

Priorities set for investigation of crime to tackle the Covid-19 outbreak

Scotland's Lord Advocate and Chief Constable of Police Scotland have set clear priorities for the investigation and prosecution of crime as measures to tackle the Covid-19 outbreak come in to force.



In a joint statement today, Lord Advocate James Wolffe QC and Chief Constable Iain Livingstone QPM stress their commitment to keeping people safe from harm and dealing effectively with those who break the law.

To support the public health guidance new arrangements for court business are being put in place aimed at significantly reducing social contact. Justice system partners have agreed measures that ensure the prioritisation of essential casework while maintaining public safety and protecting public health.

The police will continue to deal effectively with criminality, and to report cases to the procurator fiscal in the usual way.

Prosecutors will continue to process cases in accordance with the Scottish

Prosecution Code. In order to minimise the need for attendance

at court, steps
are being taken to reduce substantially the number of trials.

There will be a focus on cases where the accused is in custody. In addition, there may be some non-custody trials where witnesses are available, with those likely to be limited to cases relating to domestic abuse, sexual offending and violence. Steps will be taken, so far as possible, within existing rules, to minimise the need for attendance at court. In other cases, trials will be deferred until after the current situation is over.

In addition, there will be revised, rigorous guidelines, focused on public safety, for the police to apply in the liberation of an arrested person pending further investigation or action.

This situation is evolving and work is being done across the criminal justice system and Scottish Government to enable the effective administration of justice to continue.

It is appreciated that uncertainty over court proceedings can have a serious impact on those affected by crime and further information for witnesses, victims and those accused of crime is available on the COPFS website.

Lord Advocate James Wolffe QC said: "My firm commitment, now as always, is to keeping the public safe from harm and maintaining the rule of law.

"Scotland's prosecution service is working with justice partners on a system-wide response to the challenges of the

coming months which
are unprecedented in modern times.

“That response will be focused on public safety and on
maintaining the fair and effective administration of justice
within the
constraints of health guidance.

“The police and prosecutors will continue to respond
effectively, robustly and fairly to criminality at all levels.
We are working
with the courts and with Scottish Government on a range of
measures which will
respond to the demands posed by the present circumstances.”

Chief Constable Iain Livingstone said: “Scotland, like
the rest of the world, is dealing with unprecedented
challenges and demands as
we respond to the coronavirus outbreak.

“The Police Service of Scotland is working closely with
the Crown Office and the wider justice system to protect
people from crime and
the threat of Covid-19, while also upholding people’s human
rights.

“My priority is, as always, to ensure the people of
Scotland are protected and policed effectively.

“Those breaking the law will be dealt with
appropriately to ensure the public is kept safe from risk and
harm through
rigorous conditions for release and, where necessary, holding
people in custody
for court.

“These measures allow us to carry out our duties in the most
effective way during this critical period.

“Our officers and staff are working around the clock to support the magnificent work of health professionals and, crucially, our fellow citizens as we all face the difficult days ahead together.

“I am confident that by working together we can respond to this outbreak and keep our communities safe.”