

Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS)

All suspicious deaths are referred to the Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS). COPFS will ensure that a full investigation is carried out and gather together the necessary information and evidence to support any criminal proceedings. You may come into contact with a number of officers from different areas within COPFS at different stages of the process. You are entitled to expect COPFS to respond appropriately to your needs, to answer questions you may have and to keep you informed of the progress of the investigation.

Departments you may have contact with

Scottish Fatalities Investigation Unit (SFIU)

The Scottish Fatalities Investigation Unit (SFIU) is a specialist unit within COPFS that is responsible for investigating all sudden, suspicious, unexplained and accidental deaths.

If SFIU considers that circumstances surrounding the death suggest that a crime took place that caused or contributed to the death, they will refer it to the High Court Homicide team for further investigation. At this point SFIU will maintain administrative oversight, receiving and passing on paperwork and instructions to ensure the process is managed efficiently.

High Court Homicide Team

If it is considered that the death may be as a result of a crime being committed, the Procurator Fiscal within the High Court Homicide team will instruct the Police to investigate.

The High Court Homicide team, is responsible for liaising with families during their investigation either directly or through Police Family Liason Officers.

The High Court Homicide team make decisions in relation to the investigation and the preparation of the case. During the investigation, the High Court Homicide team will decide who is most appropriate person to keep you informed. It could be a member of the High Court Homicide team or they could direct your FLO to provide you with information. The appointed person will talk to you about post-mortems, death certificates and arrangements for release of the body. They will answer any questions that you have if they are able to. The High Court Homicide team will provide you with as much information as they can but it is not always possible for them to share all the details they have because this could impact on the successful prosecution of the case.

Once all the evidence has been gathered and documented, the High Court Homicide team will submit the case to Crown Counsel. Crown Counsel are senior lawyers who make decisions in serious cases, determine the appropriate charge and will submit the case to the High Court. Crown Counsel also advise Procurators Fiscal on complex or sensitive issues in relation to a case.

Upon completion of their investigation, the High Court Homicide team will refer the case back to SFIU who will then take responsibility for ensuring that you are kept informed.

Procurators Fiscal

Procurators Fiscal are qualified lawyers working in COPFS under the direction of the Lord Advocate. Procurators Fiscal direct the police to investigate, gather evidence and obtain witness statements in order to determine whether a crime has been committed. Procurators Fiscal within the High Court Homicide team will prepare the case and provide a report to Crown Counsel.

High Court Victim Information Agency (VIA) Officers

High Court VIA officers are specially trained to work with bereaved families and are responsible for ensuring that you are provided with information in relation to criminal proceedings. They may do this through direct contact with you or by instructing your FLO to provide information. VIA officers aim to provide information about key aspects of the criminal justice system in general and keep you informed about the progress of the case. When court proceedings begin, the FLO will no longer be involved and will handover to VIA officers who will advise you of key dates when court proceedings are scheduled and any changes to those dates. VIA officers will also explain the Victims Impact Statement to you and advise you of the COPFS Bereaved Families fund and whether you might be eligible for financial support for attending court.

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