

STREET CRIME INITIATIVE JOINT INSPECTION

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS RELATING TO THE CPS

Overview

The Street Crime Initiative has been prioritised by all of the participating Areas, with the result that there have been many improvements in the overall handling of street crime cases. In most Areas, the SCI has been the catalyst for enhancing effective inter-agency relationships, which has laid the foundation for fully joined up working within the CJS.

Whilst considerable advancements have been made, there remain priorities for further improvement, which should not only secure future improvements in relation to street crime cases, but also provide transferable lessons for the handling of casework generally.

Positive Results

- * The CPS national framework was used as a means of coordinating the role of the ten CPS Areas and the circulation of national guidance regarding handling of cases, as well as the promulgation of good practice;
- * The agreement of a Street Crime Protocol in each of the ten Areas, provided an inter-agency framework for implementation and delivery of the SCI. Notably, following the communication of findings from Phase 1 of the joint inspection, all Areas had taken steps during Phase 2 to review the provisions of the Area Protocols and efforts were made to include achievable provisions in the revised edition, and to incorporate previously excluded agency representatives, such as Victim Support, the Witness Service and the Probation Service.
- * In addition to improved partnership working at a strategic level, the inspection found evidence of closer working relationships with the police. Positive feedback was received from the police regarding the working relationship with members of the CPS and CPS staff also noted improvements. Notwithstanding these improvements, there was the need for more effective coordination of these efforts on an operational level.
- * Effective corporate arrangements were put in place for delivery of the premium service; many Areas deployed senior staff to conduct these cases, who were either dedicated or dedicated. However, in some Areas, the lack of available experienced staff militated against achieving this aspect of the premium service and meant that it was not possible to reduce the reliance on agents in the magistrates' court.
- * Some pockets of good practice were identified regarding performance measurement and management, such as in West Midlands and Avon and Somerset, where there was monitoring of advice referral, of whether the lack of referral for advice might have affected the eventual outcome and of the information provided at the time advice was sought, as compared with that contained on the full file. Information was fed back to police and improvements noted. In West Midlands, practitioners were also assisted by street crime specific monitoring of cracked and ineffective trials.

- * In Nottinghamshire, Merseyside and Thames Valley, where the CPS had noted improvements in file quality, the courts also reported improvements in the standards of case preparation, as compared with non-street crime cases.

Aspects for improvement

- * The absence of cross-cutting targets has adversely affected the ability to monitor baseline data and identify performance improvements and successes. CPS requests for central guidance in this regard did not lead to progress in this area.
- * The late roll out of VIPER delayed perceived benefits. Although VIPER provided the opportunity for procedures to be undertaken during a suspect's period in custody, in practice this did not always happen. Indeed, in London, the practice was to charge defendants before holding the procedure, which contributed to a comparatively high discontinuance rate. Different practices regarding the interpretation of the **FORBES** decision, meant that parades were not routinely held in circumstances where identification was in issue, which again contributed to the comparatively high discontinuance rates in some Areas. There was the need for joint monitoring of the impact of identification evidence on case outcomes.
- * Delays continued to occur regarding the formatting and service of CCTV evidence, which again impacted on case outcomes and case progression. A single agency should be responsible for collection, formatting and service.
- * Police file quality continued to represent a major priority for the police and CPS, both in terms of the quality of the investigation and the timeliness of file building. There was street crime specific JPM monitoring in South Yorkshire and Thames Valley only, but a reinvigoration of JPM is required for cultural changes to occur.
- * Whilst there had been an increase in advice referral during Phase 2, advice continued to be under utilised. The absence of either joint monitoring, or inter-agency consideration of advice referral and case outcomes meant that the benefits of pre-charge advice were seldom in evidence.
- * The identification of street crime offences on the SCAT tracker system affected the validity of the data collected, and confusion over the definition of street crime offences meant that some cases were not identified.
- * Pre-trial checks were in place and senior staff undertook retrospective quality assurance checks, but a more inquisitorial approach was often required. The judiciary and magistracy noted that whilst these cases were not the most evidentially complex, discernible improvements in file quality and case preparation were not always in evidence.
- * Court listing practices and staff shortages meant that it was not always possible to deploy staff to present street crime cases and concerns were raised in two Areas over the extensive use of agents.

- * It was necessary to prioritise the role of the police and CPS in coordinating responsibilities for the needs of victims and witnesses and in particular applications for special measures and witness warning.

Conclusions

- * The SCI highlighted the need for effective joined up working and coordination of efforts to improve the handling of street crime cases. Undoubted efforts have been made by practitioners, and successes made in aspects of case preparation, but for demonstrable benefits to be identified and sustained, there is the need for cross cutting targets to encourage positive liaison and promote measurable performance improvements.