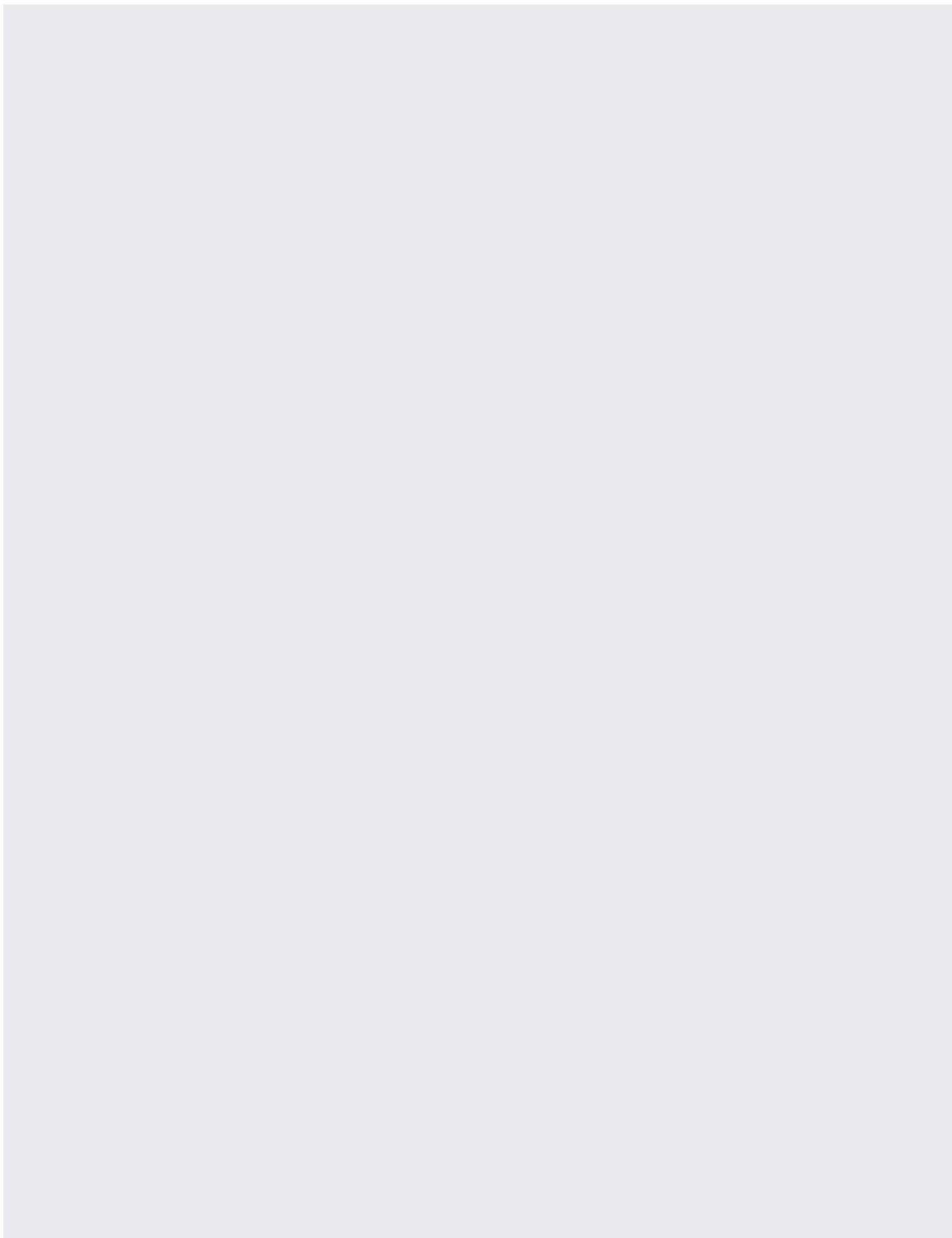




BUSINESS PLAN 2025-2027

NORTHUMBRIA
LOCAL CRIMINAL
JUSTICE BOARD (LCJB)



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FOREWORD BY SUSAN DUNGWORTH

POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR NORTHUMBRIA
(CHAIR OF THE LCJB)

I am delighted to take on the role of chairing Northumbria Criminal Justice Board following my election as Police and Crime Commissioner in May 2024.

Becoming a victim of crime is often a traumatic experience and we must get the response right. Entering the complexity of the criminal justice system, in which multiple agencies operate, can be confusing and frustrating for all who encounter it.

Northumbria Criminal Justice Board is a mature partnership that has a strong history of collaborative working. It has a clear vision to put people at the heart of an effective criminal justice system that is fair, consistent, and transparent, and in which our communities can have confidence.

Nationally, the criminal justice system faces a number of significant challenges, which have been widely reported. Easing the pressure in the short term has necessitated changes to legislation, as well as changes to operational practice for some agencies.

As a Local Criminal Justice Board, this Business Plan highlights our response to these challenges and our ambitions for the future.

By adopting a whole system approach to the way in which we work, we can continue to provide an efficient and effective system, where cases are progressed in a fair, just, and effective manner. A system where victims feel fully supported by high quality services that meet their individual needs. A system where offenders have access to effective, rehabilitative services to support their desistance from criminal activity, and our communities can expect to be less affected by crime.

I saw first-hand how well our colleagues and partner agencies worked this summer to deliver an outstanding response to the civil unrest we witnessed in our region.

As a new Police and Crime Commissioner, I was impressed with our collective response – not only in the immediacy of the violence, but also in the aftermath. The support, community engagement, recovery work and concerted effort to deliver swift justice to those responsible, was all work to be proud of, and my thanks go to everyone involved.

All of the priorities outlined in this Business Plan aim to provide reassurance to those entering the local criminal justice system that it will deliver fair and timely outcomes for them, and provide confidence that their individual journey through it, will be supported and their experience positive.

It is with pleasure I endorse this Business Plan 2025-2027.

Susan Dungworth

Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria
(Chair of the LCJB)

OUR VISION AND FUNCTION

The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 placed a duty on Police and Crime Commissioners and other criminal justice agencies (Chief Constable; Crown Prosecution Service; His Majesty's Court and Tribunal Service, His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service and Youth Offending Teams) to work together to provide an efficient and effective local criminal justice system.

