

New process to cut paperwork 'could save 28,000 days in police time'

Initial findings show a new process for streamlining the production of case papers by police officers for prosecutors could save around 28,000 days of police time per year – the equivalent of 138 more full time police officers on the streets of London.

The Streamlined Process (SP) simplifies the file that must be produced for the first hearing at the magistrates' court, ensuring a more efficient and effective criminal justice process. The initiative was rolled out across London last year, with the last group of boroughs going live in December 2008.

The early findings from SP are positive. A dip sample of 200 cases in five areas showed that frontline police officers saved over an hour per guilty pleas case and over two hours per not guilty case. If these results are replicated across London, this would equate to a saving of 28,063 days of police time per year – a saving of £7.47 million or the equivalent of 138 police officers working over a twelve month period.

The findings also suggest that SP is not undermining the performance gains delivered through Criminal Justice: Simple, Speedy, Summary (CJ:SSS), by allowing cases that go to trial to receive more focussed preparation. The courts, prosecution and defence agencies are able to identify the real issues to be addressed at trial, and so limit the preparation of the file to those areas.

The findings indicate that the anticipation of whether a crime will be admitted or not by the defendant is working well, with 91.6 percent of guilty pleas and 69.4 percent of not guilty pleas being anticipated correctly. There has also been no adverse impact on the rate of pleas being entered at first hearing. All agencies have reported that they find the new system, which includes a structured case summary, helpful and appreciate having the key information that they need on one summarised form.

As well as significantly saving police time, evaluation has found that the slimmer, more proportionate case files are saving Crown Prosecution Service time in preparing for first hearing. SP has also demonstrated that it allows the prosecution team to correctly target and prepare for those areas contested in the event of a not guilty plea and ensure effective use of court time.

Now that the rollout is complete, the London Criminal Justice Board's (CJB's) focus has turned to embedding SP to ensure that it maximises its potential and compliments other projects in the reform of London's criminal justice service.

London CJB Chief Executive, Andrew Morley, said: "As our initial results show, Streamlined Process has the potential to significantly cut paperwork for police officers, meaning they can spend more time on their core work of policing London's streets.

"The evaluation has also shown that Streamlined Process will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal justice service, enhancing our service to the public, providing better value for money and helping improve public confidence."

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