



Norfolk's Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) response to inspections published by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)

Section 55 of the Police Act 1996 (as amended by section 37 of the Policing and Crime Act 2017) requires local policing bodies to respond and publish comments on all inspection reports pertaining to your force within 56 days of report publication.

Inspection Title:

Joint case building by the police and Crown Prosecution Service

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All local forces in England and Wales

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[Joint case building by the police and Crown Prosecution Service: final report - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services](#)

Section 55 Response Deadline:

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Key Findings

His Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPsi) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) carried out a joint thematic inspection of the building of prosecution cases by the police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). The inspection question was:

"How can police forces and CPS Areas improve culture, communications and partnership work on case building in either-way and indictable-only casework to deliver stronger cases, a better product for the court and defence, and a better service to victims, witnesses, and the public?"

The inspection had a particular focus on how communication and culture impact on prosecution case building up to the point of the first plea hearing.

In January 2024, the Inspectorates published their interim findings report after phase 1 of the inspection. These findings were derived from work in two CPS Areas and four police forces, including the examination of 40 case files.

The Inspectorates inspected a further four CPS Areas and eight police forces. They spoke to police and CPS personnel in most of them and jointly examined a further 80 cases.

The final phase of inspection focused on the strategic oversight and development of the working relationship between the police and the CPS. The Inspectorates engaged with national bodies, including the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), interviewed those in the CPS with a national role, and spoke with other interested parties. This work was carried out during the first half of 2024.

Recent inspection activity identified increasing tensions and frustrations between policing and prosecutors. There had been a number of high-profile events where senior leaders expressed views that highlighted the degree of tension. The Inspectorate's findings from their own inspection programmes also show how the long-standing issue of police file quality, timeliness of charging advice and changes to how case files were built were increasing tensions and impacting relationships at senior and frontline levels.

Since publishing the interim report, there has been much activity by senior leaders in both the police and the CPS to consider, address and mitigate some of the inefficiencies and tensions that have developed. However, some of the issues are deep-seated and will require change that cannot be made quickly.

In working with the NPCC lead for criminal justice and other senior officers, solutions to address some long-standing issues have been developed. The Strategic Joint Operational Improvement Board has driven changes, developed pilots and challenged current practices in an attempt to address aspects causing the greatest tension and inefficiency on the frontline.

As stated in the interim report, the key issue remains the effectiveness of communications between the police and the CPS. Difficulties arise from differing priorities, overly bureaucratic systems, multiple processes and poor information technology. There is no clear strategy for improvement being driven across the system and there is a lack of shared performance metrics. The data used by police and the CPS to measure performance is not trusted, incomplete and stokes tensions at a local level. These fundamental problems naturally have a significant impact on the culture, communication and partnership building between police and the CPS.

Tensions have been exacerbated by the changes in the Attorney General's Guidelines on Disclosure and the Director's Guidance on Charging (6th edition) (DG6). These changes have compounded the fundamental problems caused by different police and CPS priorities and added significant further tension. Throughout this inspection, the Inspectorates highlight how the requirement for the police to redact pre-charge material has a serious impact on resourcing and productivity. Additionally, the police now need to submit far more unused material at this stage. This has created tensions at both national and operational levels between police and the CPS which are aggravated by differing understandings and

misinformation of what is required to comply with data protection legislation. This needs to be resolved before the working relationship can improve.

A fundamental issue is that current information technology (IT) systems are not fit for purpose. This drives inefficiency alongside frontline frustrations and tensions. The lack of digital infrastructure to support effective sharing of material is difficult to understand or accept given that recommendations have been made about the need for improved and joined-up IT since 1998. This inspection finds that there is still no overarching IT strategy for the CJS which has resulted in systems being procured and developed in a piecemeal fashion.

There is an urgent need to integrate police IT systems. The lack of an overarching CJS IT strategy or effective co-ordination is concerning. The current IT landscape is very complicated and will be expensive to resolve. Additionally, the CPS case management system was never designed to receive and send material to and from different police IT systems, but instead to manage casework. It is also not a system that would support multiple interfaces with police and other CJS IT systems.

