



Crown Office and
Procurator Fiscal
Service

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Dear Convenor

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Committee's evidence session on 9 September in relation to Courts, Backlogs and Workforce.

Mr Macpherson asked me about the demands and resourcing requirements relating to organised crime cases. Mr Macpherson's focus was on levels of serious criminal activity by "a small but very challenging minority of young people" in urban areas. I undertook to write to the Committee with more detail on this.

I am aware that Mr Macpherson has spoken in the Parliament, and in other public spaces, about serious crimes, including knife crime, committed by young people in his constituency.

COPFS adopts a robust approach to the prosecution of knife crime. We recognise the significant harm caused to individuals, families and communities by this type of offending. In recent years there have been a number of high-profile cases in which people have died as a result of young people carrying and using knives. Naturally, there is public concern about these cases and the safety of communities.

COPFS takes seriously cases involving the possession or use of knives. In many such cases proceedings are brought on indictment. Prosecutors consider carefully each case on its own facts and circumstances and with reference to the factors outlined in the Scottish Prosecution Code. In deciding whether to take proceedings, and in deciding on the forum in which to bring proceedings, prosecutors have regard to aggravating features and high-risk circumstances, for example where an offence takes place in a town or city centre, or in an area where there have been problems with violence; and where there is a gang-related context.

We recognise that children reported to us often have complex needs and vulnerabilities. At the same time, all reports of violence and knife crime by children are assessed carefully and in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, including offenders, victims and witnesses who are children. Outcomes can, and

do, include prosecution in court, even for children. This year, and in recent years, children have been indicted to the High Court for murder, where the offences have involved the use of knives.

COPFS reviews cases involving child accused to ensure that there is a consistent approach. We also engage with Police Scotland, Youth Justice Assessors, the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit and the Scottish and United Kingdom governments, to improve reporting and information sharing, with a focus on identifying persistent or escalating behaviour; and to ensure prosecutors have the most effective tools and information available when dealing with knife crime and youth violence.

We have also engaged directly with the public about our approach to knife crime, to offer reassurance about how seriously we approach knife crime; and to warn those contemplating taking knives into public of the serious consequences there may be for them and others. In June 2026, following the conviction of a child for the murder of John McNab, in the constituency of Mr Macpherson, Laura Buchan, COPFS Legal Director for Deaths Investigations, spoke publicly to warn that the carrying of knives is blighting communities and destroying young lives. Ms Buchan spoke of the lasting loss suffered by Mr McNab's family and noted that the young offender, aged just 17, faces time in custody and a lifelong criminal record because of his deliberate actions. Ms Buchan said, "We hope this conviction sends a clear message to young people. Carrying a knife or other bladed weapon is illegal and can have lifelong consequences. It can cause serious and lasting harm - to you, your family, your friends and to others". Ms Buchan confirmed that COPFS will continue to do all we can to ensure those responsible for this type of crime are held to account.

Turning to organised crime more broadly, in the most serious and complex cases this is dealt with by specialist prosecutors in our Serious and Organised Crime Unit (SOCU) and Major Crime Team (MCT). SOCU was established to ensure that COPFS can respond robustly to the threat posed by serious and organised crime and to reflect the priorities and the strategy set by the Serious Organised Crime Taskforce, which is chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and attended by the Lord Advocate.

SOCU and MCT are involved at an early stage of police enquiries and provide focus and direction on the scope and strategy of complex investigations. This can be seen in the approach we have taken to Operation Portaledge and Operation Zora, multi-agency investigations launched to dismantle a violent gangland feud involving rival organised crime groups across Scotland's central belt. In these cases, which are being led by SOCU and MCT, on the instruction of the Lord Advocate, we have worked to process cases efficiently and at pace, engaging with the police and the Scottish Police Authority forensic services to fast-track evidence processing; and facilitating early disclosure and meaningful early engagement with the defence; all with a view to seeking agreement of evidence and early resolution of cases. This approach has paid

dividends, with a number of successful prosecutions completed, and significant custodial sentences imposed.

I hope that this is helpful to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Yvette Greener
Chief Operating Officer