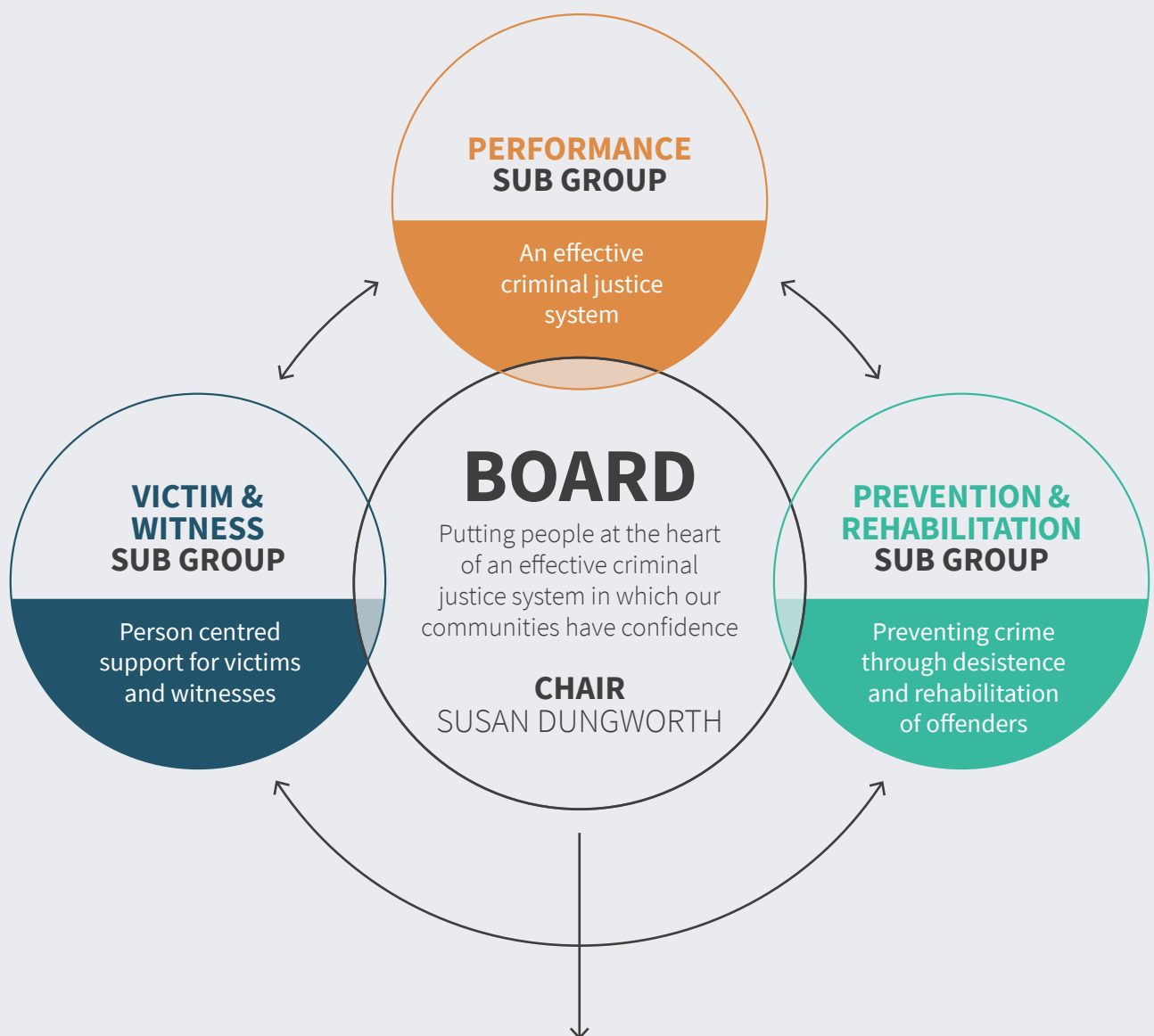
In Northumbria we fulfil that duty by working together, and with other partners, as a Local Criminal Justice Board. We work collaboratively to build confidence in the criminal justice system through the delivery of efficient and effective criminal justice processes for all, that are fair consistent and transparent.

Our priorities are:

- Person centred support for victim and witnesses
- Prevention of crime and rehabilitation of offenders
- An effective criminal justice system

As well as our local focus, we engage nationally to shape debate and influence decision making so that our communities can be confident in their criminal justice system.

LCJB STRUCTURE AND PRIORITIES (2025-2027)



We will work collaboratively to build confidence in the CJS through the delivery of efficient and effective criminal justice processes for all, that are fair, consistent and transparent.

SUB GROUP PRIORITIES

The following priorities,
will be our focus for 2025-2027



VICTIM AND WITNESS SUB GROUP

AIM

Person centred support for victim and witnesses

OBJECTIVE

Ensure partners adopt a victim focused approach that incorporates lived experience to ensure the victims voice is listened to, heard and responded to

OBJECTIVE

Demonstrate partnership compliance with the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime

OBJECTIVE

Provide co-ordinated end to end care and support for victims that meets their individual needs



PRIORITY AREAS

1. Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (VCOP)
2. Victim Retention in the Criminal Justice System



OUTCOME

Victim and witnesses feel fully supported during their criminal justice journey by high quality services that meet their individual needs, enabling them to cope and recover from their experience and participate in the criminal justice process

Priority 1

Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (VCOP)

The Victims' Code

Becoming a victim of crime is often a traumatic experience. The criminal justice system in which agencies operate is complex and navigating it can be confusing and frustrating. The Victims Code¹ was designed to improve the quality of service provided to victims of crime. It sets out the minimum standard of service that criminal justice agencies and other organisations must provide to victims in England and Wales.

This priority seeks to ensure partnership compliance with the Victims Code, not simply as a 'tick box' exercise in compliance, but as a mechanism to provide co-ordinated end to end care and support for victim and witnesses that meets their individual needs consistently.

The success of this priority will also contribute to victim retention within the criminal justice system.

National Context

After reporting a crime, victims may find themselves interacting with the police, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), and the courts. Some victims will also have contact with the Probation Service.

For a victim who gives evidence at a contested trial there are several handover points from one agency to the next as the victim moves through the system. To support victims effectively the police, CPS, courts, and the Probation Service need to work well, both individually and together.

The Victims' Code sets out the service and minimum standards that must be provided to victims of crime which is enshrined in 12 Rights. Whilst some are

'technical' in nature, for example having the details of your crime recorded. Others go to the heart of supporting the victim in a bespoke manner during their criminal justice journey, for example providing 'special measures'² at court or recording a victims personal statement about the effect the crime has had on them.

National oversight of how well criminal justice agencies meet the needs of victims is difficult to assess because of a lack of accurate data. Whilst CPS, the courts and Probation Service use national IT systems, police forces do not, and often a new metric may require a 'work around' to provide the information required. In addition, the data provided on the 12 Rights tends to be quantitative rather than qualitative in focus.

Challenges

Victims and Prisoners Act 2024

Introduced to enshrine victims' rights in law and better support victims of criminal conduct through additional measures. These include enhancing oversight of the Victims Code through improved data collection, strengthening the role of police and crime commissioners (PCCs) to monitor compliance, introducing a duty for criminal justice agencies to collaborate in the way they support victims of sexual violence, serious violence, and domestic abuse, and improving the consistency of IDVA³/ISVA⁴ services locally through statutory guidance.

Whilst the Act gained Royal Assent in May 2024, Part 1 which relates to victims of criminal conduct is prospective and did not come into force on Royal Assent.

