



## CASE FILE QUALITY PAPER

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### What are the Policing Principles?

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| Accountability <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Fairness <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | Honesty <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>      |
| Integrity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>      | Leadership <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Objectivity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>  |
| Openness <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>       | Respect <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>    | Selflessness <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

## **Purpose**

This paper provides an update following a previous paper to the PCC in April 2020 and an overview of the key strengths and improvements, and areas for continued focus in relation to case file quality in Surrey Police. It also provides commentary on the positive action being taken to improve these areas.

## **Background**

The CPS Senior Leadership team in the South East still remain robust in respect of case file quality. With this approach the South East region have made it clear whilst improvements have been seen, our file quality still has room for improvement. Current NCFQ data shows Surrey ranked at 35 with a percentage of only 33.6% of our files meeting the required standard. It should be noted that the ranking tables fluctuate regularly. As a result Surrey has identified a need for continued focus and improvement around file quality.

It is worth noting that although the data provided is inconsistent the detailed data provides accurate reflection of what the key issues are around Case file quality and it is from this Surrey are able to identify what action is required for improvement.

It has been the inconsistency in the data provided by the CPS that has driven the local Surrey initiatives around performance monitoring and the creation of the Case Review Team to give Surrey Police more control over their own data in respect of Case File quality.

## **Current best practice within Surrey**

Whilst there are areas of development it should be noted that Surrey has good consistent performance above the national average in several key areas:

- **Guilty Plea at First Appearance in the Crown Court** – Defendants are pleading guilty at the first hearing demonstrating the quality of the evidence produced in files to prevent further hearings. Surreys rate of 41.9% is just above the National Guilty plea rate of 41.5%, showing Surrey as ranking 24.
- **Magistrates Conviction Rates** – Surrey consistently maintains strong conviction rates which are above the National average. Surreys Magistrates Court rate in October 2020 is 89.4% which is just above the National conviction Rate of 87.8%.and showing Surrey as ranking at 19.
- **Magistrates Court Guilty plea at First hearing-** Since May 2020 Surrey has shown a consistently strong trend in respect of guilty pleas at first hearing. As of October 2020 data Surrey is shown as 78.3% of cases within the Magistrates Court pleading guilty at first hearing which is above the National average of 78% and showing Surrey as ranking at 25.

## **Updates following on from April 2020 report:-**

**Governance:** The T/ACC for Local Policing continues to chair the Joint CPS and Police File improvement Group which continues to focus on areas of file quality improvement. This regular meeting ensures there is strategic focus identifying trends and areas of best practice.

**Action Plan:** The File Improvement plan supports the File improvement group in identifying key areas of focus and creating a working action plan for improvement. The plan was reset in September 2020 and sets the focus on the key areas and issues under the headings: Magistrates Court, Crown Court, Disclosure and Digital.

**Magistrates Court:** Following a review of the existing file improvement plan, giving consideration to the data produced from the Prosecution Team performance management data it was identified that the key area of focus for the Magistrates court will focus on pre charge work. The key areas of focus identified as:

- ***Pre charge volumes of work***
- ***Pre charge quality (of case files submitted)***
- ***Pre charge triage rejections (reasons for rejections on first submission to the CPS)***
- ***Pre charge action plans (timeliness in which Police respond to CPS initiated action plans)***

**Crown Court:** Reviewing the data produced for the Prosecution Team performance management meeting it was identified that the area of performance requiring improvement for the Crown Court were:

- ***Crown Court disclosure schedules***
- ***Crown Court Pre charge action plans***
- ***Trial readiness action plans***

Work to improve Crown Court pre charge and trial readiness action plans will be the focus from January 2021 and Crown Court disclosure schedules will also form part of the improvement plan around disclosure (as per the below).

**Internal Oversight Board:** A new Internal Case File Quality Oversight Board has also been created and will be chaired by the T/ACC for Local Policing. This Board will focus on training, culture and supervision and will be attended by all C/Insp across the force to review these key areas to help improve file quality, particularly for volume crime cases. These meetings will take place on a bi-monthly basis with the first meeting scheduled for the 08<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

**Disclosure:** Performance in respect of disclosure remains an area requiring further improvement, with key focus required around disclosure management, handling of digital material and schedule descriptions.