It is the Inspectorates' view that there is a lack of strategic governance and co-ordination. There is need to identify the strategic objectives of the CJS and this must align with improving nine outcomes. Measuring the success in achieving those objectives needs to be based on agreed metrics that captures performance of all the agencies involved in the criminal justice processes, with a focus on outcomes.

The lack of co-ordination and strategic oversight has led to duplication of effort, conflicting approaches and confusion on where to focus and what to prioritise.

There is also evidence that there is little co-ordination between initiatives and projects in which the CPS, the NPCC, the Home Office, the Attorney General's Office (AGO) and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) participate. Given the multiplicity of initiatives and projects, the Inspectorates found that there was a lack of awareness between some, of the work performed by each organisation. Some of this resulted in an absence of appreciation of how changes made in isolation may impact not only other stakeholders, but the wider CJS.

Recommendations

18 recommendations are made within the report, three of which are directed at Chief Constables nationally:

Recommendation 5:

By July 2026, police forces should have in place as part of their gatekeeping or comparable arrangements:

- an effective governance and decision-making capability to ensure investigations are timely and completed to the appropriate standards
- agreed contact arrangements in place in forces and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) Areas to facilitate clear, consistent, and transparent communication between police and CPS
- sufficient, trained, and competent decision-makers

- effective and efficient systems and processes to manage case file submission queues, to avoid unnecessary delays and risks to cases subject to statutory time limits.

Recommendation 7:

Within 12 months of the completion of recommendation 6, police forces should ensure that every supervisor responsible for assessing case files prior to referral to the Crown Prosecution Service for a charging decision is trained in case file building and Director's Guidance on Charging (6th edition) (DG6) quality assurance.

Recommendation 9:

By July 2026, the police and Crown Prosecution Service at Joint Operational Improvement Meetings should develop a joint local training plan to increase awareness and understanding of each other's roles, including the operation of IT systems.

Areas For Improvement

There were no areas for improvement.

Chief Constable response to report and any Recommendations/Areas For Improvement

This report, titled “Joint case building by the police and Crown Prosecution Service: final report” summarises the findings of a joint thematic inspection conducted by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and His Majesty’s Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI). The inspection examined how the police and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) work together within the Criminal Justice System to build cases through investigation and prosecution.

I acknowledge the report’s findings.

The inspection has led to 18 recommendations which are aimed at improving the efficiency of the criminal justice system and achieving better outcomes for victims. I welcome the Inspectorates’ recognition that these improvements cannot be delivered by the police and CPS alone, and that enhanced strategic governance and coordination across the wider criminal justice system are essential.

There are three recommendations which are directed to all police forces in England and Wales, which I accept. We have reviewed our current position against each and are developing plans to help us meet the required standards within the specified timeframes.

Our initial response to each recommendation is outlined below.

Recommendation 5

“By July 2026, police forces should have in place as part of their gatekeeping or comparable arrangements:

- an effective governance and decision-making capability to ensure investigations are timely and completed to the appropriate standards
- agreed contact arrangements in place in forces and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) Areas to facilitate clear, consistent, and transparent communication between police and CPS
- sufficient, trained, and competent decision-makers
- effective and efficient systems and processes to manage case file submission queues, to avoid unnecessary delays and risks to cases subject to statutory time limits.”

Norfolk Constabulary has already taken significant steps towards meeting the different components of this recommendation.

To ensure investigations are completed promptly and to the required standards, supervisors conduct 28-day reviews of all investigations. These reviews assess both quality and timeliness, identifying outstanding actions. This oversight is enhanced by our innovative ‘My Team’ Power BI tool, which provides real-time data on live investigation workloads and flags approaching Statutory Time Limits (STLs).

We maintain a strong, collaborative relationship with the East of England CPS, underpinned by quarterly Strategic Joint Operational Improvement Meetings (JOIMs) and regular Operational JOIMs. These structures support joint performance oversight of case building and case progression, alignment on objectives and priorities, and a forum for the escalation

of emerging issues. In addition to scheduled meetings, police and CPS leaders remain in regular contact to ensure swift, coordinated responses to operational challenges, and we have a clearly defined ‘on the ground’ rapid escalation process, with senior management oversight. To further enhance day-to-day communication, innovations such as live Microsoft Teams channels are being introduced and real-time case conversations to expedite charging decisions in some domestic abuse cases will be piloted later this year.

