was 63% in August 2024.
61. It is worth noting that the KPI is not based on all calls made to Enquiry Point, but only those that enter the call queue. It also excludes calls that enter the queue and that are abandoned within 10 seconds as Enquiry Point has had limited opportunity to answer them. When the Enquiry Point phone line is switched off each day, operators work until all the calls in the queue are answered. As well as the 37% of callers in the queue whose call was not handled by Enquiry Point in August 2024, there were others whose call was not handled because it never entered the queue. In August 2024, more than 5,000 calls did not enter the queue.
62. Older data shows that Enquiry Point was also failing to handle 90% of calls presented prior to the introduction of the contact centre application in 2022. We asked whether consideration had been given to revising the KPI, but managers were keen to maintain it as a standard they should be working towards.
63. If KPI 1 was based on calls handled as a proportion of the total volume of calls rather than the calls presented, operators would have handled 41% of all calls made between October 2023 and September 2024.
64. In relation to KPI 2, data is not readily available to help Enquiry Point accurately and routinely monitor whether it is answering 80% of enquiries at first point of contact.
65. Data is available on the proportion of calls that it successfully transferred to other teams within COPFS. This is generally around 10% of the calls it handles. While this can be a useful proxy for KPI 2, it does not account for other ways enquiries can be managed and does not take into account email enquiries. For example, following a failed attempt to transfer a caller to another team, operators may send that team an email or suggest that the caller does so. While the operator's involvement in the enquiry will have ended at this stage, the enquiry may not be 'answered' from the caller's perspective. Current systems do not allow for these actions to be recorded in a way that would allow robust data to be gathered.
66. The data from our own audit (paragraphs 80 and 83) suggests that Enquiry Point may not be meeting KPI 2, but much depends on how KPI 2 is to be interpreted.

67. The operator targets were described to us as more of a guideline. It was recognised that their performance each day and their call management would depend on the individual circumstances of each call they received. Operators we interviewed were aware of these targets but did not feel under pressure to ensure they met them every day. They felt there was good understanding among managers of issues that can affect daily performance, and they were clear that their focus should be the quality of call handling rather than the quantity. Nonetheless, the existence of the targets provided operators with a guide as to what was expected of them, and managers could monitor the targets to identify outliers and to explore variations in performance.
68. The data available from Enquiry Point was not sufficiently detailed to allow us to calculate the exact number of calls handled per operator per day. Experienced operators told us it was possible to meet and exceed the target of 40 calls per day. Much depended on the nature of the calls received, and whether they had managed any particularly complex or protracted calls.
69. In relation to the second target for operators, regarding hold time, data shows that 69% of callers were put on hold while their call was being handled. Between October 2023 and September 2024, the average time callers spent on hold was just over three minutes. This shows that operators are generally meeting this target. However, each month, the longest time on hold is noted. This was at least 16 minutes every month. The longest time on hold across the year was just over 24 minutes. Long hold times are usually caused by operators having difficulty transferring the caller to other COPFS teams, or having to wait on the call while the other team provides the operator with the information needed, rather than speaking directly to the caller. In our own call audit, there was an example of a caller hanging up after they had been on hold for 10 minutes.
70. The indicators and targets set out above are for internal use only. COPFS does not routinely publish any data about the Enquiry Point service, nor has it published any commitments about the service the public should expect to receive from Enquiry Point until very recently. In its Business Plan 2024-25, COPFS stated that it would respond to all calls and messages to Enquiry Point via initial contact or by returned call in four hours, providing all callers with a direct point of contact.¹⁴ We welcome this ambitious goal, but found limited information about how it would be achieved or measured.
71. The data shows that Enquiry Point is not meeting the demand for its service. Between October 2023 and September 2024, 65,669 (19%) calls made to Enquiry Point were not admitted to the call queue. Of those admitted to the queue, 138,418 (50%) were abandoned. While many of these callers may try to call again another time or send an email instead, others may not.
72. The extent to which demand is met can fluctuate significantly month to month. It is susceptible not only to staffing and system issues noted at paragraph 44, but also to the prolonged call handling times caused by difficulties transferring callers to other teams and to the decreased availability of operators as they deal with significant failure demand.¹⁵
73. There is a need to look afresh at Enquiry Point's demand, to consider what level of service COPFS aims to provide to those who call and email, set measurable targets

¹⁴ COPFS, [Business Plan 2024-25](#) (2024).

¹⁵ These issues are explored in further detail from paragraph 270 (transfer difficulties) and paragraph 156 (failure demand).

that support delivery and to ensure Enquiry Point is appropriately staffed and supported by the wider organisation. Given public sector financial constraints, it cannot be expected that operators immediately answer every call made, but COPFS requires to consider whether it is striking the appropriate balance of resourcing and service delivery. These issues are explored further throughout the remainder of this report.

74. For those whose calls are answered by an operator, the results of our contact audit are generally more positive.

Contact audit results

75. By auditing calls and emails received by Enquiry Point, we sought to assess how well enquiries were responded to by COPFS. We assessed this using a range of measures.
76. In 96% of the enquiries we audited, we assessed the Enquiry Point operator's response to be polite, respectful, professional and empathetic. We observed examples of operators being reassuring and patient with those who were anxious, and examples of operators remaining polite and professional with those who became angry and abusive. In the small number of enquiries where this was not the case, we considered the operator was not sufficiently empathetic given the subject matter of the enquiry, sounded disinterested in the caller's issue, or provided an overly brief response to an email enquiry.
77. We also observed operators to be polite and professional when transferring enquiries to their colleagues in other teams across COPFS.
78. Where operators were required to provide information to the person making the enquiry, we assessed whether the information was supplied in accordance with COPFS policy and whether the information was accurate:
 - information was supplied in accordance with COPFS policy in 86% of enquiries
 - accurate information was supplied in response to 85% of enquiries.
79. There was some overlap in the errors identified when assessing these two measures. Where information was not shared in accordance with policy, this was because the information should not have been shared at all or too much information was shared; the information was incorrect or involved speculation on the part of the operator; or the operator was not qualified to provide the information because they were not legally trained. Examples of supplying inaccurate information included operators showing a lack of knowledge or understanding of justice processes, or not interpreting information on systems correctly.
80. We also considered how operators 'disposed of' enquiries and whether this was appropriate. We assessed this separately for call and email enquiries as the disposal options varied. Of the call enquiries:
 - operators entirely resolved 45% of enquiries with no further action needed
 - operators resolved a further 7% of enquiries after consulting with another COPFS team
 - operators told 18% of callers to write to COPFS
 - operators sent an email about 16% of enquiries to another COPFS team (for almost half of these enquiries, an email was only sent after the operator had tried to transfer the caller to another COPFS team but received no response)
 - operators successfully transferred 10% of callers to another COPFS team

- 3% of enquiries were dealt with in some other way.¹⁶
81. We assessed that 84% of call enquiries were disposed of appropriately. We considered an alternate disposal may have been more appropriate for the remainder. For example:
- a caller seeking information about the status of their case was highly concerned about their child who was a witness. The operator provided an update about the case but given the caller's concerns, it would have been more appropriate to also transfer the caller to VIA
 - a caller provided information about another person who may have been responsible for an assault and details of additional injuries. This information should have been passed to a legal member of staff to instruct further enquiries and to consider disclosure and evidential implications
 - a caller who asked whether a fiscal fine was a conviction was advised to make a subject access request to COPFS. This enquiry should have been resolved by the operator.
82. In some cases, it was another member of staff within COPFS rather than the Enquiry Point operator who was responsible for the enquiry not being disposed of in the most appropriate way. For example, an operator attempted to transfer a caller with an enquiry about special measures in a domestic abuse case to VIA, but VIA refused to take the call. Instead, VIA insisted that the operator wait while the information was found and that it was the operator who relayed the information to the caller, rather than VIA.
83. Of the email enquiries we audited:
- operators resolved 55% with no further action needed
 - operators resolved a further 4% after consulting with another COPFS team
 - operators forwarded 37% to another COPFS team to resolve
 - operators responded to 2% by seeking to verify the emailer's identity (no trace of any further emails could be found)
 - no response to 2% of email enquiries could be found.
84. We assessed that 86% of email enquiries were disposed of appropriately. Examples of email enquiries that were not disposed of correctly included an enquiry that was forwarded to the wrong local office and emails that contained information which should have been recorded on COPFS systems but was not. While the majority of email enquiries were disposed of appropriately, many of these were routine enquiries from those working in the justice system such as the police or defence. Email enquiries from members of the public requiring a more tailored response appeared more likely to be passed on to other teams in COPFS for action, rather than the operator resolving the enquiry at first point of contact (as they would have done for a call enquiry).
85. Finally, we assessed the overall quality of enquiry handling by Enquiry Point, taking account of the issues listed above for each enquiry audited. We assessed the response as either good, reasonable or unsatisfactory. The overall quality of enquiry handling was:
- good for 67% of enquiries
 - reasonable for 18% of enquiries
 - unsatisfactory for 15% of enquiries.

¹⁶ Throughout this report, percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

86. Where enquiry handling was good, this was because the operator was polite, respectful, empathetic, reassuring and listened well. The operator verified the enquirer's identity where relevant and provided accurate information. The operator either resolved the enquiry at the first point of contact or passed the enquiry to an appropriate person within COPFS for resolution. Where enquiry handling was reasonable, most of these features were present, but there was scope for improvement in some aspects of how the enquiry was dealt with.
87. Examples of unsatisfactory enquiry handling included:
- a domestic abuse victim who called wishing to have the charges against her partner dropped. The caller became distressed during the call and mentioned she was feeling suicidal. The operator was not empathetic and the victim was not referred or escalated to VIA but simply told to write to COPFS with her views about the charges
 - after her initial enquiry was dealt with, a caller wished further information about what would happen when she arrived at court as a witness. Inaccurate information was given by the operator about the court process
 - an email from a witness in a solemn case advising that they were unfit for court was not shared with the sheriff and jury team managing the case. As a result, that team did not become aware there was an issue until several months later.
88. Where Enquiry Point operators transferred calls or sent or forwarded emails to another team within COPFS for action, we also assessed the quality of subsequent call handling by that team. We found this to be:
- good for 45% of enquiries
 - reasonable for 20% of enquiries
 - unsatisfactory for 35% of enquiries.
89. Recurring issues in enquiries that had been passed to other teams and that were assessed as reasonable or unsatisfactory included no record of any action being taken to address the enquiry, delays in action being taken in response to the enquiry, and important information from enquiries not being added to case management systems. For example, a witness emailed Enquiry Point seeking clarification on whether she was needed at court. The operator forwarded the email to the local office to respond. There was no record of a response by the local office and the email enquiry was not imported to the case file. Ultimately, the witness attended court only to be told she was not required.
90. We found the overall quality of enquiry handling by Enquiry Point is good or reasonable for 85% of the call and email enquiries we audited. This is positive. We consider that the quality of enquiry handling could be improved even further if operators are supported by better guidance and training and if the other issues outlined in this report are addressed.
91. Comparing the results at paragraph 85 to paragraph 88, it is apparent that when enquiries are passed by operators to other teams within COPFS for resolution, the quality of enquiry handling drops. COPFS therefore needs to consider what more can be done to support staff across the organisation to respond to enquiries effectively and efficiently.

Email enquiries – initial response times

92. Those emailing Enquiry Point receive an automated acknowledgement of their email, advising that their enquiry will be responded to within three working days. While managers check the Enquiry Point mailbox to gauge progress in responding to

emails, the current email system does not allow compliance with the response time to be easily monitored. However, we assessed the timeliness of the first response to the 56 email enquiries we audited. For two, no response could be found. For the remaining 54 enquiries, the average time to respond was 2.5 working days. Response times ranged from the same day to 10 working days. Emails from members of the public were likely to get a quicker response – 100% of their enquiries received an initial response within three working days, compared to only 54% of enquiries from professionals and partner organisations.

93. While we welcome the attention given to email enquiries from members of the public, the wide range of initial response times suggests more consistency is needed in how Enquiry Point responds to emails. No doubt some enquirers who do not receive a response within three working days as advised by the automated acknowledgement will re-contact Enquiry Point or another team within COPFS, thereby contributing to failure demand. Moreover, the three-day response time is not publicised and is not known to enquirers until they send their email. If this was publicised by COPFS (for example, on its website), those making enquiries could make a more informed choice about whether to email or phone.

Quality assurance

94. Enquiry Point itself had recently begun to monitor the quality of its enquiry handling shortly before our inspection. In April 2024, it commenced routine quality assurance of calls. This involves two calls per operator being quality assured each week. The calls are assessed based on the empathy shown by the operator, their professionalism and knowledge, how long they take to wrap up the call, and the action they take. Feedback, including good practice and areas for improvement, is provided to staff. Additional training can be provided to individuals if needed or, if common themes arise, training can be provided to all operators.
95. We welcome the introduction of quality assurance by Enquiry Point. It appears that it is being carried out in a constructive manner with a focus on learning and improvement rather than blame. We consider this approach should support further improvements in the already good service offered by operators.
96. We consider there are key ways in which the approach to quality assurance could be strengthened:
- lengthy calls were not being quality assured at the time of our inspection due to a lack of capacity. We consider lengthy calls may be a particularly good source of learning
 - quality assurance is focused on how calls are dealt with by Enquiry Point. Consideration could be given to extending this to how enquiries are resolved, regardless of whether the enquiry is concluded by an operator or passed on to other teams within COPFS
 - there is a need to quality assure responses to email enquiries.
97. As we were preparing this report, we heard that Enquiry Point's quality assurance capability is being strengthened and that consideration is now being given to monitoring email responses, which we welcome. We also consider that there is scope for those carrying out quality assurance to identify calls that should be used to support the training of new operators.
98. In addition to the more formal quality assurance activity, we heard that Enquiry Point managers frequently listen in to calls and provide feedback to staff.

User satisfaction

99. In its service improvement strategy, COPFS sets several outcomes that it aims to achieve, one of which includes seeking ‘continuous improvement through user feedback’.¹⁷ We welcome this intention. However, as yet, there is no mechanism in place by which COPFS regularly seeks and acts on feedback from those who have called or emailed Enquiry Point.
100. We heard that some ad hoc attempts to gather user feedback had taken place in the past. This has included operators asking callers at the conclusion of their call whether they were satisfied with the service. This took place during an annual Customer Service Week. The results do not appear to have been analysed or shared widely, and we heard little about how they had been used to improve or develop the service.
101. Other justice agencies routinely carry out customer satisfaction surveys. Both SCTS and Police Scotland commission external agencies to assist with this process. SCTS measures court user satisfaction, while Police Scotland carries out monthly user experience surveys.
102. In a contact centre environment such as Enquiry Point, customer satisfaction surveys should be carried out routinely. The results should be used to inform training and service improvements as well as positive feedback for staff (see Recommendation 5).
103. Given the absence of user satisfaction data to help us assess the quality of the service provided to those making enquiries, we carried out our own survey. Key findings were that:
- 65% of respondents were satisfied with how polite and professional the person who dealt with their enquiry was
 - 49% were satisfied with the knowledge of the person who dealt with their enquiry
 - 36% of respondents were satisfied with how quickly they received a response.
104. When we asked respondents to rate their satisfaction with their overall experience of contacting Enquiry Point:
- 38% were satisfied
 - 45% were dissatisfied
 - 17% said they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.
105. Despite our survey being open for less than three weeks and attracting only 85 responses, the quantitative and qualitative results provide useful feedback for a service to consider and use to make improvements. When we asked respondents what could improve in how COPFS responds to enquiries, the most common theme was the need to improve the speed with which enquiries are managed. Many respondents complained of long call waiting times. Some respondents felt they received a prompt response from Enquiry Point itself, but noted delayed responses if their enquiry was transferred to another team within COPFS. This highlights that the internal challenges faced by operators in making contact with other teams and the failure of other teams to deal with emails promptly are visible to service users.

‘They should respond faster, and the waiting times on the phone line require to be cut down drastically, as these are very, very high.’ (Solicitor survey respondent)

¹⁷ COPFS, Improving our service strategy 2023-2027 (2023).