Disclosure Guidance in respect of schedule descriptions has been circulated across the Force and the launch of the CJ Guidance Hub includes a dedicated tile for disclosure, which includes example forms to assist officers. The Hub also includes content around the consequences of poor disclosure and outlines officer's responsibilities.

**CJ Guidance hub:** The online CJ Guidance hub was launched on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2020. This provides details on a wide range of topics relating to case file building and will provide 24/7 guidance to front line staff. Also providing a central information hub for a large proportion of topics relating to Case file quality and will give structure to Officers in respect of case file build and progression.

**Quality assurance review - Creation of Case Review Team:** The quality assurance review created a centrally managed and newly branded 'Case Review Team' (CRT) bringing about more capacity, consistency and efficiency providing local support to front line practitioners. This now includes a pre charge evidential review to ensure the very best case files leading to effective outcomes for victims. The introduction of pre charge work sets a new focus for the team who previously only dealt with post charge files, the goal is to bring about improvements to pre charge file submission. Work is now ongoing in regards to the evidential reviews pre and post charge to bring consistency between the Police and CPS case file reviews.

**CJ Performance Products – Improvements made to previous data reporting:** The Criminal Justice team produces an in-depth product which provides detailed scrutiny of performance, identifying trends, repeat officers and supervisors who continue to omit key papers or evidence so support can be provided and can be overseen by divisions and departments. Any learning themes are shared through divisional DCI's, CJ newsletters and with CPS.

The product has been reviewed and developed further to focus on the data required by divisional leaders to help aid file improvement. The new product is due to be launched during December 2020 and will be reviewed over the following three months. Its focus being to improve case file quality and to enable Divisional leads to understand their strategic focus for case file improvement

**Moving pre charge file transmission to the CJ teams:** The ownership of sending the pre charge case file to the CPS has been moved from the OIC to the CJ team. This is to ensure a greater compliance of what is being sent to the CPS to ensure that the team with the greater knowledge re file content would check compliance on what is being receipted by CPS.

**Introduction of NICE investigate for digital transmission of evidence:** NICE investigate was introduced to Surrey in April 2020. This has improved the efficiency of the transfer of evidence between agencies, by introduction of a system which allowed digital transfer of most media (CCTV and photographs) through an online port. We are awaiting a further update in respect of NICE Photo book which will improve the way in which photographs are sent between the Police and the CPS.

**SFR medical and Introduction of SFR Medical Portal:** The introduction of SFR medical in August 2019 transformed our way of getting medical evidence through a bespoke company of specific NHS doctors, who have electronic access to medical reports and provide prompt evidential statements. SFR Medical reduced months off the time traditionally involved in waiting for and chasing medical reports, resulting in professional reports including the necessary evidence.

On 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020 a new SFR Medical Portal was launched, which replaces the old and unreliable email system, and aims to improve submission timeliness by ensuring officers provide all the necessary information in a legible format, provides officers with regular updates as their work progresses, significantly reduces resource requirement both sides in respect of back office data collection.

### **Digital updates**

**Two Way Interface (TWIF):** The 08<sup>th</sup> December 2020 will see the launch of the TWIF within NICHE, which will allow the digital transmission of information between the Police and the CPS. Where previously the Police have only been able to send information direct to the CPS and only received email updates back, the two way interface will facilitate communication between the two agencies via digital transmission through NICHE. This will ensure CPS updates are sent directly into NICHE reducing the administrative work in respect of uploading Memo's and ensuring the OIC receives the information faster and directly.

### **Conclusion**

Whilst performance continues to move in the right direction Surrey are not complacent and are committed to continuing to look at opportunities for improvement in respect of file quality. With all of the current changes that have been made in regards to internal performance monitoring products, developments of internal teams to review case file content and the creation of a central guidance hub it is felt that the focus is very much on improving file quality and giving the force the right tools and support to continue to improve. Surrey will continue to work closely with the CPS to enable us to identify and address key concerns affecting file quality.