¹ Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, Ministry of Justice, 2024 (referred to as the Victims Code)

² For example – screens, live link, removal of wigs and gowns by judges, intermediaries

³ Independent Domestic Violence Advisor

⁴ Independent Sexual Violence Advisor

Funding

The funding landscape to support victims is complex. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) provides grant funding to PCCs to commission specialist support for victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence, and general support for victims of other crimes. In addition to MoJ funding there are many other sources of funding from the Home Office, Department of Health, and Social Care and the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, charities, and other organisations. This makes it difficult for victims, support providers, PCCs and criminal justice agencies to understand what services are available in a particular area and to understand how many victims funding has supported collectively.

Quality of the victim needs assessment

Right 4 in the Victim's Code states that victims have the right to be referred to support services and to have their needs assessed so that services and support can be tailored to their needs. This generally occurs at the beginning of the criminal justice process and is carried out by the police. The quality of the assessment is critical in gaining an understanding of the victims' needs to allow appropriate support referrals.

Local Response

VCOP metrics

Northumbria Police are one of several pilot forces assessing and testing the collection of Victims Code metrics across the different IT systems held by forces. Northumbria is the only force that has a stand-alone records management system. This activity is designed to ensure that the system and metrics adopted are compatible with all force systems in use across the country.

Northumbria Victim and Witness Service

The merging of Victim First Northumbria (VFN) and Northumbria Police Court Liaison services into Northumbria Victim and Witness Service (NVWS) reduced the number of handover points for victims. It has allowed officers investigating a crime to choose NVWS to provide updates to victims under Right 6 in the Victims Code (when a suspect is arrested, voluntary attended, charged or bailed). This has supported the timeliness of updates to victims and provided further opportunities to engage with

them to assess cope and recovery support, and any special measures that may be required.

Victim needs assessment

Northumbria police have moved away from the requirement for victims to 'opt in' or consent to a victim needs referral to NVWS. Officers are able to make the referral using their judgement following completion of the victim needs assessment. This has seen an increase in the referral rate from 17% to a sustained 24%, with further increases anticipated.

Engagement plans

NVWS complete engagement plans with all victims at the point it is determined they are required to attend court for trial and give evidence.

Special Measure Advisor (SMA)

Northumbria police have secured funding for one SMA as part of a pilot. The SMA will support improving officers understanding of special measures while also developing a set of metrics that track the use and impact of special measures across the CJ system. The SMA will also quality assure applications and ensure their appropriate use.

Local Improvement Focus

1. Reduce the number of victims who withdraw from the criminal justice process at any stage of their criminal justice journey
2. Increase the use of special measures to support victim and witnesses
3. Improve compliance with the Victims Code

Priority 2

Victim Retention in the Criminal Justice System

Victim Retention in the Criminal Justice System

Whilst the Victims' Code outlines specific actions to be undertaken at specific points in a victim's journey, this priority seeks to identify the issues within the criminal justice system that cause victims to withdraw from the process.

It also seeks to identify and implement solutions to ensure victims feel individually supported during their journey, so that they have the confidence to remain engaged in the criminal justice process and not feel overwhelmed by it to such an extent that they withdraw from it.

The success of this priority will complement the work undertaken as part of the Victims Code by contributing to a greater understanding of a victim's individual needs.

National Context

There are a plethora of academic reports, together with individual agency inspection reports that clearly articulate the ways in which the criminal justice system lets victims down. This includes but is not limited to court waiting times, (the time it takes for a trial to be listed and proceed), inexperienced personnel across all agencies, the quality of court buildings, a lack of timely access to support and the right support being available.

Challenges

Understanding of victim support services

The joint inspection report '*Meeting the needs of victims in the criminal justice system*'¹ identifies that many police officers, staff, and investigators do not fully understand the role of victim support services.

Whilst some services do provide training to the police (and others), this is not the case in every instance.

Support service capacity and availability

There are differences between areas in England and Wales in the length of time victims have to wait to speak to someone, even for general support services. For specialist services such as mental health support there are few services available and when they are available, they often have long waiting lists.

This is particularly relevant for victims whose cases are progressing to court. Long waiting lists to access support may mean that victims have not been able to access it, in advance of their trial. Consequently, they may feel unsupported and withdraw from the process.

Understanding special measures and their application

The joint inspection report highlights that some officers and staff do not fully understand what special measures are available and how they work at court. As a result, special measures are not fully explained to the victim at the earliest opportunity to assess what a victim may need. This is particularly so regarding 'intermediaries', who are available to support vulnerable victims to communicate effectively and be understood during the process.

When requesting special measures, the police should advise the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) of the need for it together with the relevant information to support an application. This information should be sent electronically. Often prosecutors have to request information on special measures in an action plan to the police because it has not been considered.

¹ Criminal justice joint inspection of how well the police, CPS and Probation Service support victims of crime (HMICFRS 2023)

Local Response

Consultation

Having taken cognizance of national inspection reports and academic studies, the Victim and Witness sub-group has undertaken local consultation events with a cross section of victims, from different crime types and backgrounds to identify the issues at a local level, which result in victim attrition. The same approach has been used to identify the actions or activities that result in victims remaining engaged in the process.

The results of the consultation formed the basis of a 'Roundtable' event held by the sub-group to develop a Victim Retention Plan. It was agreed that the initial focus of the plan would be on domestic abuse victims across the whole criminal justice system. This is timely given the recent report from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner '*Shifting the scales: Transforming the criminal justice response to domestic abuse*' (January 2025).

The consultation identified five key areas of focus:

- Better communications – frequent, accurate and consistent communication
- Improved timescales – shorten the time from report to charge, and charge to court
- Trauma informed, empathetic responses – empathy and sensitivity from professionals
- Positive awareness raising – more 'good news stories' which show successful criminal justice outcomes and not the constant negative narrative
- Better criminal justice outcomes – improved conviction rates and sentencing

DA trial readiness checks

The CPS together with Northumbria Victim and Witness Service (NVWS) have added an extra tier of focused 'trial readiness checks' for domestic abuse cases in the Magistrates Court. This is conducted at an optimum point in the process to enable the CPS to determine if the trial will proceed as anticipated or if an evidence led prosecution (ELP) needs to be considered.