'I default to emailing COPFS as calling is usually not practical, more often than not I have called and the line is not accepting calls. It is not a method of contact I would rely on.'
(Victim/witness support organisation)

'Email responses are great, quick and helpful. Always feel my enquiry is treated with urgency and respect.' (Victim/witness support organisation)

Complaints

106. Monitoring complaints is another means of gathering feedback about a service. COPFS may receive complaints specifically about the service provided by Enquiry Point, or where the role played by Enquiry Point is one feature of a complaint about its service more broadly. We asked for data about complaints involving Enquiry Point. This was not available as complaints are not categorised in such a way as to make those involving Enquiry Point easily identifiable. The inspectorate highlighted this as an issue in our 2013 review of Enquiry Point.¹⁸ Our recommendation that it be addressed remains outstanding.
107. While no data was available, complaints involving Enquiry Point are shared with the service's business manager who plays a role in investigating the complaint and providing a response. So long as all relevant complaints are brought to the business manager's attention, there is an opportunity for learning to be gathered and acted upon. The lack of robust data, however, means opportunities to monitor trends in complaints are lost.

Overall assessment

108. Evidence gathered during our inspection shows that the quality of enquiry handling by Enquiry Point is generally good. There is some scope for improvement, particularly in how enquiries are managed when assistance is needed from other teams within COPFS. The ease and speed with which those making call enquiries can access operators is of concern, as is the timeliness of responses to email enquiries.

¹⁸ IPS, [Thematic report on COPFS Enquiry Point](#) (2013), Recommendation 13.

Direction

109. During our inspection, we considered the purpose of Enquiry Point and the role it plays in the service delivered by COPFS. We also considered the leadership and governance arrangements for Enquiry Point, and the extent to which COPFS understands the enquiry-related demand from and needs of its service users.

Purpose

110. COPFS established Enquiry Point as its national customer contact centre in 2009. Previously, those wishing to contact COPFS required to contact their local procurator fiscal office. By establishing a centralised customer contact centre, COPFS's aim was to improve the service delivered to the public by providing a 'high quality and prompt telephone enquiry service building on best practice in the contact centre industry'.¹⁹ It was expected that, as a single point of contact, Enquiry Point would respond to enquiries from the public and partner organisations and provide them with information. Where Enquiry Point operators were not able to provide the information needed, they would route the caller to the relevant team within COPFS.

111. Since being established, the role of Enquiry Point has evolved. For example, while Enquiry Point initially only dealt with enquiries made by phone, its remit was later extended to responding to email enquiries. During our inspection, we also heard that, in more recent years, there has been a greater focus on Enquiry Point resolving enquiries at the first point of contact, minimising the need to transfer callers or forward emails to other teams within COPFS. This shift was described by some as a focus on the quality of enquiry handling, rather than the quantity of enquiries handled.

112. The context in which Enquiry Point operates has also changed significantly since the service was established. This includes:

- legislative changes, including the duties placed on COPFS and the rights accorded to victims and witnesses from the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014
- a greater focus from COPFS on the need to improve communication with service users and stakeholders
- improved understanding of the impact of trauma on those affected by crime
- changes in the profile of 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.

113. Despite these developments in the role of Enquiry Point and its operating context, we could find no up-to-date, clear statement of the purpose of Enquiry Point, its remit and how it sits alongside other services within COPFS. While there appeared to be a common understanding of the work of Enquiry Point among senior leaders and those working in Enquiry Point itself, this understanding was not shared across COPFS.

114. Some staff incorrectly believed that Enquiry Point operated as little more than a switchboard, redirecting those making enquiries to the relevant teams within COPFS. They had no awareness of the volume or nature of enquiries resolved entirely by Enquiry Point operators. This misconception led to some staff not valuing the contribution made by Enquiry Point.

¹⁹ IPS, [Thematic report on COPFS Enquiry Point](#) (2013).

115. The lack of clarity about the role of Enquiry Point contributed to a ‘them and us’ attitude among some staff. Enquiry Point staff often felt isolated from and undervalued by the rest of the service, while some staff outside Enquiry Point had limited understanding of how Enquiry Point supported their work or contributed to the overall mission of COPFS. The sense of a collective ‘team COPFS’ approach to responding to enquiries was absent from some of the discussions we had with staff.
116. Enquiry Point managers and staff have sought to address the lack of awareness and understanding of its work within COPFS. They have publicised their work in various ways, including by making presentations during visits to other COPFS offices and by publishing articles on the intranet. They have also encouraged staff from across COPFS to visit Enquiry Point and shadow operators. This work has been supported by senior leaders and corporate communications staff who have also sought opportunities to highlight the work done by Enquiry Point. These efforts were having an impact and should continue – staff who had read articles or heard presentations about Enquiry Point felt their understanding of its work had improved.
117. Those staff working across COPFS who did have more awareness of the role of Enquiry Point tended to also value its contribution more. They appreciated that enquiries about their cases were often dealt with entirely by Enquiry Point, thereby reducing demand on them. These staff seemed more likely to assist operators to resolve enquiries when needed.
118. While the work of Enquiry Point was highly valued by senior leaders, including the Law Officers, we found its role was often missing from key strategic documents. For example, while COPFS has committed to improving how it communicates with customers and partners in its strategic plan and to improving its customer service in its service improvement plan, no mention is made of the role Enquiry Point will play in delivering these commitments. More recently, however, COPFS did reference the role of Enquiry Point in its Business Plan 2024-25.²⁰
119. Aside from this recent statement in its business plan and more general statements around customer service, COPFS has not published any clear, accessible and specific commitments regarding the service those contacting Enquiry Point should expect to receive. This would be helpful. Not only would clear commitments help manage user expectations, but they would help staff understand what is expected of them and provide clear standards against which COPFS could be held to account.
120. The lack of clarity and understanding about Enquiry Point’s purpose and the role it plays in COPFS’s wider work are longstanding issues and have been highlighted previously. In the 2015 review of Enquiry Point carried out by an external consultant, it was noted:
- ‘The current function of the EP [Enquiry Point] is not clear within the business. There is no clearly defined scope of the EP’s responsibility... lack of visibility has led to a failure to recognise the EP’s contribution in the wider business, and within the EP, a lack of clarity about what it can and can’t do, and indeed what it should and shouldn’t do.’
121. Despite the 2015 review making recommendations to address these issues, they persist. There remains a need for COPFS to clarify the purpose of Enquiry Point for the benefit of the public and its own staff, and to specify the role that Enquiry Point will play in delivering COPFS’s strategic objectives and in the transformation and

²⁰ See paragraph 70.

improvement of COPFS's service. The respective roles of Enquiry Point and VIA would also benefit from clarification.

Recommendation 1

COPFS must ensure that there is a clearly defined and widely understood purpose, remit and vision for Enquiry Point, as well as a plan for how this will be delivered. COPFS should also publish commitments about the service the public can expect to receive.

Leadership and governance

122. Within COPFS, responsibility for Enquiry Point lies with the Procurator Fiscal for Policy and Engagement. The Procurator Fiscal reports to the Deputy Crown Agent who leads on Operational Support. Enquiry Point itself is led by a business manager.²¹ All of these individuals recognise the importance of the work of Enquiry Point and have sought to address challenges in service delivery. The business manager is an effective leader who is committed to supporting Enquiry Point staff and developing and improving the service.
123. Within Enquiry Point, there is regular scrutiny of the performance of the service and of individual operators. This scrutiny takes place at, for example, weekly manager meetings and monthly team meetings. However, there is scope for more effective and regular strategic oversight of Enquiry Point's performance, including around unmet demand from callers, speed and quality of response, and compliance with key performance indicators. In addition, there is a need for strategic understanding of how well COPFS as a whole responds to enquiries, including those which are passed from Enquiry Point to other teams for resolution. Such oversight is essential if COPFS is to truly understand how well it is delivering its commitment to improve communication with customers and partners.
124. Improved governance and oversight would also facilitate greater consideration of:
- (a) how decisions taken elsewhere in COPFS impact the volume and nature of Enquiry Point's workload
 - (b) how the work of Enquiry Point can act as an indicator of pressures elsewhere in the service.
125. With regard to (a), we heard that decisions taken by other teams within COPFS can have a significant impact on the work of Enquiry Point. These decisions are sometimes taken without informing or consulting Enquiry Point and without assessing the impact on Enquiry Point.
126. With regard to (b), we noted that trends in the number and nature of calls can point to systemic issues or areas of risk or concern in other teams within COPFS. For example, at the time of our inspection, there were clearly problems in the countermanding of witnesses in a particular area. While a lack of data about the nature of calls (see paragraph 131) hampers the ability of Enquiry Point to easily monitor trends, where operators do identify emerging issues, they raise these with managers. We heard that managers can face challenges in knowing where and how to most effectively raise these issues with others in COPFS. More effective governance arrangements would help facilitate this.

²¹ There are further layers of business management staff between the Procurator Fiscal for Policy and Engagement and the Enquiry Point business manager.

127. We have previously commented that COPFS could more effectively exploit the data and intelligence it holds to inform and improve its service.²² We have highlighted the benefits of using quality assurance, performance data, complaints information and service user and stakeholder feedback to monitor and improve service delivery. The volume and nature of enquiries received by Enquiry Point are an additional source of intelligence that could be used by COPFS.
128. The 2015 review of Enquiry Point also noted the lack of communication of Enquiry Point's performance across the wider business, and the need to improve visibility of performance to improve service delivery. It also noted that Enquiry Point was sometimes unaware of decisions taken elsewhere that affected its work. That the findings and recommendations of that review, commissioned at some expense to COPFS, have not been effectively actioned, illustrates the need for improved governance and oversight of Enquiry Point.
129. COPFS recently embarked on a programme of work to revise its structure, governance and management capabilities. Known as 'Designed for Success', this programme provides a timely opportunity to consider the governance and oversight arrangements for Enquiry Point. There is an opportunity to align oversight of the work of Enquiry Point with other COPFS services which have direct contact with service users. This would facilitate a greater focus on understanding and meeting service user needs, including how COPFS is delivering its commitment to improved communication and customer service.

Recommendation 2

COPFS should ensure there is effective governance and oversight of Enquiry Point and its performance.

Understanding demand

130. Understanding demand is key to COPFS designing and delivering a service that meets the needs of its users. COPFS requires to understand who makes enquiries, what enquiries are about, and how the volume and nature of enquiries changes over time. It also requires to understand the extent to which enquiry-related demand is met by Enquiry Point itself or passed to other teams within COPFS. Understanding demand helps COPFS to meet the demand for its service by allocating sufficient resources and ensuring staff are appropriately trained. Monitoring and understanding shifts in demand allows COPFS to change and improve its service in response.
131. While data is available about the volume of calls received and answered, currently no data is available about the identity of the caller or the nature of the call. It was hoped that such data could be gathered following the introduction of a new contact centre application in 2022, but problems encountered during its implementation prevented this. There is also a lack of data about emails. Again, the introduction of new systems resulted in Enquiry Point losing the ability to easily monitor the volume of emails received.
132. The lack of data about the volume of emails received means it is not possible to monitor whether the shift from calls to emails during the pandemic has been permanent, or whether service users have reverted to making enquiries by phone. This limits COPFS's ability to understand users' channel preference, which impacts consideration of the development of additional channels in future.

²² IPS, [The prosecution of domestic abuse cases at sheriff summary level](#) (2024), from paragraph 492.

133. This lack of data about the source, nature and even volume of enquiries limits COPFS’s ability to understand demand. This impedes efforts to develop its service, to the detriment of those making enquiries. Such data is routinely gathered in contact centre environments in other organisations and is fundamental to their ability to meet the needs of service users.

134. During our inspection, we used our contact audit to gather information about enquiries. Table 1 shows who made the enquiries we audited. It shows that some groups are more likely to make enquiries by phone, while others prefer to use email. Of the 200 enquiries we audited, 82% were made by members of the public (that is, those not making contact in a professional capacity). Members of the public made 93% of phone enquiries but only 52% of email enquiries.

135. The largest proportion (38%) of enquiries came from witnesses (or those making an enquiry on behalf of a witness). However, witnesses made 44% of phone enquiries but only 21% of email enquiries. There is a similar pattern for victims – they appear to prefer to phone Enquiry Point (31%) rather than use email (13%).

136. This pattern was reversed for professionals contacting Enquiry Point, including defence agents and the police. For example, defence agents made 9% of all enquiries, but 27% of those made by email and only 2% of those made by phone.

Table 1 – Source of enquiries audited

Who made the enquiry?	Phone enquiries	Email enquiries	All enquiries
Victim or person on behalf of victim	31%	13%	26%
Witness or person on behalf of witness	44%	21%	38%
Next of kin	1%	0%	1%
Accused or person on behalf of accused	15%	16%	15%
Defence	2%	27%	9%
Police	1%	14%	5%
Victim support organisation	1%	0%	1%
Other	5%	9%	6%

137. Enquiry Point receives enquiries about a range of issues. Table 2 shows the nature of the enquiries that we audited. The nature of the enquiry was often linked to the identity of the person making the enquiry, thus different patterns in the source of phone and email enquiries are also found in the nature of phone and email enquiries.²³

138. The most common types of enquiries are from:

- people (including members of the public and professionals) looking for information about the status of a case
- people looking for information about the outcome of a court hearing
- witnesses enquiring about being cited to give evidence at court
- witnesses providing information about their availability to attend court or seeking an excusal
- people looking for information about a court date.

²³ Professionals often enquire about the status of a case. They are also more likely to make email enquiries. Thus, there is a far greater proportion of email enquiries about the status of a case than call enquiries.

Table 2 – Nature of enquiries audited

Nature of enquiry	Phone enquiries	Email enquiries	All enquiries
Court date	12%	4%	10%
Court outcome	18%	4%	14%
Status of case	5%	41%	15%
Citation	14%	13%	13%
Witness availability or excusal	16%	7%	14%
Fine or fixed penalty	3%	5%	4%
Witness expenses	2%	4%	3%
Request to 'drop charges'	3%	2%	3%
Other	28%	21%	27%

139. While there were several common types of enquiry, there were also a large number of subjects about which there were only one or two enquiries, hence the volume of enquiries categorised as 'other'. Examples of 'other' enquiries include enquiries about special measures, bail or undertaking conditions, non-harassment orders, viewing a statement, complaints, productions, warrants, disclosure, deaths, diversion from prosecution, the criminal justice process, whether papers had been received and updating an address.

140. This volume of 'other' enquiries illustrates the breadth of the work undertaken by Enquiry Point and the need for operators to be knowledgeable and skilled at dealing with a range of issues.

141. Further analysis of data such as that in Tables 1 and 2 would show the most common types of enquiries made by specific groups, such as enquiries most often made by victims or by partner organisations.

142. Improved data collection and analysis would allow COPFS to understand what type of enquiries are not being resolved at first point of contact by Enquiry Point. This would help assess whether enquiries are being appropriately passed on to other teams whose expertise is needed, or whether operators require additional training to resolve enquiries themselves.

143. While our contact audit represents a snapshot of the source and nature of enquiries from a particular week in April 2024, it nonetheless provides a useful indication of who is contacting Enquiry Point and what they want. If this data was routinely collected and analysed, it could be used to inform improved service planning and delivery, not only in Enquiry Point itself but also in teams across COPFS which play a role in responding to enquiries.

144. In summary, COPFS does not currently have the necessary data that would help it better understand demand and develop Enquiry Point to its fullest potential. While Enquiry Point staff know about some of the issues highlighted in our audit as a result of their day-to-day experience, data would help quantify the issues and provide more robust evidence for decision making. To fully exploit its data, Enquiry Point may also benefit from the support of a performance analyst.²⁴

Recommendation 3

COPFS should gather the data needed to inform the design and delivery of an improved enquiry handling service.

²⁴ To help with understanding demand, COPFS may find the National Audit Office's work in this area helpful – NAO, [Improving services – understanding and managing demand](#).

