HM Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland

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Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee
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Dear Convener

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

We understand that the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee is currently considering the non-implementation of Part 1 of the Domestic Abuse Protection (Scotland) Act 2021 and I wanted to share our follow-up inspection report, which has been published today, with you, for interest.

Focused follow-up inspection: communication with victims of domestic abuse in summary cases | HM Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland

Our inspection sought to determine what practical difference has been made to how the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) communicates with victims of domestic abuse since our report on the prosecution of domestic abuse cases at sheriff summary level was published over two and a half years ago.

In particular, we have taken account of the rollout of enhanced victim engagement (EVE) across COPFS since 2024.

- In 2024, we found that communication was unsatisfactory for victims in 80% of cases. IPS therefore recommended that immediate action be taken to improve communication for domestic abuse victims in summary cases. Our focused follow-up inspection has found little evidence of improvement. Most victims of domestic abuse continue to receive an unacceptable standard of service from COPFS. We found that overall communication with victims was unsatisfactory in 75% of cases. Many of the failings we identified in 2024 persist.

- Since 2024, COPFS has made attempts to decrease the workload of summary Victim Information and Advice (VIA) teams, but this has not resulted in meaningful change for victims. We found the introduction of new VIA letter templates for victims to be well-intentioned but poor execution often resulted in letters that are overly long, confusing, and often missing important information.

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- Our inspection showed a clear deterioration in the standard and quantity of communication provided by COPFS to victims of domestic abuse as cases progress. There was an improved focus on updates to victims after the accused's first appearance in court, but there was often no information provided about the trial outcome, verdict or sentence. This can be linked to backlogs in VIA work and can create the risk of victims being unaware that bail conditions have ended.

- We found that the introduction of EVE, has not had a significant impact on the overall standard of communication. This was due to failings in delivery by VIA coupled with a lack of resources to deliver EVE. In person meetings that should be offered to some victims were rarely offered across the four offices we reviewed (Hamilton, Paisley, Dundee and Glasgow) with the specialist domestic abuse model of working in Glasgow creating a significant issue for the delivery of EVE.

- We were concerned to find evidence that translation and interpretation tools were not always being used for victims who did not have English as a first language, and as a result were often particularly vulnerable, leading to them not receiving the standard of service they ought to receive.

- A continued lack of national oversight and guidance for VIA staff means there is wide variation of service for victims.

We have chosen not to make any further recommendations. Rather, our report shines a light on the practical and necessary changes which COPFS requires to consider along with implementing the outstanding recommendations from the 2024 inspection.

I would be very happy to discuss our report with you further should that be of interest to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

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