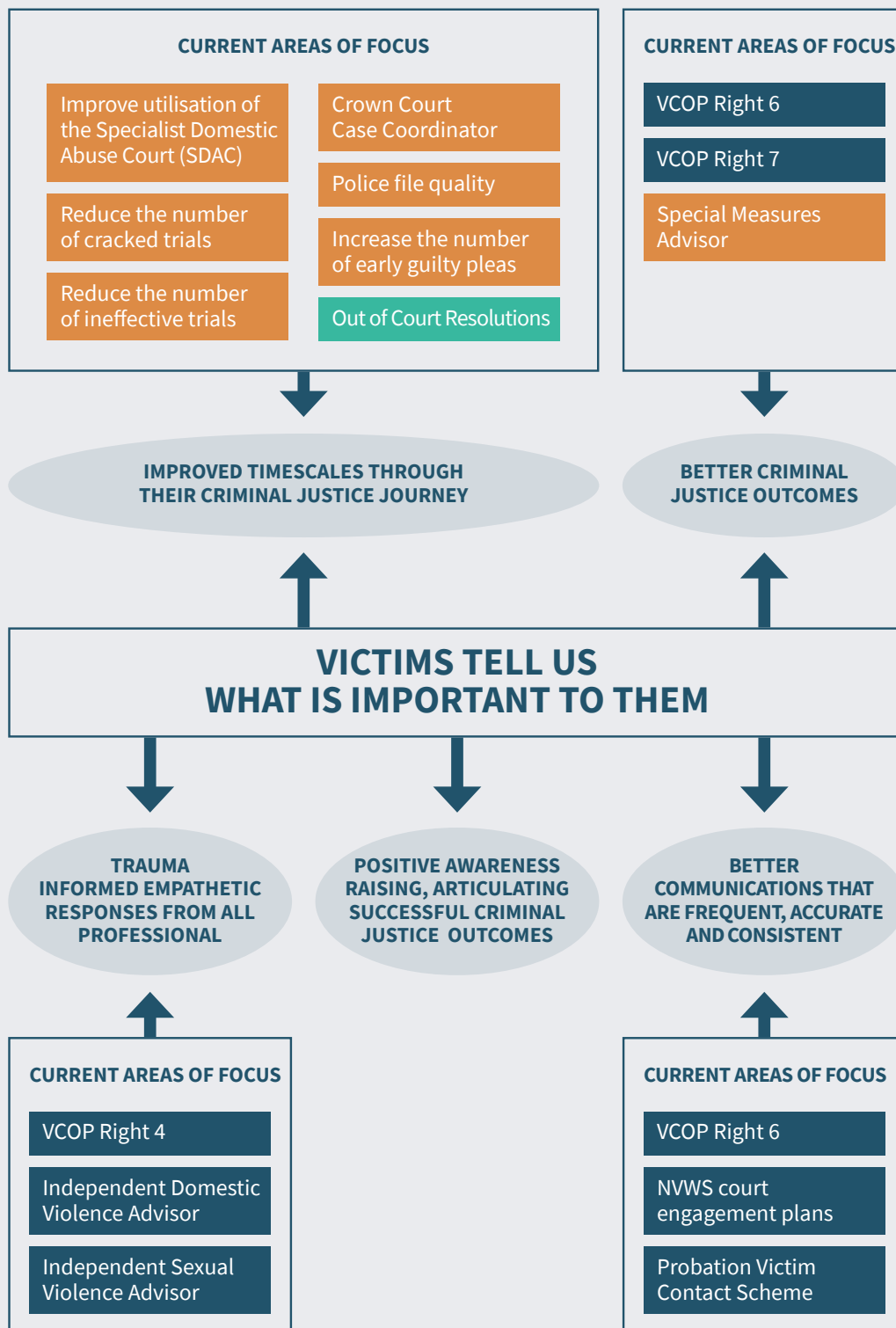
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Local Improvement Focus

1. Develop and progress a multi-agency Victim Retention Plan
2. Agree and prioritise actions across partner agencies in support of the retention plan, with a focus on domestic abuse
3. Realise improvements in victim retention across the local criminal justice system through a whole system approach
4. Support operational task and finish groups to deliver against the retention plan objectives

VICTIM AND WITNESS WHOLE SYSTEM APPROACH



PREVENTION AND REHABILITATION SUB GROUP

AIM

Prevention of crime and rehabilitation of offenders

OBJECTIVE

Widen the scope of the current IOM model by engaging partners to provide greater opportunity for innovative problem solving to address criminogenic behaviour and reduce reoffending



OBJECTIVE

Deliver effective early intervention strategies with offenders to divert them from the criminal justice system, maximising the opportunity to prevent reoffending and deliver timely criminal justice outcomes for victims



PRIORITY AREAS

1. Two Tier Framework (Out of Court Resolutions - OOCR)
2. Integrated Offender Management (IOM)



OUTCOME

Offenders have access to effective, co-ordinated rehabilitative services to support their desistance from criminal activity, improve their life chances and keep communities safe

Priority 1

Two Tier Framework (Out of Court Resolutions - OOCR)

Out of Court Resolutions

Out of Court Resolutions (OOCR) are an important tool in addressing the early stages of offending behaviour. They allow the police to deal quickly with low-level offending without making recourse to the courts and offer swifter criminal justice outcomes for victims of crime.

Following government reviews into OOCRs (formerly known as Out of Court Disposals) which began in 2013 there has been a desire to simplify and move away from the six tier framework, which provides a catalogue of disposal options that is often difficult to understand.

Following agreement by National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) and reinforced by the 2020 White Paper: *A Smarter Approach to Sentencing*, police forces have been transitioning towards a two tier framework of disposal options.

The Police Crime Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 outlines the new two-tier OOCR framework consisting of two statutory resolutions. An upper tier called the 'Diversionary Caution,' and a lower tier called the 'Community Caution.' The Community Resolution remains as a non-statutory resolution option.

This priority seeks to ensure the effective delivery of OOCRs, enabling low-level offending to be addressed without recourse to the courts, and in doing so providing swifter criminal justice outcomes for victims of crime.

National Context

The two statutory OOCRs allow the police to attach conditions or actions to a resolution. They are an option for offenders who have accepted full responsibility for their offending behaviour and are eligible to receive an OOCR.

The new two-tier framework remains focused on preventing crime and disorder, by reducing reoffending, and changing offender behaviours through early intervention, diversion and rehabilitation pathways that address the root cause of the recipients offending behaviour in a more focused way.

Of equal importance is the fact that victims needs are addressed. The victim is no longer a passive participant in the process but has greater influence in how offenders are dealt with and is part of the process from the start. Victim agency allows the victim of the crime to have a voice and as such increases engagement and confidence in policing and the wider criminal justice system.

Challenges

The Police Crime Sentencing and Courts Act 2022

Whilst the Act gained Royal Assent in 2022, part 6 of the Act which deals with the Diversionary and Community Caution was not brought into force at that point. 2025 is currently understood to be the 'go live' period for the introduction of the national two-tier OOCR framework. At present forces still have use of all or some of the current six OOCRs (Conditional Caution, Simple Caution, Community Resolution, Penalty Notice for Disorder, Cannabis Warning and Khat Warning).

Funding

Early intervention, diversion and rehabilitative pathways that address criminogenic behaviour come at a cost. This is particularly so for some types of offences, for example domestic abuse which requires specialist knowledge in relation to affecting behaviour change. Likewise, offenders with underlying addictions may need additional support or onward referral to specialist support services for the longer term.