Pre-empting, diverting and reducing demand

145. One of the benefits of understanding enquiry demand is considering whether there are options for better managing demand. This could include pre-empting, diverting or reducing demand.
146. For example, comprehensive, accessible and easy to understand information on the COPFS website may help those who would otherwise contact Enquiry Point with a general rather than case-specific enquiry. In our survey of those who had contacted Enquiry Point, a third of respondents said they had visited the website for help prior to contacting Enquiry Point. Respondents who were victims or witnesses were more likely than others to have done so. A few respondents said they found the website useful, clear and straightforward. Indeed, some Enquiry Point operators told us that they themselves used information available on the website to help answer enquiries. However, other survey respondents said the information they were looking for was hard to find online, or that information could have been explained more clearly or concisely. They felt more information could be provided about justice processes.
147. While there has been some coordination between those managing the COPFS website and Enquiry Point to identify and address frequent enquiries online, more could be done in this area. However, this would be made significantly easier if more comprehensive data about enquiries, as well as user feedback, was available.
148. Analysis of data regarding the source and nature of enquiries may also help identify opportunities to divert or reduce demand. For example, the police frequently seek an update about the status of a case from Enquiry Point. Such enquiries could be reduced or even eliminated if the police could access this information directly.
149. During our inspection, we noted several types of recurring enquiry where COPFS is not the correct or most appropriate organisation to provide the information. One example was enquiries about fiscal fines. Operators told us they receive a large number of enquiries about the payment of fines, a process administered by SCTS. Operators redirect these enquiries to SCTS. To reduce this unnecessary demand on Enquiry Point, COPFS could review the documentation it issues with fiscal fines to clarify which organisation individuals should contact if they have a query about a fine.
150. Another example was enquiries about court scheduling. In 7% of the email enquiries we audited, defence agents asked for information about the scheduling of cases. This information was supplied by Enquiry Point, but such enquiries are more appropriately directed to SCTS.
151. More generally, enquiries from defence agents often cover a range of cases and accused. Responding requires careful examination of COPFS systems and can be particularly time consuming for operators. COPFS should consider whether this is an appropriate use of operator time. We welcome COPFS's introduction of the Defence Agent Service, a digital portal that can be used by the defence to access information about cases. It is hoped this will reduce the volume of enquiries received by Enquiry Point.
152. Finally, there is an information sharing protocol between COPFS, SCTS and Police Scotland.²⁵ The protocol guides victims and witnesses as to which organisation to contact for information about a case. For example, they should contact Police Scotland about why a crime is being investigated; COPFS about a decision not to institute criminal proceedings; and SCTS about a final decision by the judge, sheriff

²⁵ Access to information protocol – A guide for victims and witnesses.

or justice of the peace in a case. We found that Enquiry Point operators, where possible and permissible, answered enquiries that should have been directed to SCTS under the protocol. They would often do so by accessing SCTS's own system in order to share a case outcome with victims and witnesses.

153. While it is commendable that operators are taking a proactive approach to addressing enquiries from victims and witnesses, we are concerned that Enquiry Point is absorbing demand that should more appropriately be managed by SCTS. There is a risk that COPFS may become the repository for any enquiries about cases. If this approach continues, this should be reflected in resourcing decisions across the two organisations and the protocol may require revision to reflect what is happening in practice.
154. In our contact audit, we considered that 13% of the enquiries should have been directed to another organisation. While operators redirected a small number of these enquiries, they sought to resolve the majority themselves.
155. There is some work already underway that COPFS intends will reduce demand on Enquiry Point. For example, COPFS has developed Witness Gateway, an online portal which will allow witnesses to update their contact details, access their statement, confirm their availability to attend court and receive updates on the status of their case. The Witness Gateway is currently being piloted for certain types of case in select areas in advance of a national rollout. In the long term, it is anticipated that the 'self-service' approach will reduce the need for witnesses to contact Enquiry Point. In the short term, however, demand may increase as witnesses let Enquiry Point know they wish to opt out of using Witness Gateway or as they seek assistance in accessing the portal.

Recommendation 4

COPFS should explore opportunities to pre-empt, divert and reduce demand on Enquiry Point.

Failure demand

156. In our review of the prosecution of domestic abuse cases at sheriff summary level, published in April 2024, we noted that COPFS is experiencing 'failure demand'.²⁶ This is when a service's failure to deal with an issue the first time prompts further demand. An example of failure demand found in that inspection was local procurator fiscal offices failing to respond to emails from victims and advocacy workers, prompting them to send another email or to follow up with a phone call. We said that if COPFS focused on a 'right first time' approach, demand across various channels of its service would reduce. We recommended that, 'To improve the efficiency of its service, COPFS should identify and reduce failure demand.'²⁷
157. Our inspection of how COPFS responds to enquiries reinforces the need for COPFS to identify and reduce failure demand and to do so urgently. In our contact audit, we found that 22% of the 200 enquiries were a result of COPFS failing to do something correctly or at all.
158. While the failure to get it right first time tends to happen outwith Enquiry Point, it is Enquiry Point that is often the recipient of the resulting failure demand. Examples that we found in our audit included:

²⁶ IPS, [The prosecution of domestic abuse cases at sheriff summary level](#) (2024) at paragraph 454.

²⁷ IPS, [The prosecution of domestic abuse cases at sheriff summary level](#) (2024), Recommendation 23.

- a failure to respond to communication from victims, witnesses, victim support organisations and defence agents, resulting in the communication being resubmitted or followed up via Enquiry Point
- information supplied to COPFS not being acted upon, such as correspondence being sent to an old address when the new address had been supplied
- victims and witnesses not being proactively kept up to date with the progress of or developments in their case, causing them to request the information
- procedural failures, such as witnesses not being cited or countermanded
- witness expenses not being processed and productions not being returned timeously.

159. Failing to get it right first time not only causes additional work for COPFS, but damages confidence in the service and hampers the efficient operation of the criminal justice process. For example, one phone enquiry concerned a case in which a plea submitted by the accused had not been acted upon, resulting in the case being continued several times.

160. Failure demand also affects staff morale and their job satisfaction. Enquiry Point operators spoke of their dismay and frustration at speaking to the same individuals who had still not had a response to an earlier enquiry about the same issue from another team within COPFS.

161. Given the challenging financial circumstances that public services are facing, it is critical COPFS operates efficiently and productively to avoid failure demand. We consider that there are significant gains to be made if COPFS were to achieve a right first time approach. Savings could be made that could be reinvested elsewhere or in further improving the quality of its service. If the failure demand found during our audit of enquiries from one week in April 2024 was replicated across the year, a right first time approach would achieve a reduction of more than 44,000 enquiries per year.

Understanding service user needs

162. As well as understanding demand, COPFS requires to understand the needs of its service users. As noted at paragraph 3, arrangements are in place for those who require additional assistance to access Enquiry Point, which we welcome. This is in keeping with COPFS's published equality outcomes, one of which states that, 'services provided by COPFS are suitable and accessible to all who need to use them'. While operators were generally confident about using these arrangements, such as telephone interpreting, staff working in other teams across COPFS were less confident. This suggests the need for more guidance or training for non-Enquiry Point staff when dealing with enquiries from those with additional support needs.

163. During our visit to Enquiry Point, we observed an operator successfully using a telephone interpretation service to communicate with a caller whose first language was Urdu. In our contact audit, we also heard an operator dealing patiently with a caller who had had a stroke. However, there were also some enquiries that could have been dealt with better. For example, one caller indicated they struggled with reading and writing and said they had a support worker listening in to the call to assist them. No record was made of these additional support needs. Consideration should have been given to referring the caller to VIA.

164. Extending Enquiry Point's remit to include email as well as phone enquiries has been a positive development, allowing service users the option to select their preferred means of contact. Given that Enquiry Point's opening hours are generally aligned

with office business hours, the option of sending an email enquiry at any time is helpful for those whose jobs do not allow for making calls during working hours, particularly when they may be queuing or on hold for some time.

165. Many contact centres offer an increasing range of options to those who wish to make contact, including webchat and text messaging. There is scope for COPFS to explore whether additional channels may be appropriate for those who contact Enquiry Point. However, care should be taken to ensure service developments meet the needs and wishes of service users, rather than a means of shifting contact to channels which suit the organisation.²⁸

166. Among Enquiry Point staff, it is well recognised that those using the service may be doing so at some of the most difficult moments in their life, and that a compassionate, empathetic and trauma-informed response is needed. In 96% of the enquiries we audited, we found operators to be polite, respectful, professional and empathetic. Almost two thirds of respondents to our survey said they were either satisfied or very satisfied with how polite and professional the person who dealt with their enquiry was.

‘The agent was very polite, helpful and knowledgeable – the agent directed my enquiry to the appropriate person and followed up with an email.’ (Victim/witness survey respondent)

‘The person who responded was very cordial and polite.’ (Victim/witness support organisation)

167. Despite this positive feedback, we consider there is further work COPFS could do to ensure it is meeting the needs of service users when responding to enquiries. This includes COPFS itself not only seeking and acting on user feedback about the quality of the current service (see from paragraph 99), but also exploring service user needs and inviting suggestions about the future development of Enquiry Point. Feedback should be sought directly from members of the public and from professionals and partner organisations. Our own survey of those who have contacted Enquiry Point provides useful information, but gathering and acting on feedback should become a routine part of COPFS’s journey to improving its customer service.

Recommendation 5

COPFS should seek feedback from service users about how well it responds to their enquiries and how best it can meet their needs. This feedback should be analysed and used to inform service improvements.

²⁸ For more on ‘channel shift’ in a policing context, see H Wells, W Andrews, E Clayton, E Aston, M O’Neill & B Bradford, [What is the strategic vision for delivering digital police contact?](#) (October 2024).

Delivery – guidance and training

168. During our inspection, we considered the guidance and training available to staff to support them to respond to enquiries effectively.

Guidance

169. All COPFS guidance and policies apply as much to Enquiry Point staff as they do to staff in other areas of the service. Here, we have considered specific examples that are most relevant to supporting staff to respond to enquiries.

170. Many enquiries are from victims and witnesses seeking information about the case in which they are involved. COPFS has a Victim and Witness Manual, Chapter 8 of which addresses the information that can be provided to victims and witnesses. This applies to all staff, although the chapter also includes a section specific to Enquiry Point. Chapter 8 should be a useful, comprehensive source of guidance on what information can and cannot be shared by staff. However, it appears not to have been updated for several years. Its contents do not reflect the latest developments or current practice. Moreover, many Enquiry Point staff we interviewed were not aware of it and never used it to guide their work. Instead, they told us they relied on an internal Enquiry Point Directory.

171. It is essential that victims and witnesses are provided the information to which they are entitled. For example, section 6 of the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014 imposes a duty on COPFS to disclose information about criminal proceedings to specified persons, including victims and witnesses. All staff, including Enquiry Point operators, require to be aware of their obligations. It is also essential that staff do not share information about a case that is not suitable for disclosure.

172. Guidance such as that in Chapter 8 of the Victim and Witness Manual should be a tool to support operators to do their job well. However, to be effective, guidance must be up to date, known about, useable and accessible, and its relevance to the work of Enquiry Point should be clear. It must not only set out COPFS's statutory duties and the rights of victims and witnesses, but must reflect current working practices and information sharing protocols with partner organisations. There is currently a gap in the guidance available to all staff that requires to be addressed. Chapter 8 should be revised.

Directory

173. To support its staff, Enquiry Point has created an electronic Directory. The Directory is in two parts:

- (a) guidance on legal processes and a range of other issues which may be the subject of enquiries
- (b) 'contact sheets' setting out contact information for all local COPFS offices and specialist teams.

174. The Directory is used daily by operators. They find it an invaluable source of guidance but said it takes time to learn how to navigate the range of information stored.

(a) Directory guidance

175. The Directory guidance has developed piecemeal over the years. It has been added to as legal or policy developments have occurred, or as novel enquiries have emerged and advice has been sought on how to manage them. Various staff within

and outwith Enquiry Point have contributed these additions. We heard that while it contains useful information, the lack of structure makes it difficult for operators to find the information they require. Some operators did not find the guidance clear, while others said it was easier to ask a manager for advice. Less experienced operators tended to rely on the guidance more than experienced colleagues.

176. Some operators felt that as well as guidance, they would benefit from a wider list of 'prompts' about what to say or not say in response to enquiries about particular issues. Some contact centres provide staff with scripts when dealing with callers. There was a feeling in Enquiry Point that scripts would be too prescriptive and not account for the variety of circumstances dealt with by operators, but that a list of suggested prompts would be helpful.
177. The guidance could also be used to more effectively support training – to ensure operators have a minimum level of knowledge before they begin managing enquiries, and to help familiarise them with the guidance so they know how to navigate it efficiently while dealing with a live enquiry.
178. While the guidance can be a useful tool for operators, we were concerned that its contents had not been reviewed to ensure it is consistent with current COPFS policies and processes, and had not been corporately approved. The manner in which the guidance had developed, and the lack of review and approval, meant some information was out of date or incorrect. Coupled with the out of date Chapter 8, the lack of effective guidance for operators risks those making enquiries being poorly advised.
179. While we thought operators often provided good responses to enquiries, it was clear from our audit, our observation of call handling and our interviews that there were areas where operators were less knowledgeable or less confident of their knowledge. Operators may benefit from additional guidance (and training) in relation to:
- case management systems and fixes to address frequent problems
 - what information can be shared about the charges in a case
 - how much information should be shared when a witness asks why they have been cited to give evidence. Providing too much information can risk tarnishing the evidence and consideration could instead be given to allowing witnesses the opportunity to view their statement
 - warrants, including the information that can be shared with defence agents about outstanding warrants
 - how to respond to email enquiries from partner organisations. Explaining to operators why the information is sought, for example, may help operators improve their responses. We understand that some work is already underway within Enquiry Point in this area, which we welcome.

Recommendation 6

In relation to guidance, COPFS should:

- (a) review Chapter 8 of its Victim and Witness Manual, ensuring it is up to date and clearly sets out COPFS's duties and expectations of staff, including those working in Enquiry Point. The review of Chapter 8 should take into account current working practices
- (b) review the guidance used internally by Enquiry Point to ensure it is accurate, consistent with COPFS policy and procedures, and corporately approved. Consideration should be given to the process by which future changes will be made.

(b) Contact sheets

180. The contact sheets not only set out the contact information for all local COPFS offices and specialist teams, but also provide instructions on which individuals or teams are responsible for what matters, and how and in what circumstances they can be contacted for assistance. The instructions are voluminous and complex. Some teams specify that they prefer emails to phone calls, or that they only accept phone calls about urgent matters. Some teams specify that only the hunt group should be contacted, while others specify individual staff members. Some request emails be sent to an office mailbox, while others specify an individual's mailbox, or that all emails should be sent to every individual in a team.²⁹
181. Designated Enquiry Point staff are responsible for ensuring the contact sheets are up to date. These staff are advised by operators if they find any out of date information. They also liaise with managers across COPFS to ensure the information held is accurate. This is a continuous process, as staff move teams or change responsibilities, and as local and specialised teams change how they work. While Enquiry Point staff ask team managers across COPFS to check the accuracy of the contact sheets every three months, the onus is also on those managers to proactively update Enquiry Point following any change. This does not always happen, causing difficulties for operators and impacting the quality of service delivered to the public.
182. Local teams may request that an instruction be added to the contact sheet temporarily. We heard of one team that requested no telephone contact at all from operators due to a lack of staff. We found that these temporary instructions were not always revoked when the situation giving rise to them resolved. For example, due to a lack of staff, the VIA team in one area was temporarily unavailable. The contact sheets were updated to instruct operators to contact another VIA team who would assist instead. During our inspection, we noted that the instruction was still in place, despite the first VIA team having been sufficiently staffed and available to take calls for some months.
183. We were concerned that these temporary instructions were not always visible to senior managers and that there was not sufficient oversight of local teams limiting their availability to assist operators in responding to enquiries.
184. The contact sheets highlight the varied ways in which local offices and specialist teams operate. It is understandable that teams across COPFS organise their business in a way that takes account of local needs, resources and case volumes. However, these local variations present challenges when they interact with a national service such as Enquiry Point. Enquiry Point (and other teams) expend considerable resource on maintaining the contact sheets. Identifying the correct team or person to contact, and the correct method of contact, is a challenging and time consuming task for operators. Moreover, it adds to the time the caller waits for a response to their enquiry, and exacerbates the difficulties operators experience when trying to transfer callers to other teams (see paragraph 270). These challenges were previously highlighted in the 2015 external review of Enquiry Point. That review suggested that local procurator fiscal offices simply have two phone numbers for use by operators. It would be for the local office to determine how calls received by those numbers were subsequently handled, rather than the operator. This approach has been piloted recently in Dundee (see paragraph 301).

