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Margaret Mitchell, MSP
Convener
Justice Committee
Scottish Parliament

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Dear Margaret,

Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service: In Year Budget Increase – 2018-19

You will recall that the Committee's consideration of the Scottish Government's Draft Budget for 2018-19 focused on the COPFS budget.

This was in the context of a proposed resource budget of £108.4m for 2018-19, the first real terms increase in the Service's budget for a number of years. I stated to the Committee that while this increase provided stability in terms of staff levels, I had commissioned work to analyse the impact on the Service of the significant change in the profile of its work. This approach built on the assurance which I gave to the Committee during consideration of the previous year's budget that I would not hesitate to seek additional funding were this to be required.

Following this analysis,, the Scottish Government has allocated to the Service additional in-year funding of up to £3.6m for 2018-19 (the equivalent of £5.7m full year). This comprises: (i) £800,000 which the Cabinet Secretary for Justice is transferring from the Justice budget to COPFS (as part of a package which also includes £300,000 for SCTS) specifically in relation to the prosecution of sexual offences; and (ii) up to an additional £2.8 million allocated in-year by the Scottish Government to the Service.

This additional funding will allow the Service to recruit up to 140 additional permanent staff – which will take the Service's headcount to a new high. The additional resource will enable the Service to meet the immediate challenges arising from the significant increase in the reporting of sexual offences during the last year and other changes in the nature and complexity of its caseload, as well as higher public expectations. I believe that it will put the work of the Service on a good footing for the future. I am confident that the Service will rise to the challenges presented by the changes in its caseload and this additional funding will enable it to do so.



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The Service is developing a detailed implementation plan, which will reflect the ways in which this increase in the Service's budget will enable it to improve its performance, in the context of a changing caseload. I would be very happy to share further details of the Service's plans with the Committee in due course but can assure you at this stage that the key elements will include:

- Reducing the "journey time" to indictment for all sexual offences in the High Court and Sheriff Court, notwithstanding the significant increase in the number and complexity of these cases;
- Providing victims, vulnerable witnesses and next of kin with an improved level of service, focused on regular updates and more meaningful progress with case preparation;
- Front-loading the work on the most complex cases prosecuted by the Service, so that the Crown can maximise the benefits of the Protocol for Large and Complex Cases which has been issued by the High Court;
- Reducing the timescale for completion of death investigations; and
- Ensuring that Local Court staff are able to meet new demands such as the new domestic abuse legislation.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and I will be providing public confirmation tomorrow, 10 August, of the funding which is being provided specifically for improving the "journey time" for sexual offences and information to victims of sexual offences.

I am grateful for the continuing interest which the Committee has shown in the work of the Service. The effective, fair and rigorous prosecution of crime underpins a just society, and helps to keep our communities safe. The Service has demonstrated its commitment to those values. The additional funding which the Scottish Government has provided to the Service will enable it to respond to the changing nature of its caseload, and to improve its performance, whilst continuing to promote reform across the criminal justice system. I look forward to updating the Committee in due course on the Service's plans, and, on the progress which it makes in delivering these improvements.

Yours Sincerely,

W. JAMES WOLFFE QC