Local Response

Transformational Resolutions, Education. Adult Diversion (TREAD)

Northumbria police established the TREAD team in September 2021 against the national drive to improve the application and effectiveness of OOCR. The team engages with victims and offenders to reduce recidivism and the number of offences charged to court. This is achieved through the provision of effective, consistent and supportive intervention pathways across a range of areas, for example victim awareness, employment, drugs, and alcohol, as well as specific groups of people including veteran's, women, and males in the 18-24 age bracket.

The TREAD team review all OOCR referrals on a case by case basis. They apply an eligibility test to assess an offenders suitability for diversion and identify the most appropriate pathway for them. Decision making rationale and outcomes are recorded to ensure the OOCRs issued are appropriate, proportionate and the process itself is transparent, consistent and stands up to external scrutiny.

Two-tier framework

Northumbria adopted the principles of the two-tier framework in November 2023, when the expected national implementation date was April 2024. The aim was to fully prepare the force for the anticipated legislative changes by identifying and resolving any 'teething issues.' This removed the use of Cannabis Warnings and Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND), with Conditional Caution, Community Resolution and Simple Caution remaining. Early intervention, diversion and rehabilitative pathways can only be applied to Conditional Cautions or Community Resolutions. Simple Cautions are only available for use in limited circumstances for domestic abuse cases where the offender is assessed as 'standard risk.'

Cautioning and relationship abuse (CARA)

CARA is an OOCR pathway attached to a conditional caution for first time domestic abuse (DA) offenders who are intimate partners or family members. Following a successful funding bid to central government and dispensation for its use in the Northumbria police area, the pathway went live on 1st August 2024. CARA provides an intervention pathway for standard risk DA offenders. Medium risk offenders can be considered on a voluntary basis

where appropriate, and following receipt of a simple caution OOCR.

CARA consists of DA workshops that can help people to make better behaviour choices in relationships. Sessions and delivery style take participants on an awareness raising journey, supporting opportunities for self-disclosure, and promoting access to additional support. Intervention content and length are proportionate to the offenders risk level and offending history.

CARA promotes the safety of an offenders' family through a linked victim contact service offering safeguarding and support.

Regional forum

Regionally, Durham, Cleveland and Northumbria have committed to bi-annual OOCR forums to share learning and best practice. The aim is to support each other in the use and development of OOCRs as well as exploring the benefits of cross boarder facilitation of OOCR diversion and rehabilitation pathways.

Local Improvement Focus

1. Full transition to the national two-tier framework
2. Increase the number of OOCRs
3. Maintain and improve the offender intervention pathway completion rate
4. Increase compliance with the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (VCOP)

Priority 2

Integrated Offender Management (IOM)

Integrated Offender Management (IOM)

Integrated Offender Management (IOM) seeks to deliver a reduction in crime and therefore the number of people who become victims, through the delivery of a multi-agency response to the most persistent and problematic offenders within communities to divert them from further offending.

This priority seeks to engage partners to provide greater opportunity for innovative problem solving to address criminogenic behaviour and reduce reoffending within the IOM cohorts.

National Context

Prison capacity

Of the total prison estate 95.8% are male. The male prison estate ran at over 99% capacity for the preceding 18 months from July 2024. Three hundred prison spaces is officially the point at which capacity is considered 'critical.' It was anticipated the prison estate would overflow by September 2024 without action being taken. The immediate solution was a reduction in the time those sentenced to eligible standard determinate sentences (SDS) served in prison from 50% to 40% (SDS40 for shorthand).

Two independent national reviews have commenced in response to prison capacity and the criminal courts:

1. The Independent Sentencing Review (November 2024) which is tasked with undertaking a comprehensive re-evaluation of the current sentencing framework to ensure the situation does not arise again where there are more prisoners than prison places. The review will provide long term solutions for the justice system.

2. The Independent Review of the Criminal Courts (December 2024) whose purpose is to produce options and recommendations for ways in which the criminal courts could be reformed, to ensure cases are dealt with proportionality, and how they could operate as efficiently as possible.

Probation Reset

Probation Reset is an operational response to high probation service workload priorities, prison capacity issues, and SDS40 temporary reduction in sentence served prisoner release scheme introduced from 1 July 2024. The operational changes that reset brings are mandated for all staff in all probation areas with no possibility of any local or regional decision making. The response represents an operational rather than a legislative change at the current time.

The aim of the reset is to 'focus probation activity to the beginning of orders where the evidence shows the most impact can be had.'¹ This includes the prioritisation of resources to focus efforts on the highest risk cases.

Challenges

Probation Reset arrangements

Probation contact arrangements for those prisoners released on licence have changed. For those sentenced to under four years custody, the final face-to-face appointment will be undertaken at the two thirds point of the licence. For those sentenced to four years custody and over, one further face-to-face appointment which is enforceable, must be arranged during the midpoint of the final third of the licence.

All Rehabilitation Activity Requirement (RAR) appointments and activity days delivered directly by probation practitioners will cease in the final third of the RAR.

¹ Consultation on the probation inspection framework in response to 'Probation Reset,' HM Inspectorate of Probation, August 2024

All sentence management contact under Post Sentence Supervision (PSS) will cease.

There are exemptions to this for example those offenders subject to Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)¹ and the option to reinstate contact in the final third of RAR, Licence or PSS if information is received that indicates a change in the individual's circumstances.

IOM is included in the Probation Reset arrangements and, in all cases, other than for offenders in an exempt group, active supervision for all community orders, suspended sentences and licences will cease at the two third stage of the sentence. IOM nominals will continue to be included in joint police and probation arrangements, unless deselected using the agreed process. This means that the sharing of intelligence and reactive management of nominals will continue. It is not expected that the police should manage IOM nominals, as a single agency, following probation reset.

Local Response

Personnel

IOM staffing has been reviewed and three newly qualified probation officers joined the existing probation IOM team in December 2024. They are based in Sunderland, Gateshead, and Newcastle.

Co-location

Police and probation staff are co-located where possible in probation offices. Co-location arrangements are available in Newcastle, Sunderland, and Gateshead. Work is currently underway in North Tyneside to set up a multi-agency Community Hub to allow agencies to work together to tackle reoffending.