²⁹ To give an idea of the scale and complexity of the contact sheets, if they were to be printed, they would be over 500 pages long.

185. While local procurator fiscal offices will necessarily be organised differently in response to local needs and the volume of work, they should consider how to make themselves more accessible to Enquiry Point and, ultimately, the public.

Recommendation 7

To improve the efficiency of enquiry handling, COPFS should explore the feasibility of standardising how Enquiry Point contacts local offices and specialist teams. Where local offices and specialist teams restrict their availability to Enquiry Point, there should be oversight at a senior level.

Unacceptable actions

186. On joining Enquiry Point, all operators are advised of and trained on COPFS's Unacceptable Actions Policy. This policy, applicable across COPFS, is particularly relevant to those who routinely engage with members of the public.

187. While all staff are expected to treat members of the public with courtesy, respect and dignity, the Unacceptable Actions Policy recognises that individuals making contact with COPFS may act out of character while distressed and may direct unacceptable behaviour towards staff. The policy outlines types of unacceptable behaviour and how staff should respond. One option available to Enquiry Point operators is to terminate a call. All staff are authorised to deal immediately with aggressive or abusive behaviour in line with the policy. Decisions to restrict an individual's contact with COPFS – for example, after a pattern of abusive behaviour – are taken by a more senior manager. In Enquiry Point, such decisions are made on a case-by-case basis and the system can flag future calls from the same person. In such cases, the operator can request assistance from a manager.

188. Operators were familiar with the policy and they highlighted the triggers that may prompt the policy being invoked, such as shouting and swearing. Operators were also understanding of the difficulties faced by callers and were reluctant to invoke the policy too readily. Some operators said they had felt authorised to invoke the policy but felt confident in their ability to speak to distressed individuals, calm the situation and provide the support and information needed. In our audit, we observed no examples of the policy being invoked, despite operators dealing with some challenging calls.

Policy and practice changes

189. COPFS frequently requires to advise staff of developments in law or policy that require changes to staff practice. These updates are published on the intranet and may also be circulated to managers. Enquiry Point managers seek to bring these updates to the attention of staff by email and during team meetings. However, all the operators we interviewed said they struggle to keep up to date with changes. Because they are continuously responding to enquiries, they have little or no time to read the latest updates. To ensure operators deliver an effective service, we consider it essential that they have regular allocated and protected time in which to read about developments and consider how their work is affected.

Support

190. Operators we interviewed highlighted the important role played by managers in Enquiry Point. They felt managers were always on hand and were a useful source of guidance and support.

191. At the time of our inspection, all managers were former operators. This meant they had good experience of responding to enquiries, but less experience of how COPFS

works in other areas. Managers are also not legally qualified. There are some enquiries that would benefit from legal expertise, yet this is not readily available within Enquiry Point. One option is to designate a prosecutor who is available to support operators with legal queries. This prosecutor could be based in Enquiry Point or remotely, and could be tasked with other work at the same time as supporting operators. They could also assist with drafting and approving internal Enquiry Point guidance. We understand such an arrangement has been trialled successfully in the past, although it was not clear why it had not continued. Some case-specific queries would still require the support of a local or specialist prosecutor familiar with the case, but having dedicated legal support would allow for more enquiries to be resolved by Enquiry Point at first point of contact.

Recommendation 8

COPFS should consider designating a prosecutor who can be readily available to support Enquiry Point with legal support and advice.

Training

192. The vast majority of operators join Enquiry Point from outside COPFS. Most have no experience of working in the criminal justice system. Effective training is therefore critical in ensuring they have the skills and knowledge to deal with the broad range of enquiries managed by operators each day.
193. New entrants to COPFS undergo a range of mandatory training irrespective of their role. This training covers some issues that are particularly relevant to the work of Enquiry Point, such as 'COPFS commitment to victims and prosecution witnesses' and 'Unacceptable Actions Policy'. Almost all of this training is delivered via e-learning.
194. While there is a good range of e-learning modules, much of the content is not specifically designed for an Enquiry Point operator's role. When completed in their first few weeks of employment, operators can find it hard to contextualise the training and understand how it relates to their role. The lack of tailoring and context, coupled with the modules often being completed in continuous blocks during a new entrant's first few weeks, mean some staff find it difficult to understand and retain the information. E-learning also limits opportunities to ask questions.
195. Some newly appointed staff we interviewed were unsure if they had completed all the relevant or required e-learning. It appeared they had no individual training records. We heard that COPFS has recently launched a new online training portal which should make it easier for staff to access and record training completed. This is a welcome development. We will consider its implementation in future scrutiny activity.
196. The e-learning completed by all new staff forms part of a wider initial training programme for operators that is designed and delivered in-house by Enquiry Point managers. This work is done collectively and is demanding – the high turnover of operators means the recruitment, induction and training of staff is an almost continuous endeavour. Given the importance of training to delivering the Enquiry Point service, we consider it a missed opportunity that no one manager takes the lead on training. This would help ensure training receives the focus it requires, and would be a useful development opportunity for the manager with lead responsibility.
197. Given the importance of Enquiry Point to the work of COPFS and its strategic objectives, we were surprised there was no corporate input to or oversight of

operator training. While COPFS has a Scottish Prosecution College which leads on staff training and development, it currently has no remit in relation to training operators. This means there has been no input from specialist learning and development staff to the initial training programme. Even if the content is provided by Enquiry Point managers, specialist staff should be able to assist with how to improve the design and delivery of the training programme. They could, for example, help managers explore other training approaches such as scenario-based learning, role play and testing knowledge. While Enquiry Point managers have done their best to develop the programme, there is scope for improvement.

Content of operator training

198. We heard that the initial training programme for operators should be five weeks. Those we interviewed had experienced initial training programmes of varying length. We heard the length of the programme was sometimes changed not due to their learning needs, but due to a lack of staff in Enquiry Point. This meant new staff experiencing a curtailed programme and becoming operational earlier than planned.
199. The training programme we saw lacked detail about the content of the training to be delivered. While it specified some areas of learning – such as suicide awareness, documents commonly used by COPFS and case management systems – little other information was available. Shadowing or partnering experienced operators was also a key feature of the training programme, but this did not appear to be balanced by other forms of learning.

The buddy system

200. A key component of the initial training programme is pairing new staff with an experienced operator (a 'buddy'). The new operator initially shadows the buddy taking calls and, at an appropriate stage, the new operator can take the calls under the supervision of their buddy. There is also an interim step where the two operators can work together to answer the enquiry (for example, one speaking to the caller while the other searches systems for the information needed).
201. Buddying can be an effective means of training operators. Many operators spoke positively about their buddying experience. It can help supportive working relationships develop and new operators can draw on the expertise of colleagues and ask questions. It can also be useful development for the experienced operator and recognises their skills. Buddying is commonly used by other organisations as part of their training programmes for similar contact centre roles.
202. However, we considered there was an over-reliance by Enquiry Point on buddying as part of the training programme for new operators. The risks associated with buddying did not appear to be fully recognised and therefore buddying was not sufficiently supported or balanced by other forms of learning. We were concerned that:
- the lack of experienced staff with whom to partner new operators meant new staff were paired with inexperienced operators
 - the lack or incorrect knowledge of the experienced operator can be passed on to the new operator (and perpetuated as the new operator becomes buddy to an even newer operator)
 - the quality and depth of learning is dependent on the ability of the buddy to effectively communicate with and train the new operator
 - the learning that takes place is entirely dependent on the enquiries received while buddying – there is no guaranteed baseline of knowledge acquired through call taking that can be achieved through other forms of learning.

203. Buddying also affects the productivity of the experienced partner, which affects overall service delivery. It can also affect their morale as they struggle to work at a slower pace or achieve their personal goals.
204. We consistently heard from Enquiry Point staff that it was preferable to 'learn by doing'. However, this often appeared to be in a live environment, rather than scenario-based learning, role play, using recordings of past calls or practicing on training cases or systems. We also heard that it was not possible to train operators for all possible enquiries as even experienced operators dealt with novel issues. However, there appeared to be no baseline of knowledge that should be acquired by an operator, such as knowing how to deal with the most common enquiries.
205. We compared the training given to Enquiry Point operators with that in other public sector contact centres, including the Police Scotland service centre which deals with emergency and non-emergency calls. Elsewhere, it appeared there were more structured training programmes, often longer and more consistently adhered to, where testing of knowledge and skills was carried out before staff became operational. These programmes also employed a variety of training methods in addition to e-learning and buddying, such as scenario-based learning, discussion and role play. These programmes also tended to be better supported by written guidance and other training materials.
206. There is risk in new, inadequately trained operators 'learning by doing' in a live environment. They may provide incorrect or inappropriate information to those making enquiries. While some operators were content with the 'learn by doing' approach, others felt their training had not provided them with sufficient knowledge or confidence to manage enquiries. We thought operators generally dealt with enquiries well, but we also observed gaps in knowledge and errors being made that could have been avoided through better training and guidance. Operators also told us about the issues they found difficult or where they would like more training. Specific areas that require to be addressed include:
- (a) contextualising general learning
 - (b) the criminal justice system
 - (c) COPFS systems and processes
 - (d) IT systems
 - (e) ongoing and refresher training.³⁰

(a) Contextualising general learning

207. Some of the mandatory e-learning completed by operators would be more effective if it was properly contextualised and followed by discussion and exercises. For example, all new entrants are required to complete e-learning on data protection. Once complete, it would be helpful if operators were advised how this relates to their specific role in Enquiry Point. Further training on verifying the identity of those making enquiries could follow, with scenarios or recordings of past calls where this was done well and poorly. When we suggested this approach to operators in training, they said it would help make the e-learning more memorable and impactful.

(b) The criminal justice system

208. Most new operators have not previously worked in the criminal justice system. An operator requires to be familiar with the justice system, legal terminology and criminal procedure. We found there to be lack of formal training in these areas.

³⁰ These issues should be read alongside those listed at paragraph 179, where we highlight a lack of guidance and training.

209. The operator training programme includes time for new operators to attend court and observe proceedings. This is an important element of their training, as they will often be asked by victims and witnesses for advice about attending court. However, some operators said they had never attended court. This had been part of their training that had been curtailed due to the need for them to become operational as soon as possible. Operators who had visited court described it as beneficial but some said their visit had been cut short or that it had not been sufficiently supported. For example, they had observed proceedings but no one had explained what was happening. Operators may benefit from court visits being led by an individual who fully understands and can explain court proceedings to others, such as a legally qualified member of staff.
210. Operators also expressed a desire for more training on particular aspects of the justice system, such as solemn procedure and warrants.
211. A lack of understanding of criminal justice processes contributes to operators failing to record information received during enquiries that may be needed for effective case management.
212. Some experienced operators we interviewed had completed a 'Certificate in Prosecution Practice'. This correspondence course provides training and assessment on criminal law and procedure. It is largely undertaken in the participant's own time but with financial support from COPFS. Feedback from those who had completed the course was very positive – they felt more confident providing information about the criminal justice process to callers.

(c) COPFS systems and processes

213. Linked to a lack of training around the criminal justice system, there also appeared to be little opportunity for operators to learn about the wider work of COPFS. Operators require to learn about the organisation, its structures, systems and ways of working. This will assist them in managing enquiries and knowing where to seek assistance if needed. Operators often speak of the benefits of other COPFS teams shadowing them so they gain a better understanding of Enquiry Point. Equally, operators should shadow those working in local offices to improve their own knowledge. Just as Enquiry Point staff have been presenting to other teams within COPFS about their work, there is scope for other teams to provide inputs to operators. This would provide helpful ongoing learning for all operators, not just those who are new.

(d) IT systems

214. Enquiry Point staff use several IT systems when managing enquiries. Some of the systems used by COPFS to manage cases are antiquated, complex and not intuitive to use. On occasion, they work differently for different staff, and staff require to learn workarounds.
215. There is training on using COPFS's IT systems during the initial training programme. There is also an opportunity to learn more about using the systems during buddying, although some operators found it hard to follow the quick actions taken by experienced buddies during a live call.
216. Given how essential these systems are to retrieving information needed by those making enquiries, operators felt the training could be expanded. They also noted a lack of written guidance on using systems. They said it would be helpful to have access to a training or test versions of case management systems. This would allow them to practice searches, and would also allow them to be assessed on retrieving information and interpreting it correctly. Some operators with previous contact centre

experience said how helpful they had found practicing on training systems when first joining other organisations.

217. Operators also frequently access an SCTS system known as the Criminal Online Portal. This is to check the outcome of court proceedings. Staff said they had not received training on this system or been provided with any written guidance.

(e) Ongoing and refresher training

218. During our inspection, we generally focused on the availability and quality of initial training for operators. There also appeared to be scope for more ongoing and refresher training for operators. Its absence may be linked to the high turnover of staff, the need for managers to focus on training new staff and the need for experienced staff to be operational whenever possible. Some more experienced staff highlighted some of the areas listed above as those in which they would welcome refresher training. This was often linked to them having experienced incomplete or curtailed initial training on joining Enquiry Point. Operators also noted that because they were continuously dealing with enquiries, they lacked time to access other COPFS training.

219. Some operators were generally happy with the training they had received, although all could identify areas for improvement. While we considered that Enquiry Point managers were doing their best to deliver sufficient training, there is clearly scope for training to be developed further. Managers would benefit from corporate support in designing and delivering the initial training programme. Some aspects of training may benefit from being delivered by a legally qualified member of staff. Staff turnover should be closely monitored and sufficient staff recruited such that initial training programmes are not curtailed due to a lack of resources and the need for new operators to prematurely 'go live'.

220. Elsewhere in this report (paragraph 316), we also note that only experienced operators respond to email enquiries. Responding to email enquiries could form part of the training for or early work of new operators given that the responses to more complex enquiries or those that the operator is unsure of can be checked before sending. This may help build operator confidence and help them become operational quickly, but in a way where their work can be easily supervised and corrected.

221. The training of operators should be informed by user and stakeholder feedback, and the quality assurance carried out by Enquiry Point.

Recommendation 9

COPFS should review the training provided to Enquiry Point operators. The review should take account of all the training-related issues highlighted in this report.

Manager training

222. Enquiry Point operators were very positive about the support provided to them by their managers. Managers were a mix of very experienced and newly appointed managers. Those who had been more recently appointed highlighted the lack of corporate training they had received for this change in their role. The lack of management training was also highlighted by staff and managers across COPFS that we interviewed. An issue raised several times among those who worked outside of Enquiry Point was that they did not think managers tackled performance issues well, and that perhaps they needed more support to do so.

223. COPFS has acknowledged a gap in the training and development of managers. This will be addressed through its Designed for Success programme (paragraph 129), with new training courses being established to address the fundamentals of line management. We welcome this much needed initiative.

Training for non-Enquiry Point staff

224. Staff across COPFS also play a role in responding to enquiries from the public and partner organisations, including those transferred or forwarded to them which operators have not been able to resolve at first point of contact. Given the range of roles across COPFS that get involved in responding to enquiries, we have not been able to explore in detail the training provided to non-Enquiry Point staff. However, it is clear that many staff would benefit from customer service training.

225. Such training is currently available to all COPFS staff, with some being designated as mandatory. It is primarily delivered through wider government e-learning courses. These courses address communicating with customers, managing challenging customers and handling complaints. These courses are highlighted to staff during an annual 'Customer Service Week' and in a regularly circulated training prospectus.

