

MSP reports delays in bodies being released

Kezia Dugdale MSP lodged a Freedom of Information request about the length of time families have waited for bodies of loved ones to be released by police.

She said today that over 200 families have had to wait for two weeks or more after a police death report is prepared until the body is released.

She has data given to her in response to her FOIA request which she says shows long delays.

In the worst cases, the response shows that there have been delays of more than 200 days.

The average is around nine days, but 208 cases between September 2016 and March 2018 involved a delay of 14 days or more.

The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Office confirmed that 'the requirement to allow a post mortem to take place on behalf of an accused in the relevant criminal proceedings' is one reason for a delay.



Kezia Dugdale MSP

COPFS, which started collecting figures in September 2016, took nearly seven months to respond to Ms Dugdale's request for the information. Days after she received the answers it was announced that a new protocol is to be introduced which is designed to address the issue of second post-mortems.

The issue was first raised by Ms Dugdale after she was contacted by the family of Shaun Woodburn, who was killed in the capital on New Year's Day, 2017.

His father Kevin spoke of his heartbreak of waiting over a fortnight to hold his son's funeral, as a second post-mortem was requested by defence lawyers. He has described the situation as 'barbaric'.

Kezia Dugdale MSP said: "These figures reveal just how long it can take before some families can hold a funeral and say goodbye to a loved one.

"While there will always be some incredibly complex cases, it demonstrates why there was such an urgent need to overhaul how the system works.

"It's disappointing that it took so many months for this

information to come to light, but the announcement of a new protocol around post-mortems is incredibly welcome, and wouldn't have happened without the campaigning efforts of the Woodburn family.

"No family should have to suffer like the Woodburns did, and I hope the new measures will make such long waits a thing of the past."