

Communications Strategy



Streamlined Forensic Reporting (SFR)



ASSOCIATION OF
CHIEF POLICE OFFICERS



HM Courts
& Tribunals
Service



Ministry of
JUSTICE

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this document is to support the Criminal Justice System (CJS) agencies and stakeholders delivering the Streamlined Forensic Reporting (SFR) work stream. The National SFR Board, chaired by Chief Constable Neil Rhodes, is working to deliver the implementation of SFR in the majority of areas in England and Wales by March 2013.

SFR is a revised case management procedure for producing forensic evidence at court and seeks to reduce unnecessary costs, bureaucracy and delays in the criminal justice system. The scheme operates by taking a more proportionate approach to forensic evidence through the early preparation of a short report that details the key forensic evidence the prosecution intends to rely upon. The aim is to achieve early agreement with the defence on forensic issues but where this cannot be achieved in the first instance, to identify the contested areas. In supporting the case for SFR the Senior Presiding Judge, the Right Honourable Lord Justice Goldring made the following comments:

“When prosecution wish to rely on forensic evidence, it is lengthy, may not be in dispute, takes a long time to prepare and is expensive. SFR is a more proportionate approach. First a short report is prepared by forensic science detailing the findings. Defence then have a decision to make:

Do they accept the findings? If so, it is admissible evidence

Do they dispute the findings? If so, the issues are addressed.”

(Right Honourable Lord Justice Goldring, 21 March 2012)

SFR has been designed to enable investigators, scientists and prosecutors to comply with the Criminal Procedure Rules (CPR) in the interests of justice and complements other criminal justice initiatives including the Early Guilty Plea Scheme (EGP) and the ‘Stop Delaying Justice’ initiative. Across all these initiatives there is a desire to tackle delay and inefficiency through robust case management and to ensure justice is dispensed more swiftly. This strategic intention was reiterated in July 2012 with the publication of the Government’s ‘Swift and Sure’ White Paper that set out the programme of reforms to the

criminal justice system in England and Wales and integrated SFR into this process.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OBJECTIVES

The objective of the strategy is to ensure effective communication to agencies, stakeholders and staff in order that all parties understand SFR, its benefits, and are able to positively promote these.

KEY MESSAGES

Communication activity during the project aims to ensure that there is an agreed, timely and consistent approach to providing updates and relevant materials to all partners and stakeholders with a vested interest in SFR. The views of those involved in the development and delivery of SFR will be considered in a post implementation review.

The key messages are as follows:

- The history of SFR and what it is
- The objectives of SFR:
 1. To reduce costs and delay associated with forensic evidence where such evidence adds no value to the administration of justice
 2. The provision of a stronger basis for Stage 2 forensic reporting through compliance with the Criminal Procedure Rules which sets out the court case management requirements for the early identification of the real issues
- The benefits of SFR to each agency and the criminal justice system as a whole
- What the SFR process looks like and how it can be implemented
- The timescales for implementation and governance

When the key messages are being delivered they should be positive, reassuring and inclusive. In addition, they should be focused on the benefits.

SFR Benefits

Effective use of SFR can lead to:

- A lower level of discontinued cases through improved case management and earlier agreement on forensic issues between the prosecution and defence
- An improvement in the early guilty plea rate resulting in fewer cases coming to trial unnecessarily thereby easing pressures on court time and costs
- A reduction in the number of cases requiring additional forensic evidence, saving time and costs associated with gathering such evidence

Benefits to the court include:

- Forensic evidence provided in a simpler SFR format prompting more effective court case management and the early identification of real case issues
- Increased early guilty pleas and reduced discontinuance of cases
- Courts are not left waiting for forensic evidence when that evidence is neither a contested issue nor adds any value to the administration of justice
- Swifter resolution of cases involving forensic evidence

Benefits to the police include:

- Fewer officers and staff required to attend court as witnesses due to increased early guilty pleas
- Reduced forensic costs. Cases built according to requirements with stricter adherence to the criminal procedure rules
- Fewer delays waiting for full forensic evidence when an early guilty plea is anticipated
- Improved timeliness and efficiency

Benefits to prosecution include:

- The SFR Stage 1 report provides key forensic evidence in a way that makes it easily understood
- SFR makes it easier to establish the early identification of issues reducing the opportunity for defence ambush tactics
- SFR is suitable for digital transmission

Benefits to the defence include:

- Early provision of SFR evidence allows the defence to advise their client accordingly and ensure the appropriate plea is entered at the first hearing
- Supports the concept of maximising sentence discount

OUTCOMES

The effectiveness of the communication strategy will be measured by progress towards the activities included within the project plan. With successful delivery of the key messages the outcomes are:

- CJS staff and stakeholders have knowledge and understanding of SFR and its benefits to the CJS, victims, witnesses and defendants and are prepared to speak positively about the process as a whole
- CJS agencies and stakeholders are kept up to date with progress towards implementation of SFR nationally
- CJS staff and stakeholders are aware of the processes and procedures to follow with implementation of SFR

THE AUDIENCE

There are a large number of interested groups and individuals that need to be reached. A structured communication approach will ensure that all relevant groups and individuals are reached in an **appropriate way**, using an **appropriate medium**, with an **appropriate message** at an **appropriate time**.

National SFR Board Members are required to identify key individuals within their respective organisations who need to receive SFR communications. The priority groups have been detailed below and will be reviewed regularly.