226. Despite the training available, we heard that some staff working outside Enquiry Point lacked confidence when dealing with members of the public. For some, this contributed towards their reluctance to accept transferred calls from Enquiry Point. There was a real desire for more training on customer service including supporting victims and witnesses specifically and issues such as supporting customers with poor mental health.

227. Given that one of COPFS's key transformation priorities is to improve how it communicates with customers and partners, we consider that more could be done to support staff to deliver effective customer service. We understand that COPFS is currently exploring this further, which we welcome. We believe improved customer service training across COPFS will support staff to feel more confident responding to enquiries and that this will in turn help reduce the transfer difficulties experienced by operators.

Delivery – enquiry handling process

228. We considered the process by which enquiries are handled by COPFS, including where they are resolved by Enquiry Point or passed on to other teams within COPFS. There are some differences in how call and email enquiries are handled. We therefore deal with the processes for handling calls and emails separately below.

Call enquiries

229. Enquiry Point can be reached by dialling 0300 020 3000. This number is widely publicised by COPFS, including on its website. There may be a cost to calling Enquiry Point depending on whether the caller is using a landline or mobile phone and the details of their calling plan. Where there is a cost, it should be no more than calls to geographic numbers (beginning 01 or 02).

Prior to speaking to an operator

230. When phoning Enquiry Point, the caller first hears a recorded welcome. The recording thanks the caller for phoning, advises them calls are recorded for quality and training purposes, reminds them of Enquiry Point's opening hours, and informs them offensive or abusive behaviour towards operators will not be tolerated. Alternate recordings are used when the lines are closed, when there are technical issues or when the call queue has reached capacity.

231. We consider there is scope to revise the recorded welcome. For example, consideration could be given to:

- using the recorded message to divert callers to other sources of information, such as the COPFS website
- suggesting that callers use email instead, if they are not able to wait in the queue until their call is answered
- revising how the message about offensive or abusive behaviour is presented. Currently, this message dominates the recorded welcome. Altering the tone and content of the message takes account of the need to take steps to safeguard operators from abuse, while also being mindful of the difficult circumstances in which many callers find themselves when contacting COPFS
- advising those calling about a case to have a case reference number ready if one is available.

232. Callers should also be advised of their place in the queue and/or the length of time they will wait before their call is answered. Currently this does not happen. It would, however, be beneficial in light of data about the average and maximum call queue times and feedback we heard from those who had called Enquiry Point. Sharing this information with callers would allow them to assess whether they want to wait in the queue, call back another time or send an email instead. Information could also be published about the days and times when the call queue is less busy.

233. Where callers are enquiring about a case, operators will routinely ask for the case reference number. This helps them easily identify the correct case and helps them deal with enquiries more quickly. The benefits of having the case reference number ready should not only be included in the recorded message, but should also be highlighted in any correspondence or other material publicising Enquiry Point's contact information. The Enquiry Point page on the COPFS website could usefully be updated with this information.

234. Where information is needed about a case but the caller does not have the case reference number, operators require to conduct system searches to identify the correct case. The search function can be slow and temperamental, and there is a risk that the wrong case is found. In the past, operators tended to ask for the name of the accused person in the case, as they found this helped identify the correct case more easily, particularly if the person calling (often a victim or witness) was involved in more than one case.

235. In an effort to take a trauma-informed approach, operators have been instructed not to ask for the accused person's name unless necessary. Where it is necessary, operators have been told to advise the caller that they need only disclose the accused's name if they are comfortable doing so. While we welcome the desire to be trauma-informed, this instruction can result in protracted case searches and several other questions being asked of the caller in an effort to identify the correct case. There is also a risk of the wrong case being identified and incorrect information being given out. Operators may require to ask those calling for details of the accused, in order to provide a quick and accurate response, so long as they do so sensitively.

Recommendation 10

To ensure a more customer-focused and efficient enquiry handling service, COPFS should:

- (a) review the information it publishes about contacting Enquiry Point so those making enquiries can choose the method and timing of contact that best meet their needs and have information to hand that will help their enquiry be dealt with more quickly
- (b) review Enquiry Point's recorded welcome message and provide information to callers about the expected wait or their position in the queue.

Verifying identity

236. Where a caller's enquiry relates to a specific case, the operator will carry out an identity check before sharing any information. This is in accordance with data protection law. Generally, only those listed as a victim, witness or accused are entitled to information about a criminal case from COPFS.

237. In some circumstances, a caller may be entitled to receive information where they are not a victim, witness or accused but they are calling on their behalf. This includes, for example, a parent of a child witness or someone who has been given permission to act on a witness's behalf (such as an advocacy worker or a friend). Operators verify that this permission has been given.

238. The identity of other types of caller also requires to be verified. For example, an operator will check that a letter of engagement is in the case file before providing information to a defence agent about their client's case.

239. In the calls we audited, we noted whether identity checks were carried out. Of the 144 calls we audited, 14 were general in nature and did not require that the caller's identity be verified. In the remaining 130 calls:

- in 119 (92%) calls, identity checks were carried out appropriately
- in six (5%) calls, identity checks were carried out but were inadequate
- in five (4%) calls, no identity checks were carried out.

240. In some of the calls we audited where identity checks were carried out, this resulted in the operator correctly refusing to give out information as the caller was unable to supply the necessary details.

241. We heard from some victim and witness advocacy workers that the identity checks carried out by Enquiry Point can be a barrier to them fulfilling their role. Despite working for well-known support organisations, if a victim or witness's consent has not been intimated to COPFS for the advocacy worker to be given information about their case, operators will refuse to provide it. While this is in keeping with the law and policy, advocacy workers note that this approach is not taken by other teams within COPFS with whom they may have more established relationships. It can result in victims and witnesses having to contact Enquiry Point to provide consent or to make enquiries themselves, reducing some of the benefits of having an advocacy worker.

242. Protecting the data of those involved in cases is essential, however the important role played by advocacy workers also needs to be recognised. This is particularly so when there are efforts to increase the availability of domestic abuse advocacy workers across Scotland. We consider that COPFS should work with organisations employing advocacy workers to ensure that they are able to access information about their clients' cases when contacting Enquiry Point. More generally, COPFS should ensure that staff outside of Enquiry Point who respond to enquiries also take data protection into account. We were concerned that the approach taken by other staff may not be as thorough as that taken by operators.

Recommendation 11

COPFS should ensure that:

- (a) prior to giving out information to those making case-related enquiries, all staff carry out appropriate identity checks
- (b) appropriate arrangements are in place that allow advocacy workers providing support to victims and witnesses to easily access relevant information on their behalf.

Verifying contact information

243. When we observed operators taking calls, we noted that some took the opportunity to verify a victim or witness's contact details while they were on the phone. This good practice helps ensure COPFS has accurate and up-to-date contact information for any phone calls and correspondence, as well as ensuring that witnesses are cited at the correct address.

244. In our call audit, we noted that some operators checked whether the address and phone number of victims and witnesses calling Enquiry Point was up to date. Other operators did not. While verifying contact information adds slightly to the call length, it can save considerable time and effort at a later stage in case preparation and management, and can help ensure the smooth running of the justice process. This should become standard practice among operators.

Operator access to information

245. To resolve enquiries about specific cases, operators access various case management systems used by COPFS. The information requested by the caller may require to be pieced together by the operator from a range of fields or documents within the various systems. Operators also access information from SCTS's Criminal Online Portal. This system is updated by court clerks with outcomes at court.

246. The need to use several systems to gather information is time consuming for operators. It results in the call being prolonged for the caller on the line, but also results in other callers waiting longer in the queue for their call to be answered. That the COPFS systems do not always work as efficiently as they should hampers operators' productivity and affects their morale. It also risks incorrect information being given out when operators' screens do not update as they should. We have

noted the poor performance of COPFS's case management systems in previous inspections and have highlighted that work on a new case management system be expedited. Our current review simply highlights another aspect of COPFS's service delivery that is negatively affected by poor systems.

247. Some information requested by callers can be found in different systems. However, there appeared to be no consistency in how operators gathered the information from the systems, such as the order in which they should be checked and the reliance that should be placed on each. For example, the outcome of a court hearing can be found in the SCTS system once uploaded by the clerk, in the prosecutor's court minute once it has been uploaded to the case file, or in the COPFS case management system once it has been updated. There were inconsistencies in which source was checked and uncertainty about the reliability of the information found in each. There was also inconsistency in whether unvalidated court outcomes could or should be shared.³¹ Some operators sought to verify the outcome by checking all sources, while others had received conflicting advice about what to do.

248. We observed that most operators were skilled at checking systems, but this was a complex task made more difficult by being carried out at speed and while a caller was waiting for a response. We were concerned that some operators did not always correctly interpret the information they found. For example, we observed an operator using the SCTS system to advise a caller that the accused had pled guilty to the charge. In fact, the accused had pled guilty to a lesser, amended charge. This highlights a training need for operators.

249. We also heard that operators find court minutes difficult to interpret. Court minutes are written by prosecutors at court and often contain their personal or local shorthand and acronyms. As a national contact centre, operators require to interpret the court minutes written by prosecutors across Scotland. We observed calls that could have been resolved by Enquiry Point at first point of contact, but were instead transferred to local offices because the court minutes were incomprehensible. This highlights a training need for both operators and local prosecutors.

Recording contact

250. After a call has concluded, operators have two minutes to 'wrap up'. During this time, they should make a record of the call on the witness contact record (for victims and witnesses) or the subject record (for accused) on the case management system. They should also complete any other follow up work, such as sending an email to another COPFS team. If more than two minutes is required, operators can put themselves into 'admin' time on the system. While in 'wrap up' or 'admin' time, operators are not presented with a new call until their work on the previous call is complete.

251. In the witness contact or subject record, operators note the details of the enquiry including any information supplied and how it was resolved. The records can be viewed by operators if they receive a subsequent enquiry from the person or about the same issue. They can also be accessed by all COPFS staff. The information recorded by operators can often be key to supporting effective case management and communication with victims and witnesses. However, there are two ways in which systems do not support operators with recording their enquiries.

³¹ Clerks upload data about court outcomes to the Criminal Online Portal, and then check or validate that it is accurate. Unvalidated data can be viewed by others before it is validated. Uncertainty about the meaning of unvalidated and validated data and whether use should be made of unvalidated data was not unique to operators. Other staff in COPFS were also unsure how to handle this information.

252. Firstly, there is a character limit on the witness contact and subject records, meaning operators are not always able to write as complete a note of the enquiry as they would like. This causes them to use shorthand and abbreviations. These may be familiar to those working in Enquiry Point, but may be challenging for other COPFS staff to interpret.
253. Secondly, systems do not support the recording of all types of enquiry. While there are designated fields for enquiries from victims, witnesses and accused to be recorded, there are no such fields for other types of enquiries. This includes enquiries from the police or defence agents. This means these enquiries are generally not recorded by Enquiry Point. Operators may send an email about the enquiry to the relevant COPFS team, and this may or may not be uploaded to the case file.
254. Where a case has been closed on the system, it is not possible to add any further information to it. If a victim, witness or accused subsequently contacts Enquiry Point, no record of the contact can be added to the case file. Similarly, if access to a case has been restricted due to its sensitive nature, operators cannot add information to it.
255. To address these system deficiencies, Enquiry Point has set up a workaround – a Microsoft Teams channel where it can enter details of enquiries about closed or sensitive cases, as well as other types of information. This means a record can be made and brings the enquiries to the attention of Enquiry Point colleagues. The channel is searchable. However, the channel is not accessible to staff outside Enquiry Point, and is not suitable as a permanent record keeping solution. It contains information that would be useful and, in some cases, essential for COPFS staff to be aware of, such as further contact from a victim or witness after a case is closed which should be considered for disclosure.
256. Of the 144 calls we audited, it was possible and appropriate for operators to have recorded the enquiries on the witness contact or subject records in 115. The enquiry was recorded in 101 (88%) of these. In the remaining 14 (12%), there was no record of the enquiry when there should have been.
257. Of the remaining 29 calls, there were 15 in which there was no need to record the contact (for example, calls from those seeking general advice). In 14, it would have been appropriate to record the enquiry on case management systems but it was not possible to do so. This included 13 calls about closed cases and one call about a sensitive case. Only one of these 14 calls was recorded on the Teams channel.
258. During our inspection, two other issues arose regarding the recording of enquiries. The first is the risk that operators are not always aware of how valuable some of the information they record is for the management and prosecution of cases. There may be information that should be brought to the attention of a prosecutor rather than simply filed on the system. While operators will sometimes send an email to the relevant COPFS team bringing their attention to the information recorded on the witness contact or subject record, this is not always done.
259. Secondly, the information recorded by operators is not always reviewed by those in other teams who are managing the case. We raised this issue in our inspection of the prosecution of domestic abuse cases at sheriff summary level. We noted that COPFS staff were often unaware that Enquiry Point recorded enquiries from victims and witnesses in the witness contact record. Even if they were aware this information was being recorded, they did not routinely review it or assess its implications for case management or victim and witness support. We recommended that:

‘COPFS should ensure that all victim and witness contact is recorded in one centralised place accessible to all staff. In the short term, COPFS should take immediate action to ensure that all staff are aware where victim and witness contact with Enquiry Point is recorded, and that staff use this information when preparing and managing cases.’³²

260. This recommendation was published in April 2024, but we had previously brought the issue to the attention of COPFS in late 2023. We were therefore disappointed that when we interviewed a range of staff across COPFS in late summer 2024 regarding how they responded to enquiries, a good proportion were still unaware of the existence of the witness contact record and the significance of the information therein. This included staff who had worked for COPFS for decades as well as those more recently employed. Staff working for certain teams were aware of it and used the records routinely.

261. In October 2024, COPFS highlighted our recommendation and the use of the witness contact record by Enquiry Point on its intranet in a message to all staff. While we welcome this message, further action should be taken to ensure staff check and use the information on the witness contact record routinely.

262. Regarding the broader point in our recommendation, that all contact with victims and witnesses is recorded in one place easily accessible to all staff, we consider that this is an essential step in ensuring staff are equipped with the right tools to do their job efficiently and effectively. We understand work is ongoing within COPFS to make the information in the witness contact and subject records more accessible to staff, such as by extracting the data for consideration before a case calls in court. We welcome efforts to address these issues in the short term, but note that some of the systems issues identified above may only be addressed by new case management systems in the longer term. In designing new systems, COPFS should ensure that issues such as those highlighted above are taken into account.

Recommendation 12

COPFS should ensure that Enquiry Point has appropriate systems and processes in place that support the recording of all types of enquiry and that this information is accessible to all those who may require it.

Transferring call enquiries

263. Enquiry Point operators try to resolve enquiries at the first point of contact. However, this is not always possible. For example, the caller may require information or assistance that can only be provided by a prosecutor, VIA or by one of COPFS’s specialist teams. In such cases, operators will try to transfer the caller to the relevant person or team.

264. The transfer of callers by operators to other teams within COPFS is one of the most significant challenges faced by Enquiry Point. Below, we set out the transfer process, the difficulties encountered by operators when trying to transfer callers and the impact this has on service users and staff. We then explore the reasons for those difficulties from the perspective of other teams within COPFS.

³² IPS, [The prosecution of domestic abuse cases at sheriff summary level](#) (2024), from paragraph 442 and Recommendation 22.