Shared IT

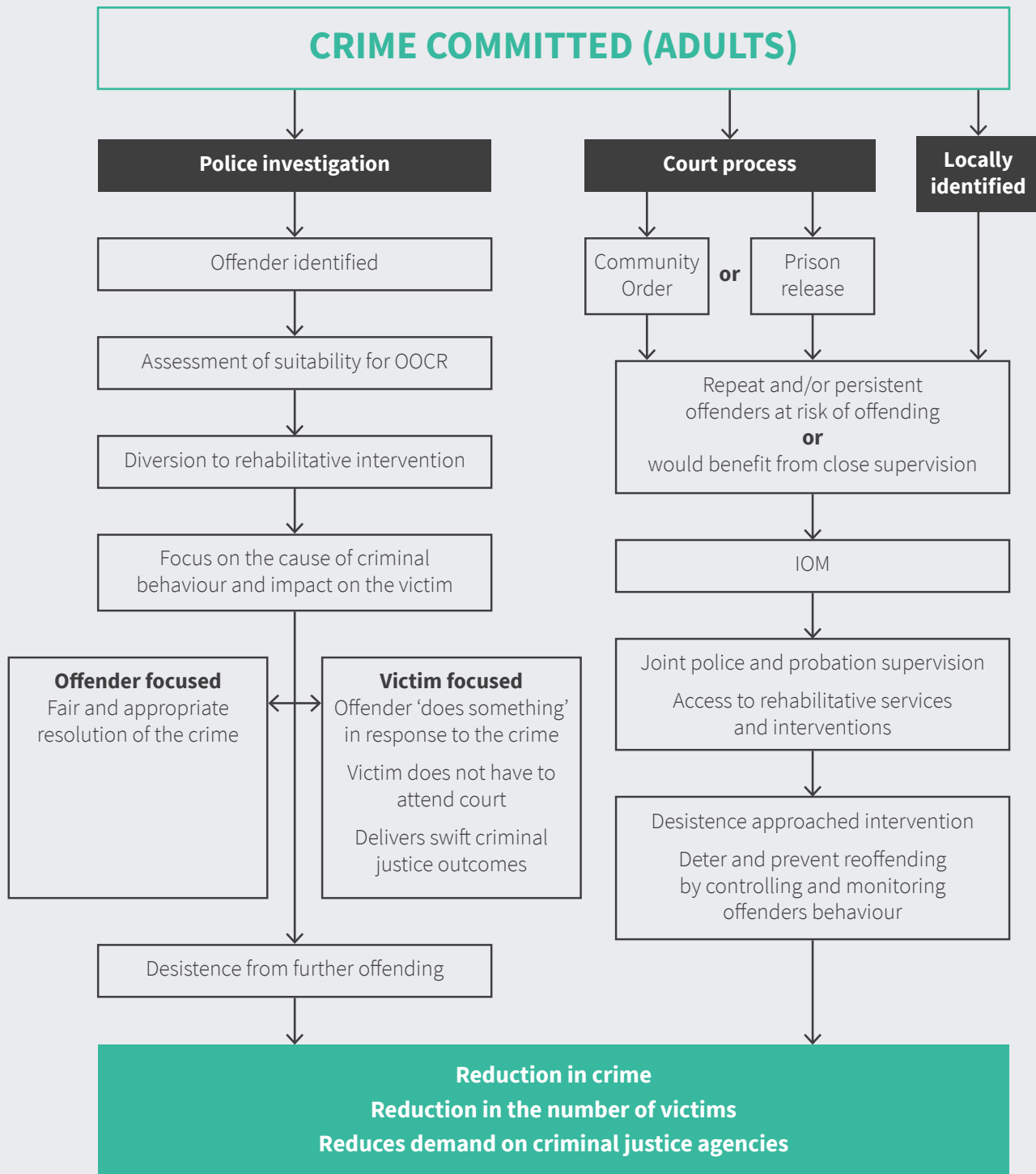
IOM police officers, and probation staff have shared access to IT systems. All police officers have access to the probation systems, including Delius & OASys. Probation now has access to two police IDIOM system licences enabling them to monitor performance and reoffending data.

Local Improvement Focus

1. Introduce Personal Management Plans for all IOM nominals to ensure organisational memory across the region. This will support intelligence sharing and help prevent reoffending and harm.
2. Understand the Serious Violence Duty introduced by the Police, Crime Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, as it relates to IOM.
3. Consider how serious violence can be prevented and reduced through the introduction of a 'Free' IOM Cohort when expanding IOM nominal inclusion.

¹ Offenders who have committed specified sexual or violent offences, or have been assessed as presenting a serious risk of harm

PREVENTION AND REHABILITATION WHOLE SYSTEM APPROACH



PERFORMANCE SUB GROUP

AIM

An effective criminal justice system

OBJECTIVE

Criminal justice
performance monitored
proactively

OBJECTIVE

Partners work
collaboratively to resolve
issues productively



PRIORITY AREAS

1. Police File Quality
2. Magistrates Court Performance – Transforming Summary Justice (TSJ)
3. Crown Court Performance – Better Case Management (BCM)



OUTCOME

Fair, just and effective progression of cases for
people in the Criminal Justice System

Priority 1

Police File Quality

Police File Quality

The majority of crimes are investigated by the police and prosecuted by the Crown Prosecution Service. From the outset of each criminal case, this joint work provides an important foundation for the criminal justice process.

Police file quality starts the process and underpins the efficiency and effectiveness of the broader criminal justice system by allowing each part of the process to deliver optimally for victims, witnesses, and offenders.

This priority seeks to ensure the delivery of high quality police files consistently, to enable the timely delivery of justice for all.

National Context

The criminal justice landscape has changed significantly in recent years.

The Director's Guidance on Charging (DG6), the revised Attorney General's Guidelines on Disclosure and the revised Code of Practice to the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 have provided guidance on 'getting disclosure right', to enable the impact of unused material to be understood from the beginning of a case to ensure appropriate criminal justice (CJ) outcomes. The effect of 'front loading' case preparation and increasing the amount of information available to the prosecutor has increased the work police must do before sending the file to the CPS for a charging decision.

The new charging model which commenced roll out in September 2022, introduced two routes for the police to seek and for the CPS to deliver charging advice and decisions:-

Red cases, where a suspect is in custody, and an application for a further remand in custody is likely, if the suspect is charged. Local CPS provide this charging advice between 9am and 5pm weekdays, with CPS Direct covering outside these hours.

Green cases, which are all of the other cases submitted to CPS for charging advice. The charging decision is made by the CPS locally within 28 days of submission by the police of a pre-condition compliant file, which meets the requirements of the Director's Guidance on Charging and the National File Standard.

Challenges

IT Infrastructure

Forces use a variety of case management systems for their criminal justice functions whilst CPS use one system. Processes are bureaucratic, largely because they have been added onto existing IT systems that were not originally intended or designed to be used for digital case transfer and have had to be adapted for this purpose.

Success of the transfer process depends on the correct use of a naming convention. When material is incorrectly named the CPS case management system does not recognise it, and it will not 'land' in the case file in the correct place or in the correct way. This can result in confusion between both agencies about what has been sent and received.

Personnel

Austerity resulted in a loss of personnel for both agencies. Whilst levels have increased this has brought with it issues regarding inexperience in frontline, supervisory and managerial teams for both agencies. Between 2020 - 2021 prosecutors and police officers received virtual training and induction with fewer opportunities to learn from more experienced colleagues.

