



National Audit Office

The Crown Prosecution Service

The introduction of the Streamlined Process

Detailed Methodology

NOVEMBER 2011

Detailed Methodology

1 This Appendix describes the research methods used in the course of our examination.

Scope

2 This report examines the value for money of the roll out of the Streamlined Process. The Streamlined Process was rolled out by the Crown Prosecution Service and the Association of Chief Police Officers in order to improve the proportionality of file preparation in straightforward criminal cases going to magistrates' courts. To examine how the initiative was set up and rolled out, we looked at how well partners were working together at a local and national level. We assessed whether the Crown Prosecution Service and its partners had rolled out the initiative effectively, whether it was embedded locally, and what impact it was having on other parts of the system.

Methodology

3 The main methods used during the course of this study were:

- Detailed review of case files.
- Analysis of Time Intervals Survey of Criminal Proceedings in the Magistrates Courts data.
- Detailed document review.
- Interviews with project staff.
- Semi-structured interviews with frontline staff.
- Observations in court.

4 We conducted the fieldwork between March and July 2011.

Detailed review of case files

5 In order to assess how well embedded the Streamlined Process was in local areas we undertook a review of the proportionality of prosecution case files. This review assessed whether the files complied with the Streamlined Process guidance as well as whether files were proportional to the needs of each case. The review involved a detailed examination of each file and was conducted primarily by inspectors from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate. The inspectorates were able to bring with them expertise in the field of legal file examinations that we did not have in house.

6 We reviewed files from 100 cases in total, split across five sites. The sample in each of these sites consisted of police prosecution files and corresponding Crown Prosecution Service files. The chosen cases in each area were drawn back chronologically from February 2011 until 40 files were available from which 20 could be selected. The smaller case load in one area meant that the date for the review of files in that area was extended to April 2011. The sample was stratified to consist of 80 per cent guilty-plea cases and 20 per cent not-guilty-plea cases.

Analysis of Time Intervals Survey data

7 The Time Intervals Survey of Criminal Proceedings in Magistrates' Courts' is a Ministry of Justice statistical briefing produced quarterly which measures the time cases take to proceed from the point of arrest to completion in magistrates' courts.

8 A key risk of the Streamlined Process was that it would lead to a fall in early guilty pleas and a rise in adjournments. We wanted to see whether there had been any significant changes in court timeliness, adjournments or guilty-plea rates since the start of the Streamlined Process nationally, or in our chosen areas.

9 We analysed the entire dataset for the Time Intervals Survey from the Ministry of Justice dating back to 2006, and conducted statistical analysis to examine national trends. We also segmented the data by area and examined trend data for the five areas we visited.

Detailed document review

10 We assessed the project management documentation for the Streamlined Process to understand its roll out, its project management and the performance to date of the Streamlined Process.

11 We undertook a detailed qualitative examination of over 30 key documents from the Prosecution Team Change and Delivery Board including:

- The Director's Guidance.
- The business case.
- Documentation of pilots and evaluations.
- Minutes of the Prosecution Team Change and Delivery Board.

Interviews with project staff

12 We assessed whether the Streamlined Process had been rolled out in line with best practice principles of project management. To support our review of the project management documentation we conducted interviews with many of those involved in the roll out of the process.

13 We conducted semi-structured and unstructured interviews and discussions with staff from the Crown Prosecution Service and the Association of Chief Police Officers who had been involved in the roll out of the Streamlined Process.

Observations in court

14 We wanted to observe whether the Streamlined Process had had an impact upon court proceedings. We checked whether what we observed in court supported what we had found from the quantitative analysis of the Time Intervals Survey data. We conducted one morning of observations in each of the areas we visited in the court most likely to hear Streamlined Process cases. In all we observed over 90 cases going through court.

15 We observed:

- Whether the hearing was effective.
- Whether a plea was entered at the earliest opportunity.
- Whether the defendant was sentenced on the same day a guilty plea was entered.
- The quality of case management, including whether:
 - parties were ready to proceed;
 - issues were in dispute agreed; and
 - there were any problems around disclosure.

Semi-structured interviews with frontline staff

16 We wanted to understand what impact the Streamlined Process had had on the everyday work of staff in the Crown Prosecution Service office, police force and courts in each area that we visited. We also wanted to understand how well embedded the guidance was in local areas by assessing awareness and understanding of the guidance among frontline staff.

17 National Audit Office, Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate and Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary staff conducted structured interviews with staff at the following grades (or equivalent in each area):

Police

- Police Constables.
- Evidence Review Officer and/or Sergeant responsible for reviewing files.
- Chief Inspector and/or Superintendent.

Crown Prosecution Service

- Case Progression Officers.
- Associate Prosecutors and/or Lawyers.
- Borough Crown Prosecutor and/or person responsible for the roll out.

Magistrate's Court

- Case Progression officer and/or Court Clerk and/or legal Advisor.¹
- Magistrate and/or District Judge.¹

¹ In one area no one was available.