The transfer process

265. To transfer callers, operators make use of the Enquiry Point Directory. This contains contact details for all other teams in COPFS. Operators will try to contact an individual within the team or a 'hunt group'. The hunt group will be made up of all or some team members. When the operator calls the hunt group, it will consecutively call all members of the group until someone answers. Some hunt groups work by calling all members simultaneously, and the first person who answers takes the call. However, we heard that COPFS generally uses the first type of hunt group. Hunt groups vary in size, but we heard about one which had 15 people.
266. Operators put callers on hold while they try to transfer them. When the transferred call is answered, operators advise their colleague who is calling and why. In our call audit, 27 transferred calls were answered by another COPFS team. In all but one, the Enquiry Point operator provided full and accurate information to their colleague about the enquiry during the handover. This minimised the need for the caller to repeat themselves once transferred.
267. If the other COPFS team was willing to accept the transferred call, most operators passed the call through. They did this without returning to the caller and explaining what was about to happen or to whom they were being transferred. The caller might only be transferred after several minutes on hold, while the operator searched systems to see if they could resolve the enquiry themselves, checked the directory for who might assist with the enquiry, dialled the relevant person and waited for them to answer. Good practice would be the operator speaking to the caller again before transferring them. Operators said they did not do this because they lacked confidence that their systems would not cut off the caller or the other COPFS staff member while doing so. One operator said they always advised the caller that either they will come back to them or they will connect them with someone else, at least warning callers that the next voice they hear may be a different one.
268. Where operators are not able to successfully transfer the calls, they provide an email address to the caller who can then email the relevant unit directly, or the operators themselves email the relevant unit to request they contact the caller. In our audit, operators told 28 callers they would send emails to another COPFS unit. In three cases, we could find no evidence of the email being sent. In 12 cases, an email was sent and was uploaded by the recipient to the case file. In 13 cases, an email was sent but there was no trace of the email in the case file.
269. There is no expectation within Enquiry Point that operators upload their emails to the case file. It is expected the recipients will do so. However, our findings suggest that this expectation is either not shared across COPFS, or is not being put into practice routinely. As a result, important information is not being added to case files and is not available to those who require it. COPFS should clarify who is responsible for ensuring emails from Enquiry Point are uploaded to case files and ensure this is done in practice.

Transfer difficulties

270. As noted, the transfer of callers by operators to other teams within COPFS is one of the most significant challenges faced by Enquiry Point. Transferring difficulties have existed since the inception of Enquiry Point. They have been highlighted in previous reviews, including in our own inspection in 2013 and the externally commissioned 2015 review of Enquiry Point. Despite this, the difficulties persist. While some steps have been taken to address the difficulties, their root causes also need to be identified and addressed.

271. The key issue is that operators make many attempts to transfer callers that do not succeed. Either the transfer does not succeed at all and operators require to take other steps to deal with the enquiry, or there are multiple attempts to transfer before transfer is eventually achieved.

272. Operators describe:

- attempting to contact colleagues across COPFS and their calls not being answered, even when the person they are trying to contact is showing as available online
- having to make multiple calls to different people within a team due to lack of response
- calling hunt groups of up to 15 people and no one answering their call
- significant delays in calls to hunt groups being answered
- some teams or individuals being well known for never answering calls.

273. Even when their calls to colleagues are answered, operators describe colleagues:

- refusing to accept the transferred call, or being clearly reluctant to accept the call
- being rude to operators
- implying that operators are interrupting them and preventing them from getting on with their job
- saying they cannot help because they are working from home.

274. Some staff will answer Enquiry Point's call and look to provide the operator with the information to pass on to the caller, rather than just accepting the transferred call and providing the information directly to the caller. This may require the operator to wait while systems are searched. It shows no awareness that the operator has the caller on hold, that the operator has a queue of other callers waiting, or that the caller may have a follow up question which the operator is not in a position to answer. We heard that operators have been instructed to insist that other COPFS staff accept the transfer of the call, rather than keeping the operator on the line. All COPFS staff should be instructed to approach transferred calls this way, not just operators.

In one call we audited, the operator attempted to transfer the caller to a local VIA team. The VIA officer did not accept the transfer but did try to find the answer to the caller's query while the operator and caller were on hold for almost 15 minutes. The VIA officer failed to find the answer and asked the operator to tell the caller that special measures 'should have been' granted for a trial the next day although this could not be confirmed.

275. What operators told us was confirmed when we observed operators dealing with enquiries and in our own call audit. It is also borne out by data gathered by Enquiry Point in early 2022 which showed a 17% success rate in transferring calls to other COPFS teams, rising to only 18% for transfers to VIA. VIA's primary role is communicating with victims and witnesses.

276. In our call audit, operators tried to contact another COPFS team in 40 of the 144 calls. In three quarters of these calls, operators had to make more than one attempt to contact the other team. In a third of these calls, there was no answer.

In one call we observed, a member of staff working in a local office refused to accept an urgent call from a witness who could not attend court that morning. The staff member said they were working from home and had no access to the prosecutor at court who needed the information.

277. We also observed a lack of professionalism when some staff across COPFS answered calls from operators. COPFS staff are not aware that it is an operator calling, as the number displayed is that of the original caller, not Enquiry Point. Given that the call could be coming directly from a member of the public, it should be answered in a professional manner (ideally stating their name, team and asking how they can help). We heard calls being answered 'what?' and other inappropriate greetings. This is not in keeping with COPFS's commitments to customer service.

278. There should also be a clear process or mechanism by which Enquiry Point can raise concerns about particular individuals or teams, and have those concerns acted upon. Where Enquiry Point managers have sought to do so in the past, they have sometimes had their concerns dismissed by local team managers. During our inspection, we heard that Enquiry Point had been asked to monitor and share information about which teams do not take calls. To have any value, this information must be acted upon by local managers.

279. Despite the widespread difficulties operators experienced when trying to transfer calls, they were also keen to mention that some individuals and some teams are more than willing to accept calls. This included teams that had a strong sense of ownership of their cases and therefore were keen to deal with any emerging issues, or teams that recognised they had specialist expertise unavailable to Enquiry Point. A consequence of some individuals being more willing to accept calls is that they tend to receive more calls, as operators know they are likely to answer.

In one call we observed, a vulnerable witness was unsure why she had been cited to give evidence. She waited 18 minutes in the queue before her call was answered by Enquiry Point. She waited 14 minutes on hold while the operator tried to transfer her to the relevant VIA team to arrange for her to view her statement. VIA did not answer the operator's call. The operator sent an email to VIA asking them to call the witness. The caller advised she had already emailed COPFS several times with no response.

280. The difficulties experienced by operators in transferring calls affects callers, the service and individual staff. Transfer difficulties:

- prolong the call for the individual caller
- prolong the time spent by operators on calls, thereby extend the waiting time for all other callers in the queue
- hamper the productivity of operators and Enquiry Point as a whole
- can result in enquiries not being resolved that day or at all
- can result in urgent information not reaching local offices timeously
- cause operators to send emails to other COPFS teams, meaning the demand just shifts to another channel
- contributes to failure demand, when callers whose enquiry is not dealt with call or email again
- affects the morale and job satisfaction of operators
- may have a chilling effect on operators whereby they do not attempt to transfer calls when this is the most appropriate action, as they anticipate the transfer not being successful.

281. Ultimately, transfer difficulties affect the overall quality of and public confidence in the service delivered by COPFS.

282. These issues have been recognised by Enquiry Point and by senior leaders. Efforts have been made to address them. These include:
- messages from senior leaders to all staff about the transfer difficulties faced by operators and the standards of behaviour expected of staff across COPFS who play a role in responding to enquiries. Staff were reminded that calls are recorded and that a failure to deliver the expected standard of work would result in managers being informed and action being taken
 - two pilot initiatives – the Secondary Response Team pilot and the Dundee pilot (paragraph 296).
283. Operators appreciate the recent attention being given to their transfer difficulties and the messages issued to staff. They feel the messages have an immediate impact that then subsides as time passes. We consider that more effort could be made to understand and address the underlying causes of the transfer difficulties.
284. During our interviews with staff working across COPFS, we sought to understand why they might be unwilling or unable to answer calls from Enquiry Point, or to accept transferred calls. We heard that:
- staff lacked capacity to deal with enquiries as well as their other work, citing a lack of resources in local office teams and pressure to get through other tasks
 - some staff do not consider that dealing with enquiries is part of their work, hence their refusal to answer or accept calls
 - staff, particularly new or inexperienced staff, lacked confidence in dealing with enquiries from the public
 - some staff working in non-legal roles lacked knowledge about the justice process and institutional knowledge of COPFS and therefore felt ill-equipped to deal with questions
 - many staff say they have not had training in dealing with the public and customer service, particularly in managing difficult or sensitive conversations (and an assumption from some staff that if Enquiry Point has not been able to deal with the call, then it must be difficult)
 - working from home means staff are not learning from colleagues how to deal with enquiries or interact with the public
 - staff might show as available online, but are actually mid-task and do not want to stop what they are doing and potentially lose their work by having to search systems to deal with an enquiry.
285. Underpinning all of the above, we heard about:
- a lack of effective supervision and management that allows unacceptable behaviour to go unchallenged
 - poor systems, that hamper staff productivity and their ability to find the information they need or multi-task.
286. Some staff admitted they might be reluctant to answer calls from Enquiry Point as they felt enquiries were sometimes passed to them that operators could have dealt with themselves. They felt operators were just seeking reassurance that their proposed response to the enquiry was correct. This may indicate a training need for operators. In some cases, it could also reflect a lack of awareness about the breadth of the knowledge needed by operators and the fact that those working in local offices should have a greater depth of knowledge that operators may require to draw on. Most staff we interviewed felt that calls received from operators were transferred appropriately.

287. Some staff acknowledged they may give operators the impression that they are reluctant to take calls when they first answer, because they are shutting down the case they are currently working on or changing systems to allow them to deal with the enquiry. They felt this could be misinterpreted by operators as reluctance. They felt if operators had more awareness of other roles within COPFS, they would better understand what they are doing. This highlights the benefits of reciprocal shadowing (see paragraph 213).

288. The key themes that arose from our discussions with staff are training, attitudes, resources, management and systems. It is these issues that require to be understood and addressed by COPFS if transfer difficulties are to be resolved and customer service improved. There is some work already underway in COPFS that should assist – for example, the Designed for Success programme has identified staff oversight and line management as an issue and intends that it will be addressed.

289. We do not expect operators to be able to transfer calls on every occasion. There will be times when a member of staff is dealing with another pressing issue or is away from their desk (supporting a witness who has visited the office for example), but we believe the pattern of successful versus unsuccessful transfers can be reversed.

Recommendation 13

COPFS should work to understand and address the reasons that staff across the organisation are unwilling or unable to answer calls from Enquiry Point.

Enquiry Point and VIA

290. The difficulties operators experience when transferring enquiries appeared to be particularly prevalent when trying to contact VIA. Operators told us that many of the callers they seek to transfer to VIA are individuals who have a direct contact number for the VIA team or officer dealing with their case, but that the number is never answered when they call. They resort to calling Enquiry Point instead. Similarly, operators' calls to VIA are often not answered.

291. Operators' difficulties contacting VIA may be because the issues listed at paragraph 284 are particularly acute for VIA. There is also a lack of shared understanding of their respective roles, which may be contributing to a strained relationship between them.

292. Among operators and VIA staff we interviewed, inconsistent views were expressed about what information could and should be provided to victims and witnesses by VIA, and what could be provided by Enquiry Point. Operators felt that they can provide information to vulnerable witnesses, but that VIA should be able to provide more support and signposting, particularly if a witness is distressed. Operators presumed that VIA staff had more training to help them deal with such situations. Some VIA staff did not necessarily agree that this was their role. They felt operators transferred calls that Enquiry Point should deal with itself. Other VIA staff felt that they are better placed to deal with calls from vulnerable victims and witnesses.

293. This raises a concern we have previously expressed, that there is not collective understanding of the role of VIA, even among VIA staff.³³ Why have staff dedicated to communicating with and supporting victims and witnesses, if that is not what they have the time and the skills to do daily?

³³ IPS, [The prosecution of domestic abuse cases at sheriff summary level](#) (2024).

294. Recent changes to the template letters to victims and witnesses used by VIA mean that the contact details for individual VIA officers or local VIA teams are now included. This is positive. It should encourage victims and witnesses to make direct contact with VIA, rather than through Enquiry Point. This should reduce demand on Enquiry Point, but only if:

- VIA staff are willing and able to answer their phones
- the barriers to them doing so are addressed by COPFS
- COPFS clarifies the proper role of Enquiry Point versus VIA
- VIA contact information is prominent in letters.

295. We understand that consideration is being given to embedding VIA resource within Enquiry Point to help manage enquiries. While we understand the drivers for this, we would urge caution regarding whether this is the appropriate solution. It risks drawing much-needed resource away from VIA teams. It also risks diminishing the benefits that designated VIA officers and teams are supposed to bring – that they are familiar with the victims and witnesses in their cases and therefore better able to offer appropriate support and signposting; and that they have connections with local prosecutors whose input may be needed.

Initiatives to address transfer difficulties

296. COPFS has explored two new initiatives to address Enquiry Point's transfer difficulties. These are known as the Secondary Response Team pilot and the Dundee pilot.

297. The Secondary Response Team pilot is an Enquiry Point initiative designed to help operators who are struggling to transfer an urgent enquiry. Urgent enquiries include, for example, witnesses seeking an excusal on the day they are due to give evidence. Operators pass the enquiries to the Secondary Response Team who continue with efforts to contact the local COPFS office. This may include further calls, emails, direct messages and escalating enquiries to local managers. The operator who originally dealt with the enquiry is freed up to take new calls.

298. The pilot took place in the latter stages of our inspection and initially ran for a two-week period. During that time, 33 enquiries were referred to the Secondary Response Team. Of these, 26 were fully resolved within 93 minutes of the initial call. The remaining seven calls were escalated to managers and were resolved within three to four hours on average. Enquiry Point considers the pilot to have been a success and has sought to extend it for a further period.

299. We welcome Enquiry Point's commitment to innovation and to improving its service. However, we caution against setting up new teams which simply draw resource from other already stretched resources. In this case, the Secondary Response Team comprised two experienced operators. Efforts to improve the service may be better focused on embedding better practice in existing structures. Nonetheless, we appreciate that the Secondary Response Team is a pilot and that further testing will help explore whether it is the most helpful solution to the transfer difficulties faced by Enquiry Point.

300. As well as seeking to address transfer difficulties, the Dundee pilot reflects COPFS's commitment in its Business Plan 2024-25 to respond to all calls or messages to Enquiry Point via initial contact or by returned call in four hours.

301. The Dundee pilot involved one hunt group being established for all summary and sheriff and jury matters in Dundee. Only six staff were initially allocated to the hunt

group, three each from the summary and sheriff and jury teams (the group had reduced to five at the time of our inspection). The idea was that Enquiry Point operators would only have to phone one number in Dundee, and the members of the hunt group were allocated clear responsibility for answering the phone. When the hunt group was called, all members' phones rang simultaneously rather than consecutively to speed up the call being answered. If the call was not answered, operators would leave a voicemail or send an email to the office which would be picked up promptly and actioned.

302. Dundee staff would seek to resolve a call immediately or, if further work was required or the enquiry came via voicemail or email, to resolve the enquiry within four hours. Where it was not possible to resolve within the target timeframe, Dundee staff would advise the caller of the expected response time.
303. COPFS monitored the impact of the pilot. Prior to the pilot, Dundee staff were answering around a third of calls from Enquiry Point, but during the pilot, this increased to between 70 and 75%. In addition, we heard that the relationship between Enquiry Point and Dundee staff improved, with operators dealing with the same staff regularly. Where Dundee staff responded to an enquiry, 70% of enquiries had some form of response within four hours while 38% had a final response within four hours.
304. The pilot was not without challenges. COPFS's systems did not easily support the monitoring of the impact of the pilot – data required to be manually extracted. This was time-intensive and meant the data was not as reliable as it could have been.
305. We also heard that despite designated staff being assigned responsibility for answering calls, some staff still appeared reluctant to take calls. The burden of answering calls fell unevenly across the Dundee staff, and operators said one member of staff in particular was the most likely to answer.
306. Dundee staff we interviewed also felt that there should have been two hunt groups rather than one. Summary staff in the group felt unable to immediately resolve queries about sheriff and jury matters. They often had to ask their colleagues for assistance before getting back to the caller. They suggested separate hunt groups for summary and sheriff and jury matters would help them resolve enquiries more promptly.
307. Staff were positive about having the responsibility to answer calls, but also suggested that those in the hunt group be rotated, perhaps every six months. This would ensure that other staff in the Dundee office took their turn at answering enquiries and did not become de-skilled.
308. Staff also noted that the four-hour response target was challenging for enquiries that required them to seek assistance from other members of staff, including prosecutors who might be unavailable for several hours due to being in court.
309. Despite the success of the pilot and the useful suggestions from staff on how it could be improved further, there appeared to be no clear vision for its future. There was no indication that it would be rolled out across COPFS. We heard other options were being considered, although these had not yet been fully developed at the time of our inspection. It was unfortunate that the suggestions from Dundee staff on how the pilot could be improved had not already been implemented. While we welcomed COPFS setting a four-hour standard for responding to enquiries, this could be applied in a

more nuanced way, acknowledging that this will be impossible to achieve for some enquiries.