Police Service:

- Police Forces in England & Wales
- ACPO Criminal Justice Portfolio
- ACPO Forensic Portfolio
 - Performance & Standards Group
 - Market Development
 - Business Change Group (BCG)

Home Office:

- Commercial Liaison
- Forensic Strategy Board
- CAST (Centre for Applied Science & Technology)

Other Stakeholders:

- CPS (including CPS Direct)
- CJS Efficiency Board
- Ministry of Justice
- Forensic Science Regulator
- Forensic Service Providers
- Legal Services Commission
- HM Courts & Tribunals Service
- Judicial Office
- Law Society
- Criminal Bar Association
- Defence Community

COMMUNICATION TOOLS

- **E-mail** – this should be used as a quick and effective means of communicating with SPOCS
- **Personal letter** – this method should be used where key individuals and organisation leads need to be contacted and can influence SFR take up
- **Intranet** – a specific section on an intranet can be used to provide further information such as a copy of the SFR toolkit or update sheets
- **Police Online Knowledge Area (POLKA)** – this is a national police system used for sharing knowledge and information within the police community. The SFR toolkit has been uploaded onto the site and is available at:
<https://polka.pnn.police.uk/en/Communities/Documents/?clubId=7&folder=Streamlined%2bForensic%2bReporting>
- **Briefings & Workshops** – this method relies on a distinct, clear and consistent message at each event. Other communication i.e. email should follow for reinforcement and feedback purposes
- **Highlight Reports** – these should be produced for providing up to date statements on progress in line with the relevant governance structure e.g. National SFR Board and CJS Efficiency Board
- **Guidance Documents & Training Materials** – these materials should be used for communicating with staff working within the SFR process and includes process maps to ensure the correct procedures are followed. The National SFR Project Team are working on a range of materials to assist areas including an NCALT e-learning package
- **Leaflets & Posters** – these can be used to increase knowledge across the defence community and should be accessible in court waiting areas
- **Specific Publications** – such as CPS News and Police Professional, for case studies and articles from early adopter areas

COMMUNICATIONS CLEARANCE & SINGLE POINTS OF CONTACT

All communications material should be cleared through the appropriate individuals below via e-mail in the first instance. If required, communications activities can be escalated to the National SFR Board for further discussion.

Management of communications to be administered by:

Lincolnshire Police: Simon Bromiley - xxxxx.xxxxxxxx@xxxxx.xxx.xxxxxx.xx
 Lincolnshire Police: Sarah Virr - xxxxx.xxxx@xxxxx.xxx.xxlice.uk
 National SFR Board: Jo Ashworth - xxxxxx.xxxxxxxx.xxxxx@xxxxxxxxxxx.xxx.xxxxxx.xx
 Home Office: Keith Edwards - keith.edxxxxx@xxxxxxxxxxx.xxx.police.uk
 CPS: Karen Squibb-Williams - karen.squibbxxxxxxx@xxx.xxx.xxx.uk

KEY COMMUNICATION: NATIONAL SFR BOARD MEMBERS

Chief Constable Neil Rhodes ACPO Lead	xxxx.xxxxxx@xxxxx.xxx.police.uk
Jo Ashworth Senior Responsible Officer, East Midlands Regional Director of Forensics	joanne.ashwxxxx.xxxxx@xxxxxxxxxxx.xxx.police.uk
Karen Squibb-Williams Strategic Policy Advisor Crown Prosecution Service	karen.squibb-xxxxxxx@xxx.xxx.gov.uk
Mike Logan Jurisdictional Operational Support Manager, Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service	michael.logxx@xxxxx.xxx.xxx.xx
Jeff Adams Forensic Science Regulation Unit, Home Office	xxxx.xxxxxx@xxxxxxxxxxx.xxx.xxx.xx
John Armstrong Forensic Supplier Contract, Home Office	john.armstrong2@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk
Sandra Glenister CJS Efficiency Programme	sandra.glenister@cps.pnn.police.uk
Sara Carnegie Legal Secretary to Senior Presiding Judge, Judicial Office	sara.carnegie@judiciary.gsi.gov.uk
Simon Stanley and Stephen O'Connor Legal Services Commission	xxxxx.xxxxxxx@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.xxx.xv.uk stephen.ocoxxxx@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.xxx.gov.uk

Please note that processes have been developed to facilitate representation and feedback from the following bodies to the National SFR Board:

- The Law Society
- The Criminal Bar Association
- The Bar Council
- The Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEX)

Further Information & Guidance

It is recognised that areas may want to tailor local communications to meet the needs of their local audiences and a checklist is provided at appendix A to assist this. For further information and guidance do not hesitate to contact the project support team.

Appendix A

Local Area Communications Plan Checklist

It is acknowledged that areas will want to engage with local stakeholders in different ways. The following are suggested activities that can be considered by forces and CPS. The list is not exhaustive but provides a steer for potential engagement.

Internal Engagement

- Key stakeholders briefed? (Police Officers, Case Builders, File Checkers, Forensic Staff, CPS Lawyers?)
- Intranet site link to SFR guidance including 60 second briefing & other internal media e.g. Yammer?
- Routine Orders entry (forces)? E-bulletin (CPS)?
- SFR posters distributed?
- Media officers briefed on SFR? Are they in a position to field journalist interest in SFR or know where to signpost queries?
- Consultation with IT department regarding digital issues?

External Engagement

- Meetings held with CPS & Courts? Is there local agreement?
- Briefings held with Resident Judge & Justices' Clerks?
- Defence community engagement?
- Posters & leaflets distributed in court waiting areas?
- Local criminal justice forums updated?
- Mechanisms in place to capture feedback from affected staff?
- Chief Officer blogs? (May be useful in explaining SFR to public & showing wider support for criminal justice efficiency)
- Websites updated with information about SFR for public consumption?