Redaction

Redaction of case file material has acquired more significance with the increased importance of data protection. It is a considerable issue for the police and CPS nationally, particularly in relation to the time taken by the police, and to a lesser extent the CPS, to prepare cases

National Digital Case File (DCF)

The Police Digital Service is working to streamline the digital delivery of case papers from the police to CPS, with a move away from the use of electronic document templates and instead via the completion of structured pre-set data fields to promote consistency, reduce errors and improve efficiency. Model Implementation of DCF is scheduled to go live in January 2026, with the national roll out set to commence in July 2026.

Local Response

JOIM

In Northumbria there is a shared strategic sense of purpose to improve file building and deliver successful outcomes for victims, witnesses, and the public. Joint Operational Improvement Meetings (JOIMs), where police and CPS managers meet to discuss performance and case building, are well embedded locally, and a mechanism to drive improvement.

Gatekeeping

Northumbria uses a tiered accredited process to quality assure the material they send to the CPS. This is composed of the Prosecution Support Unit (PSU) and accredited CJ sergeants on each response team.

The PSU operates on a 24/7 basis assisting with Red charging cases and assessing all of the Green pre-charge cases where the file has not been reviewed by an accredited CJ sergeant. Once accredited the CJ sergeant can submit a file directly to CPS.

A key success of the charging model has been the joint TEAMS channel for Red cases which has improved the working relationship between the PSU and CPS lawyers and improved efficiency for Red charging cases. It is hoped that this can be expanded further at some point.

Training

Collaborative training between police and CPS took place during 2024 as part of the CJ Sergeant accreditation process. This has been followed by case file improvement workshops for response sergeants supported by bitesize videos on a particular file area for example, disclosure.

Digital case file

Local digital investments are underway including exploratory work with AI platforms to support file creation, the acquisition of approved automated redaction software and options to improve the usability of the current DCF system.

Local Improvement Focus

1. First triage rejection rate
This is an administrative check of the initial file submission undertaken by the CPS to ensure all of the necessary documents are present in the right format and with the right names
2. Action plan rate
 - 2.1 Compliance with DG6 - thematic analysis indicates non-compliance with DG6, specifically the inclusion of key evidence, is one of the main reasons for actions plans being set
 - 2.2 The timeliness of the police response to CPS action plans
3. Access to advice for more complex cases to reduce action plans and improve efficiency
4. Consideration of expansion of the TEAMS channel between police and CPS
5. Improvements in the local DCF process

Priority 2

Magistrates Court Performance – Transforming Summary Justice (TSJ)

National Magistrates Court Performance - Transforming Summary Justice (TSJ)

The starting point for all criminal cases regardless of offence type is the Magistrates Court.

Correctly identified pleas enables the appropriate listing of first hearings into the correct court. This allows a balance to be struck between over and under listing and ensures the effective use of court time.

Having a case heard in the correct court ensures pleas are taken at the first hearing and any appropriate challenge to not guilty pleas can be made. This enables both parties to focus on narrowing the issues at hand, avoiding adjournments unless absolutely necessary.

This priority seeks to ensure the effective application of TSJ principles in the Magistrates Court to prevent any adverse impact on victims, witnesses, and defendants and to ensure the efficient flow of work through the system.

National Context

At the end of September 2024, the Magistrates Court outstanding criminal caseload in England and Wales stood at 327,228. This represents a 22% increase on the previous year (269,033). However, the figure of 327,228 is set against an emerging trend of a reduction in the number of case disposals, indicating an upward trajectory for the total outstanding caseload.

On 18th November 2024 the government extended the sentencing range in the Magistrates Court from six to twelve months for a single offence. The aim is to better support victims through 'swifter justice', drive down the remand population and in doing so relieve the pressure on prison capacity.

Challenges

Prison capacity

Recent prison capacity issues have had an impact on the efficient movement of detained people between the police, courts, and prison custody.

Personnel

Nationally challenges in the recruitment of legal advisers due to budget constraints, lead in times for training, and the subsequent retention of personnel has resulted in challenges regarding the experience of key personnel.

Local Response

Judicial Delivery Group

Both the Judicial Delivery Group for Northumbria and the Judicial Business Group for the North East have set an improvement in the effective trial rate, as one of the priorities for 2025. The groups are judicially led and responsible for ensuring appropriate arrangements are in place for the efficient and effective conduct of the Magistrates Court.

Magistrates' Court Working Group

Attended by the North East Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutor, this internal CPS group drives efficiency in the handling of Magistrates Court work by analysing TSJ performance, sharing good practice, setting priorities, and managing national issues relevant to TSJ performance.

TSJ Working Group

Working locally at an operational level, the group supports Northumbria LCJB Performance subgroup through the early identification of issues impacting performance, identifying, and evaluating options and making recommendations for change.

TSJ performance in all areas has improved since 2022 with Northumbria ranked 4th nationally at the beginning of 2024 from a previous position of 32 in 2023. The proportion of early guilty pleas entered at first hearing has improved significantly following a period of sustained effort and ensuring cases are assigned to the correct court from first listing. This has all contributed to an improvement in the timeliness of trial listing.

Personnel

A successful local recruitment drive has been undertaken for trainee legal advisers to fill key posts. A number of measures are in progress locally to support improvements in performance, including targeted training for HMCTS staff, refreshing, and improving knowledge around TSJ measures, and in depth analysis of guilty and not guilty case designations to ensure cases appear in the right courts. This enables effective case management to take place at first hearing.

Local Improvement Focus

1. Increase and maintain the percentage of guilty pleas at first hearing
2. Reduce the ineffective trial rate percentage
3. Reduce the bad cracked trial rate percentage
4. Reduce the percentage of cases dropped at the third or subsequent hearings
5. Improve utilisation of the Specialist Domestic Abuse Court (SDAC)

Priority 3

Crown Court Performance – Better Case Management (BCM)

National Crown Court Performance – Better Case Management (BCM)

Over 90% of criminal cases are dealt with in the Magistrates Court, the remaining cases, usually more serious and complex offences, transfer to the Crown Court.

The Crown Court caseload is determined by the flow of case receipts moving to the Crown Court and the flow of cases out of the court once completed. When the rate of receipts exceeds the rate of disposals the caseload increases, resulting in a backlog.

A minimum or optimal caseload at which the Crown Court functions most efficiently does not exist because the optimal level is dependent on the nature of cases and the capacity available to hear them, both of which vary.

This priority seeks to ensure the application of BCM principles to deliver justice, mitigate the withdrawal of victims and witnesses from proceedings, and prevent trials from failing due to long waiting times.

National Context

At the end of September 2024, the Crown Court outstanding caseload in England and Wales stood at 73,105. This is an increase of 10% on the previous year (66,426) and has almost doubled since the end of 2019 (38,016), and before the pandemic.