310. It is worth noting that the basic premise of the pilot, which commenced in 2023, was mooted in the 2015 external review of Enquiry Point but does not appear to have been taken forward at that time.

311. We have already noted that variations in how local offices should be contacted present challenges to operators. If other teams were more consistent in the contact information they provide to Enquiry Point – such as one hunt group for summary cases and one for sheriff and jury cases in each local office – the process may work more efficiently. This would require the members of the hunt groups to be clear that responding to enquiries is a key part of their role. Those staff should be supported – with the necessary time and training – to carry out this role, but should also be held to account for it. Contact sheets could feature clear escalation routes for each office, so that operators struggling to transfer an urgent enquiry always have a means by which to have it dealt with locally. We consider the ideas put into practice in the Dundee pilot and the suggestions made by staff for further improving that pilot are worth exploring further (see Recommendation 7).

Email enquiries

312. As noted above, enquiries from professionals and partner organisations make up a greater proportion of email enquiries compared to phone enquiries. In our audit, 48% of email enquiries were from professionals and partner organisations, compared to only 7% of phone enquiries.

313. All emails to Enquiry Point arrive in a single mailbox and are then triaged by an operator. Checks are made throughout the day for urgent emails (such as those relating to attendance at court that day). Emails from the public remain in the mailbox until they are actioned, while emails from certain groups are moved to separate folders. This includes:

- enquiries from solicitors requesting information about their clients' pending or existing prosecutions (known as 'agent case checks')
- enquiries from the police regarding the criminal history of accused persons
- enquiries from the Scottish Prison Service regarding cases and seeking information to inform parole decisions.

314. Each day, operators are assigned to work through the mailbox and the folders to provide responses. Aside from urgent emails, emails are dealt with in the order they arrive. When dealing with email enquiries, operators will either respond to the enquiry or forward it to another COPFS team to respond.

315. Where emails are urgent, we noted that operators simply mark them as urgent and forward them to the relevant COPFS office to respond. There is a risk that these emails are lost in the large number of emails received by local offices and are not actioned immediately. COPFS should consider how best to mitigate this risk. For example, Enquiry Point could be more proactive in ensuring the urgent emails are dealt with (such as by phoning local office to advise of the email) and/or local offices should have processes in place to identify and action urgent enquiries. Alternatively, urgent emails could be allocated to the Secondary Response Team, if that pilot initiative is to be extended further.

316. Within Enquiry Point, email enquiries are generally managed by operators who are already experienced at call handling. We heard this was due to the risk of

inexperienced operators providing incorrect information in writing to the enquirer. There did not seem to be the same fear of inexperienced operators providing incorrect information verbally while on the phone. We consider that those making enquiries should receive the same standard of service whether the enquiry is made by phone or email. While the reputational risk to COPFS of inaccurate written information may be perceived to be greater, from a user perspective, the outcome is the same.

317. We consider that responding to emails may provide new operators with a useful development opportunity, learning to manage enquiries without the time pressure of a caller waiting on the phone for a response. It also allows for draft responses to be overseen or spot checked by a supervisor before sending. Allowing new operators to consolidate their skills by responding to emails may assist in building their confidence.

318. While only experienced operators responded to emails, we felt that, generally, Enquiry Point prioritised calls compared to emails. This prioritisation may be caused in part by a greater proportion of calls coming from members of the public, while many emails are from partner organisations. It may also be a legacy of a time when Enquiry Point only dealt with calls. A difference in attitude between emails and calls was evident in our discussions with staff. We heard that operators allocated to the mailbox could be reassigned to answer calls when demand was high. It was also evidenced from our email audit – we found that operators simply forwarded some email enquiries to other COPFS teams to manage, when if that enquiry had been made by phone, they would have resolved it themselves. Response times to emails are also longer – only 9% of the emails we audited received a same day response.

319. Enquiry Point should carefully consider this prioritisation. The urgency of some email enquiries is equivalent to that of phone enquiries, and some members of the public only use email because calling is not an option for them. They may be unable to call Enquiry Point during its opening hours due to their own work schedule. They may also resort to email because they are unable to access the call queue or wait on hold for protracted periods of time. For some, email is simply a more accessible form of communication. They should not be disadvantaged because of their needs or preferences. Enquiry Point should be looking to provide comparable levels of service, regardless of whether an enquiry is made by phone or email (whether they choose to prioritise enquiries from members of the public over partner organisations is a different matter). Given average response times to emails, this may require a review of the resources allocated to and within Enquiry Point.

Verifying identity

320. As with call enquiries, operators verify the identity of the person sending an email enquiry and check that they are entitled to receive the information requested. Often, those emailing do not supply all the information needed to help an operator check their identity. The operator's initial response to the email is therefore to request the information, rather than answer the enquiry. This is an essential step in the process, but delays the substantive response.

321. This process can be further complicated by Enquiry Point's email management system. Emails are not, for example, allocated a unique reference number, allowing the enquiry to be tracked. When the enquirer responds to the identify check, their response goes to the general mailbox, not the operator who requested the information. Thus, when an enquirer responds to an identity check but does not include the original enquiry in the email, the operator monitoring the mailbox at that

time (who may not be the same operator as carried out the identity check) requires to trace the original email in order to respond. This can delay the subsequent response.

322. During our inspection, we audited 56 email enquiries. As with the calls we audited, we assessed whether identity checks were carried out appropriately. Because many of the enquiries came from partner organisations such as Police Scotland, there was no need to carry out identity checks. For the remainder, identity checks were mostly carried out appropriately by the operator where Enquiry Point itself resolved the enquiry. When we asked operators about how they verified the identity of the emailer, there was some inconsistency in their responses, and inconsistency in how they approached emails compared to calls. This should be addressed through operator guidance and training. In addition, where the operator forwarded the enquiry to another team, we were concerned there was a lack of clarity about whether the operator should carry out the identity check prior to forwarding, or whether the recipient office should carry out the check. This lack of clarity risked no checks being carried out.
323. To minimise the back and forth involved in identity checks, COPFS should publicise the information that those sending emails need to include to expedite the process. Consideration could also be given to including an online form on its website that supports the submission of enquiries and encourages individuals to specify the information needed for an identity check to be carried out. The form could also encourage inclusion of the case reference number where this is relevant to the enquiry.

Managing and recording enquiries

324. In our audit of 56 email enquiries, we could find no record of a response to two enquiries. Given the system for managing emails in Enquiry Point, we consider it more likely that the absence of a response was a record keeping issue rather than a failure to respond.
325. Enquiry Point has sought to organise its email enquiries as best it can, but the system itself is rudimentary. It is not of the standard expected in a contact centre environment and is not conducive to effective record keeping or retrieval of linked emails, or efficient email handling. There is also no integration between the systems for managing phone and email enquiries.
326. While emails from and to defence agents, police and other partner organisations are stored in designated folders, emails from members of the public, once actioned, are generally stored in a folder linked to the COPFS office or team dealing with their case. Responses to email enquiries are sent from the Enquiry Point email address but are found in individual operators' sent items. Operators are required to move sent items to the same folder where the original email is stored, but do not always do so.
327. During our audit, as well as being unable to trace any response to two enquiries, we were unable to trace some responses in an email chain in the folders where they should have been stored. While some of these responses were eventually found in the personal mailboxes of operators, others were never found.
328. Enquiry Point operators do not upload case-related emails to the electronic case file. They expect that if the enquiry is forwarded to the COPFS team managing the case, it is that team's role to update the case file. If the email enquiry is dealt with entirely by Enquiry Point, the only record of it is stored in the Enquiry Point mailbox. This is not accessible to staff across COPFS. There is a risk that information that may be potentially valuable to a prosecutor or other person managing a case is currently

unknown and inaccessible to them. In our audit, 59% of email enquiries were dealt with entirely by Enquiry Point. As a result, no record of the enquiry would be found outside the Enquiry Point mailbox. Enquiry Point staff should be uploading these emails to the case management system.

329. An example of an email enquiry that is not recorded in the case file, but which may be useful to those managing the case is one from a defence agent indicating they are acting for the accused. The agent may, for example, be aware of the case from the accused, but is seeking its reference number from Enquiry Point. Operators may provide the information but take no further action. Those managing the case may be unaware of who is acting for the accused and an opportunity for early resolution may be missed.
330. While the Enquiry Point mailbox can be searched, the volume of stored emails make this challenging. At the time of our inspection, the folder containing emails from members of the public that had already been actioned had over 230,000 emails. It appeared that emails were stored indefinitely. It was unclear how COPFS's records management policy was being applied to email enquiries.
331. Even where a case-related email enquiry is forwarded to the COPFS team managing the case, the initial enquiry and any response were not always uploaded to the case file. Again, this risks information not being known or accessible to those who require it. Of the emails we audited, 20 were forwarded by an operator to another COPFS team. Only half of these were uploaded to the case file. Uploading was always carried out by the other COPFS team. We also found that on no occasion did the Enquiry Point operator update the witness contact record with details of the email enquiry, as would have happened if the enquiry had been made by phone. Presumably, this was because they expected the enquiry itself to be added to the case file.
332. Staff have told us the process for uploading emails to case files can be cumbersome and time consuming. This may have contributed to the absence of email enquiries from case files. Where email enquiries were uploaded to case files, this tended to be done by VIA. The usual practice for VIA staff is to update VIA minute sheets with information about any contact with a victim or witness.³⁴ This is where we tended to find a record of email enquiries.
333. The email system operated by Enquiry Point, coupled with inadequate record keeping across Enquiry Point and other teams in COPFS, mean information that may be relevant to the management of cases is not easily accessible to all those who may require it. This risk requires to be addressed. COPFS also requires to review its approach to records management within Enquiry Point.

Response

334. To achieve a comparable level of service in how it responds to calls and emails, Enquiry Point requires to revisit its approach to emails. Too often, we found operators were simply forwarding emails to other COPFS teams rather than seeking to resolve the query. This is in contrast to the goal for call enquiries, 80% of which Enquiry Point aspires to resolve at first point of contact.

³⁴ The VIA minute sheet is a written record of any contact between VIA officers and victims and vulnerable witnesses in a case where VIA is involved. It may also record actions taken by VIA officers in relation to the case. Prosecutors may also record notes from contact with a victim on the minute sheet.

335. In our audit, only 59% of emails were resolved by Enquiry Point. However, email enquiries from partner organisations were more likely to be resolved by Enquiry Point than enquiries from the public. Only 31% of email enquiries from members of the public were resolved by operators with a larger proportion being forwarded to other COPFS teams for a response.

336. Where operators did attempt to resolve email enquiries from members of the public, the results were mixed. We found some responses to be good, but others to be brief, unhelpful and one was inaccurate. We noted similar issues in the email responses to partner organisations. This was echoed by respondents to our survey. For example, police respondents felt operators did not always respond to the entirety of their enquiry, resulting in prolonged email exchanges. They felt more attention to detail was required.

‘As a unit we send many emails per day and having to frequently go back and forth trying to get a clear reply is very frustrating and time consuming... I am often responded to with exactly what I have written in my initial email which is obviously very unhelpful.’ (Police survey respondent)

337. Operators seemed less confident and less skilled in writing responses to enquiries than providing verbal responses. We also found individual operators took different approaches to responding to email enquiries. Their responses varied in tone, formality and length. Some provided very brief information while others tried to pre-empt follow-up questions. Practice varied even when emails were being forwarded to other COPFS teams for action. Some operators simply forwarded the email, others forwarded the email and copied in the person who made the enquiry, others forwarded the email and also responded to the person who made the enquiry to let them know they had done so. The inconsistencies in how email enquiries are managed highlights the need for guidance, training and clear processes to ensure those emailing Enquiry Point receive a comparable level of service to those who phone. While we understand Enquiry Point has begun to develop guidance for responding to particular categories of email, a more comprehensive review of guidance and instructions for staff is needed.

Recommendation 14

COPFS should review how Enquiry Point responds to emails, ensuring that those who make email enquiries receive a comparable level of service to those who make enquiries by phone.

Forwarded emails

338. When operators forward email enquiries to other COPFS teams for action, they do so using the Directory. As it does for calls, the Directory sets out myriad instructions on how other teams are to be contacted. Some offices operate general mailboxes, while others ask operators to forward enquiries to the individual mailboxes of staff (and often the mailboxes of multiple staff members). With so many varied instructions, there is scope for operators to forward emails to the wrong person or team. The frequency with which other teams check mailboxes varies.

339. Recent changes to letters sent by VIA in summary cases means victims and witnesses are being given the Enquiry Point rather than the local VIA email address. It was hoped Enquiry Point would deal with the emails it could and only forward those it could not, thereby relieving pressure on VIA staff. However, VIA staff we

interviewed felt this new approach had simply introduced delay. They felt Enquiry Point was just forwarding the emails to them, but only after they had sat in the Enquiry Point mailbox for a few days. They also felt operators marked all emails to VIA as urgent even when they were not.

340. Operators felt that forwarded emails are often not actioned. They receive follow-up emails from the person who made the initial enquiry saying they have had no response (another example of failure demand). When following up on behalf of the enquirer, operators sometimes note an email has been uploaded to a case file, but not dealt with. In our audit, 20 email enquiries were forward to another COPFS team for action. We could find no evidence of any action being taken in response to six of those emails by the other team.

341. An enquiry ticketing system, as suggested at paragraph 384, may help COPFS better monitor enquiries to ensure they have received a response.

Delivery – resources

342. We considered the resources available within COPFS to respond to enquiries. This included staffing resources as well as the IT systems used by staff.

Workforce planning

343. Workforce planning is the process by which organisations make sure they have the right people with the right skills in the right place at the right time and at the right cost. It requires an organisation to understand its demand and be clear about its objectives, and to balance these against the financial resources available to deliver the service.

344. At the time of our inspection, Enquiry Point had 40.9 full-time equivalent staff. This was made up of 34.15 operators, as well as 6.75 more senior roles. Operators are graded at Band B, the entry level to COPFS. A person graded at Band B+ carries out a quality assurance function, while managers are graded Band C and the overall manager for the Enquiry Point service is a Band D. There is a mix of full-time and part-time staff at operator and supervisory levels.

345. We sought to understand whether the staff resources allocated to Enquiry Point were sufficient. This proved difficult. As already noted, COPFS does not have a comprehensive understanding of demand for the Enquiry Point service. Nor has COPFS clearly and consistently articulated its objectives for Enquiry Point. While COPFS has said it wants operators to handle 90% of the calls presented to them, it has not stated how long it thinks it is acceptable for those making enquiries to wait before they are resolved or what volume of calls it is acceptable to turn away from the queue. As a result, COPFS has not been able to develop a workforce plan for Enquiry Point that analyses demand and assesses the staff resource required to deliver the quality of service to which it aspires (and compare this to the financial resources COPFS has available).

346. As noted at paragraph 71, 19% of callers are not admitted to the call queue and 50% of calls are abandoned after being admitted to the queue. Unless COPFS considers this level of service to be acceptable, we must conclude that Enquiry Point does not have sufficient resources to meet current demand. However, in order for the appropriate level of resources to be determined, COPFS must develop a workforce plan. To do so, it must first:

- be clear about the role and remit of Enquiry Point (Recommendation 1)
- set the standards which service users should expect from Enquiry Point, taking into account service user needs and feedback (Recommendations 1 and 5)
- understand its demand, including the impact of taking steps to pre-empt, reduce and divert demand and eliminate failure demand (Recommendation 4) as well as taking forward other recommendations designed to support more effective service delivery
- consider what it can afford (and consider what it cannot afford, by not delivering a service that meets user needs and maintains their confidence).

Recommendation 15

COPFS should develop a workforce plan for Enquiry Point. It should ensure Enquiry Point is sufficiently staffed to meet demand and deliver the desired level of service.

347. While there is scope to increase the productivity of some aspects of Enquiry Point's work (notably by addressing the time spent attempting to transfer calls to other teams and improving the efficiency of IT systems), operators themselves have a high level of productivity. They work diligently throughout the day responding to call and email enquiries with little downtime.

Staff retention

348. Workforce planning is linked to other staffing issues such as retention and recruitment. Over the years, Enquiry Point has struggled to retain its staff. This is not unusual in contact centre environments. Between September 2021 and August 2024, 35 staff left Enquiry Point. Only five of those staff left COPFS, while the majority moved to other roles within COPFS either on level transfer or promotion. This data supports what we heard from many – that Enquiry Point can be viewed as a good entry point to the wider COPFS.

349. While the rest of COPFS benefits from staff who have acquired a range of knowledge about the service, high turnover has a negative impact on Enquiry Point. It results in a loss of knowledge and experience, decreased productivity and affects the morale of those left behind, all of which impacts the quality of the service. Managing turnover and persistently having to recruit and train staff takes up a significant proportion of manager time, limiting their capacity for other work.

350. There is no robust data on the reasons for high turnover within Enquiry Point. For example, exit interviews were not routinely carried out with those leaving COPFS at the time of our inspection, and exit interviews are not undertaken with those who move roles within the service. We spoke with current and former Enquiry Point staff to try to understand the difficulties retaining staff. Staff talked about the pros and cons of working for Enquiry Point, and how these compared to other teams in COPFS.

351. Positive aspects of working in Enquiry Point included:

- the support offered by Enquiry Point managers
- feeling part of the Enquiry Point team
- leaving work behind at the end of the day – when the phone lines are closed for the day and the calls waiting in the queue are dealt with, the work day ends
- the scope for part-time working and the higher degree of certainty about working hours compared to other teams. This means the work can be especially attractive to, for example, those with caring responsibilities.

352. The positives described by staff were supported in many ways by recent staff survey results.³⁵ For example:

- Enquiry Point staff were significantly more content with their workload than COPFS staff generally (82% compared to 52%)
- Enquiry Point staff were happier with their work life balance compared to colleagues across COPFS (82% compared to 67%).

353. Working in Enquiry Point also provided operators with impressive levels of contact with staff across COPFS. They acquired broad knowledge of COPFS through managing a variety of enquiries, good customer service skills and experience of using IT systems. These positives did, however, make Enquiry Point staff well placed to achieve moves or promotion to other teams.

³⁵ COPFS People Survey 2023.

354. Negative aspects of working in Enquiry Point included:

- the location – some staff who were not local to Dumbarton did not enjoy having to travel there (although note the opening of a second site at paragraph 363)
- a lack of career development. Beyond the skills noted at paragraph 353, staff felt there were limited opportunities for promotion within Enquiry Point, hence them seeking opportunities elsewhere in the service
- not feeling part of the wider COPFS team – the staff survey showed that only 36% of Enquiry Point staff felt a strong personal attachment to COPFS compared to 53% across the service
- not feeling valued or respected by colleagues across COPFS
- frustration about some aspects of the role, such as dealing with failure demand caused by other teams in COPFS. As the first point of contact for many, customer dissatisfaction is often unjustifiably focused on operators
- the nature of the operator role
- the lack of flexibility, such as opportunities to work at home, compared to other COPFS staff.

355. With regard to the nature of the operator role, staff described their work as difficult, fast-paced, pressured and constant. Some felt that being an operator had a 'limited shelf life' and that they either had or expected to 'burn out'. They also said the operator role can be lonely. Staff also noted that feeling this way was exacerbated when other staff left. Staff who dealt with email enquiries said this was a welcome opportunity to take a break from dealing with calls.

356. With regard to the lack of flexibility, operators felt their working conditions compared less favourably to colleagues in other COPFS teams. In the staff survey, only 39% of Enquiry Point staff felt they had a choice in deciding how they did their work, compared to 73% for COPFS overall. Operators noted:

- they had to work beyond their set finishing time to deal with any calls that were still in the queue when the Enquiry Point line closed
- the set opening hours of the Enquiry Point phone line meant there was little opportunity to take back flexi time or to work in a more flexible way
- there were almost no opportunities for home working. This was in contrast to many staff elsewhere in COPFS. As entry level Band Bs, operators are among the lowest paid staff members in the service and their commuting costs therefore represent a greater proportion of their income than others.

357. Some operators did not want to work from home. They preferred to keep their work separate from their home life, and liked having colleagues and managers on hand when dealing with difficult or upsetting calls. Managers were also keen to work with operators in the office, to ensure they had support whenever needed. The extensive use of the buddy system to train new operators also necessitated operators being in the office. More evenly spreading responsibility for responding to email enquiries among all operators, and allowing them to work from home while doing so, may go some way towards allowing operators a degree of flexible and home working.

358. Enquiry Point managers are well aware of the benefits of retaining staff and continue to explore how to improve retention rates. They could be assisted by corporate support to, for example, implement an exit interview process, analyse reasons for leaving and consider what action can be taken in response. If operator turnover cannot be reduced, however, COPFS should at least acknowledge the role Enquiry Point is playing as a training ground for other units within the service. This should be factored into workforce planning by, for example, allowing Enquiry Point to over-recruit so that turnover has less of an impact on the service provided to the public

and partner organisations. Consideration could also be given to rolling recruitment and training programmes for operators.

Recruitment

359. Enquiry Point struggles to recruit operators from other teams within COPFS. This is unfortunate as operators with experience of working elsewhere in the service would be an asset. Within COPFS, Band Bs are also not a moveable resource – that is, COPFS cannot compel staff to move to Enquiry Point. As a result, operators are almost exclusively recruited externally.
360. Recruiting externally has also often been challenging. Some recruitment campaigns have resulted in insufficient applicants. In the past, this has been linked to the roles being office-based in Dumbarton. The opening of a second Enquiry Point site in Glasgow should assist with recruitment.
361. A consequence of high turnover within Enquiry Point is that recruitment is an almost constant endeavour. Given poor staff retention, managers appreciate the importance of getting recruitment right. They have sought to make changes that will increase retention rates, such as being clearer in job adverts about what an operator role entails. We welcome this work. However, we consider that more corporate support from COPFS could strengthen recruitment to Enquiry Point even further.
362. Operators must be especially skilled in communicating both verbally and in writing. They deal with the public every day and will be many people's first or only interaction with COPFS staff. Despite the specialist skills required by operators, they are recruited using a generic Band B competency framework. We heard that applicants to be an operator may be asked the same questions as applicants to an administrative Band B post that has limited, if any, contact with the public. We also heard that operator applicants are not subject to any additional testing during the recruitment process, such as role play or testing their ability to interact with the public or the quality of their written skills. This recruitment process has sometimes resulted in the appointment of operators who are not ideally suited to the role, but who may be well suited to other Band B roles in COPFS. Delivering a more bespoke recruitment process may help Enquiry Point identify the most suitable candidates in the first instance, and improve staff retention in the longer term.

Recommendation 16

COPFS should explore the reasons for poor staff retention in Enquiry Point and take action to address them. It should consider what changes can be made to its recruitment process for operators to better identify the most appropriate candidates and to improve retention in the longer term.

A second site

363. In August 2024, Enquiry Point opened a second site within the procurator fiscal's office in Glasgow. The business case highlighted three main benefits of a second site:
- an increased pool of potential applicants when operator vacancies arise
 - co-location of operators with COPFS colleagues to allow for greater interaction and to address the sense that Enquiry Point is separate from COPFS
 - improved resilience for business continuity purposes. For example, should one site experience a loss of service, Enquiry Point could continue to operate from the other site.

364. The opening of a second site is a positive development for all of the reasons outlined above. Enquiry Point managers have been alert to the potential risks of a second site, such as a divergence of practice between sites. They have sought to address these by, for example, having managers move between the offices.

Telephony and IT systems

365. Effective telephony and IT systems are essential to COPFS's ability to respond to enquiries accurately and timeously. Enquiry Point handles an average of almost 550 calls per day. Most call and email enquiries require operators and other COPFS staff to use various IT systems to search for information sought, or to record information being provided.

366. During our inspection, we consistently heard from staff about frustrations with IT systems. Staff felt systems were antiquated, complex, not intuitive and unreliable. They also felt systems were inefficient and contributed to the under-recording of important information. Throughout this report, we have highlighted instances of systems not helping staff to do their jobs well.

367. We have previously reported on challenges faced by staff when using COPFS's electronic case management systems. In our recent inspection of the prosecution of domestic abuse cases at sheriff summary level, we found that, 'IT systems used by COPFS hamper staff productivity and do not help staff manage cases as efficiently and effectively as possible. This affects the service provided to victims and staff morale.'³⁶ In another inspection published in 2022, we stated, 'COPFS should not underestimate the daily toll poor systems are taking on staff, their productivity and the service provided to victims'.³⁷

368. A recent report commissioned by the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union called on COPFS (and SCTS) to urgently monitor and review the performance of all IT systems, and recommended the full replacement of IT systems to meet the requirements of a 21st century justice system.³⁸

369. In our previous reports, we have noted that COPFS is aware of the deficiencies of its case management systems. It is not clear, however, whether COPFS is aware of the scale of the productivity losses caused by poor IT. COPFS is planning a next generation case management system using innovative digital technology to meet the delivery needs of a modern prosecution service. As we have said before, this system is much needed. Work to progress it should be expedited.

Contact centre application

370. In 2022, COPFS procured and implemented a new cloud-based contact centre application for Enquiry Point. This was linked to wider changes in the organisation's approach to telephony systems. The new application could be integrated with Microsoft Teams, allowing operators to receive calls via their laptops rather than requiring operators to have traditional desk phones.

371. It was expected that the new application would 'transform our customer experience by introducing new ways and channels of communicating with the service'. Some of the anticipated benefits included:

³⁶ IPS, [The prosecution of domestic abuse cases at sheriff summary level](#) (2024), page 7.

³⁷ IPS, [Inspection of COPFS practice in relation to sections 274 and 275 of the Criminal Procedure \(Scotland\) Act 1995](#) (2022), paragraph 49.

³⁸ PCS/Unity Consulting Scotland, [Rough justice: the challenges faced by Scotland's justice workers](#) (2024)

- new ways for Enquiry Point to engage with customers including opportunities for calling, webchat, email and social media channels
- modern tools to support staff to do their job, helping to reduce repeat contacts and providing a more customer-focused experience
- analytics to identify customer contact trends
- call recording to monitor quality
- integration with other applications.

372. The contact centre application was implemented in October 2022. In the 18 months that followed, we heard that Enquiry Point experienced significant problems with the application's operation. This included:

- calls being disconnected
- calls being stuck in the queue and never presented to an operator
- stuck calls preventing other calls being presented to operators
- calls being presented to multiple operators at the same time
- call controls freezing
- poor call quality
- poor integration with Enquiry Point's call recording system.

373. We also heard that much anticipated features of the contact centre application which it was hoped would support better customer service and generate data had to be switched off as they did not work as expected. Switching those features off was thought necessary to preserve other, basic functionality. Plans to manage email as well as phone enquiries through the application were also abandoned.

374. Generally, Enquiry Point staff found the application to be unreliable and they lost faith in its ability to support them to do their jobs well. Those we interviewed consistently said that the new application had been a retrograde step.

375. During the 18-month period when problems with the application were at their most acute, we heard that a disproportionate amount of the Enquiry Point business manager's time was spent identifying and trying to resolve issues. This left her little time for other service development work. She was supported by a colleague from COPFS's Information Services Division (ISD). Together, they worked well in excess of their contracted hours to improve the application's basic functionality and stability.

376. It was not entirely clear why the contact centre application had not delivered what was expected. A range of factors may have contributed:

- while some consultation had taken place with Enquiry Point prior to the application being procured, it appears a more comprehensive assessment of the service's needs may have been needed
- the contact centre application had originally been used internally at COPFS to help manage calls to its ISD helpdesk. We heard the application worked well for that purpose, but was perhaps not suited to the volume of calls received by Enquiry Point
- insufficient support and training around the implementation and operation of the application.

377. We met with another public sector contact centre using the same application as Enquiry Point. They said the application worked well for them, and they were exploiting its functionality to a greater degree than Enquiry Point. It is possible that it is the application's interaction with COPFS systems and infrastructure that has caused difficulty. User acceptance testing of the application was carried out but had

not flagged the problems that subsequently occurred. This raises the possibility that the user acceptance testing was not sufficiently robust.

378. At the time of our inspection, the application was operating in a more stable way, but the anticipated benefits, outlined at paragraph 371, were still not fully realised.

379. While governance arrangements are in place for IT projects within COPFS, we do not consider that those arrangements operated effectively with regard to the project to deliver the contact centre application for Enquiry Point. The project was reviewed following implementation of the application and both a lessons learned and closure report were prepared and signed off. Neither of these documents make any reference to the extensive difficulties experienced by Enquiry Point. The project closure report features a list of the benefits delivered by the new application. This list is inaccurate and there is an absence of supporting evidence. The closure report does not represent a robust assessment of what has actually been delivered and the impact this has on the quality of the service provided by Enquiry Point.

380. The closure report was prepared without input from Enquiry Point staff or the member of ISD staff who was familiar with the difficulties experienced. Not consulting with those who have used the application daily has resulted in a failure to properly explore and measure whether the intended benefits have in fact been realised. The closure report paints an overwhelmingly positive picture of a project which has hampered the delivery of the existing Enquiry Point service and failed to deliver some of the new features that would better support the service. A more robust assessment of the project would have alerted senior managers to the difficulties faced by Enquiry Point and the fact these had not been fully resolved.

381. Ineffective project governance has contributed to COPFS missing opportunities to both review the operation of the contact centre application and to consider whether an alternate solution should be procured. We heard that the contract for the application was renewed in the summer of 2024, without consulting the Enquiry Point business manager.

382. Currently, COPFS has a range of digital projects that are already underway or planned. The effective delivery of these projects is key to COPFS transforming its service and to it becoming a more modern and efficient organisation that better meets the needs of its users. It is therefore essential that these projects are subject to robust governance and oversight.

Recommendation 17

COPFS should ensure that the governance of digital projects is sufficiently robust.

383. With regard to the way forward for Enquiry Point, once its purpose and remit has been clearly defined as required by Recommendation 1, COPFS should consider the systems needed to deliver that purpose. There should be a comprehensive assessment of the requirements of Enquiry Point, not only in terms of how it currently works but how the service will develop in future. This assessment should take into account:

- the views and experiences of Enquiry Point staff
- service user needs and feedback
- benchmarking with comparable contact centres.

384. The assessment should inform the specification and procurement of appropriate products. Consideration should also be given to:
- the integration of Enquiry Point's system for handling call and email enquiries. While it was anticipated that the current contact centre application would deliver this integration as well as creating new channels through which enquiries could be made, this has not been achieved. Prior to any expansion of its channels, COPFS should consider whether these meet the needs of its service users
 - whether Enquiry Point would benefit from a customer relationship management (CRM) system. CRMs are common in contact centre environments and help centralise all customer-related information in a single, accessible system. On receipt of a call from an individual who has previously been in touch, for example, an operator could immediately access information about them, including any vulnerabilities or additional support needs, and reasons for previous enquiries and whether and how those have been resolved. In a criminal justice context, a CRM could help victims and witnesses avoid having to repeat information about themselves and their circumstances each time they contact COPFS. This could help achieve a more trauma-informed service
 - whether a customer service ticketing system would help COPFS identify, assign and track enquiries, monitor resolution, and measure performance. Such a system could, for example, track response times and flag repeat enquiries and failure demand. Enquiries could be tracked and monitored even when they are passed by operators to other staff across COPFS.

Recommendation 18

COPFS should ensure that it has a contact centre application and other associated systems that help it deliver an effective and efficient Enquiry Point service.



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