The Crown Court backlog can be influenced by a wide range of cross-system factors, for example the criminal defence barristers' industrial action in 2022. Whilst this contributed to a reduction in disposals it also increased the proportion of remaining cases that were more complex, because less complex cases were more likely to be disposed of.

The number of people in prison on remand, awaiting trial or sentencing has risen to its highest level in 50 years at 16,005 people, 65% higher than December 2019. Around two-thirds of remand prisoners are awaiting trial, with one-third awaiting sentencing. The MoJ regards pressure on prison capacity to be the most pressing consideration in relation to reducing the Crown Court backlog¹.

Challenges

Trials

Nationally the proportion of listed trials that do not go ahead on the day has increased from 16% in 2019 to 27% in 2023. The reasons for ineffective trials include witness and defendant unavailability, poor case preparation, over listing of cases and unavailability of barristers. These cases then need to be relisted.

Cracked trials withdrawn on the day of trial due to the defendant offering an acceptable plea or the prosecution offering no evidence, are not relisted but the preparation work and court time allocated to it, may be wasted.

Receipts and Disposals

The rate of receipts is at source affected by the level of crime in society and how much of this is caught and prosecuted. The 'swift' disposal of cases is affected by their complexity, the availability of court time, the appropriate people being available and the prevalence of early guilty pleas, thus avoiding a trial.

¹ Reducing the backlog in the Crown Court – National Audit Office (2024)

Local Response

Sitting Hours

Newcastle Crown Court consistently remains above the national average for length of a sitting day, ensuring effective court room utilisation.

Crown Court Case Coordinator

Newcastle was successful in being selected as a pilot for the national 'proof of concept role,' the ambition of which is to gather evidence to demonstrate that having a dedicated case progression resource facilitates more effective running of the Courts – leading to fewer ineffective hearings and trials, fewer cracked trials, more early guilty pleas, and less wasted court time. The role commenced in early 2024 and will be evaluated throughout the 18 month proof of concept period.

Better Case Management

Following the relaunch of Better Case Management in May 2023, the principles contained in the BCM handbook are being applied by practitioners to the conduct of cases in the Crown Court. The Crown Court judiciary are leading the focus on effective Plea and Trial Preparation Hearings (PTPH) as the foundation of good case management. The Case Coordinator also champions the principles of Better Case Management with a strong focus on early case management and trials, working with the CPS, Defence, Probation, and other relevant parties to help ensure that timetables are kept, responsibilities are upheld and judicial orders are abided by.

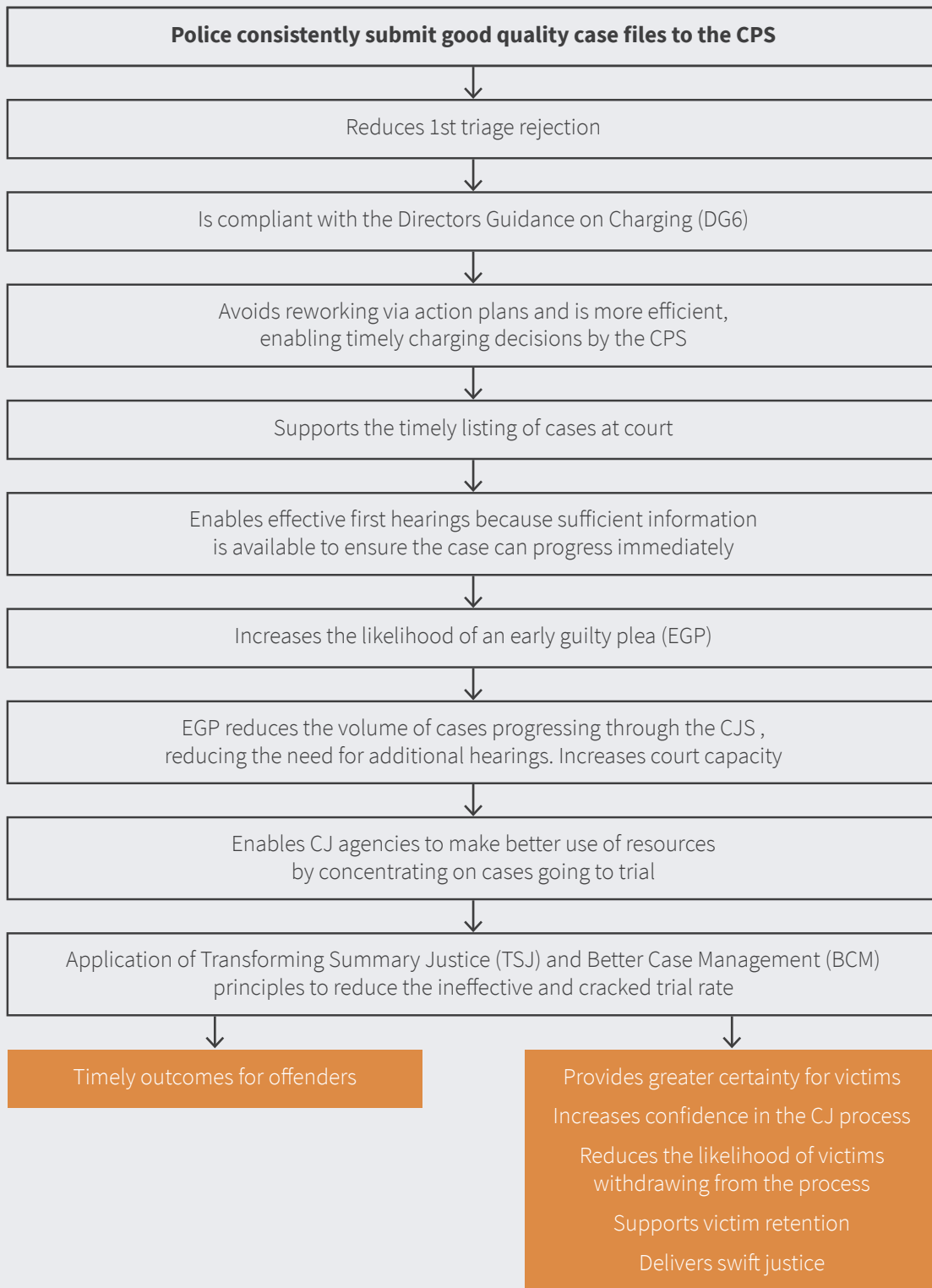
Loading of Lists

Newcastle Crown Court have reviewed the loading of court lists with the Resident Judge, reducing the number of trials that are listed each day. This has reduced the ineffective trial rate due to court reasons and supports improved victim and witness retention.

Local Improvement Focus

1. Increase and maintain the early guilty plea rate
2. Reduce the number of trials which are ineffective
3. Reduce the number of trials which crack on the day to offences on the indictment
4. Evaluate the Crown Court Case Coordinator pilot (case progression)

PERFORMANCE WHOLE SYSTEM APPROACH



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