While Recommendations 6 and 7 of this report will establish national standards for training and supervisory competence in case building and decision making, we remain committed to raising our standards in the interim. Our Investigations Improvement team (Op Investigate) is delivering a programme of training and targeted interventions to further enhance our investigation standards from initial evidence gathering through to decision making. Additional training for supervisors reviewing case files prior to CPS referral is scheduled for late 2025. Our Criminal Justice Services (CJS) Case Progression and Support Officers have also received updated training on evidence review and the Director’s Guidance on Charging (6th edition) (DG6).

Robust processes are already in place to manage case file submission progression. All files are triaged upon submission to CJS, with consideration given to STLs and other prioritisation factors. Custody system data is used to identify cases not submitted by target dates, and an ‘Insight report’ which will provide live data on cases nearing STL that remain unsubmitted is being re-introduced.

A new Power-BI product has been developed to track performance against key case building metrics. This will be used to identify themes and training needs at team and individual levels. Insights from this tool will inform the work of the newly established Joint Norfolk and Suffolk File Quality Improvement Group, to enable targeted interventions and support to be delivered where needed.

Further planned improvements include a ‘traffic light system’ allocations tracker for Not Guilty Anticipated Plea (NGAP) cases. This will improve the visibility of case progression, help to identify backlogs, and support Section Leaders in managing workloads and mitigating STL-related risks.

Recommendation 7

“Within 12 months of the completion of Recommendation 6, police forces should ensure that every supervisor responsible for assessing case files prior to referral to the Crown Prosecution Service for a charging decision is trained in case file building and Director’s Guidance on Charging (6th edition) (DG6) quality assurance.”

In collaboration with Suffolk Constabulary, a joint strategy to ensure the delivery of the national training products that will be developed under Recommendation 6 within the required timeframe is being developed between the Joint CJS Disclosure and File Quality Support Team, our joint Learning and Development department, and our Investigations Improvement teams. This will include training in the latest edition of the Director’s Guidance on Charging.

Recommendation 9

“By July 2026, the police and CPS at Joint Operational Improvement Meetings should develop a joint local training plan to increase awareness and understanding of each other’s roles, including the operation of IT systems.”

This recommendation is being progressed through the Operational JOIM. It was formally adopted as a joint CPS/Police action at the JOIM meeting held on 16 July 2025.

While the aim of driving service improvement is commendable, the cumulative impact of successive HMICFRS thematic reports recommending training-related actions is placing an increasing burden on police forces. These recommendations are contributing to rising training costs, greater operational abstractions, and the diversion of resources away from frontline delivery – further stretching already limited capacity.

PCC response to report and any Recommendations/Areas For Improvement

This report, titled “Joint case building by the police and Crown Prosecution Service: final report” presents the findings of a joint thematic inspection conducted by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and His Majesty’s Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI). I note the contents and recommendations of the report with interest.

My starting point in reviewing all the Inspectorates’ reports is to ask what a member of the public could be reasonably anticipated to expect of the service under review. The public, and particularly victims/survivors and witnesses, experience the criminal justice system (CJS) as a singular system. There is a reasonable expectation that it functions as such.

It is therefore concerning that, as the report notes, as long ago as 1998 a recommendation was made for a single integrated unit in case preparation and management, and a need for a set of common performance measures. Neither of these have fully materialised, and the need that was established in 1990 for an integrated operating system has not come to fruition either. As a result, efficiency and effectiveness is reduced, and frustrations are felt in both policing and the Crown Prosecution Service.

Within the wider CJS, as a party to the Norfolk and Suffolk Local Criminal Justice Board, the report’s observations regarding national governance and the failure of the National Criminal Justice Board to meet for a recent two-year period is concerning also. I have also become aware of marked differences in approach between some Local Criminal Justice Boards (LCJB) across the country which are alluded to in the report. With some LCJBs being largely for verbal updates, others are more active and seek to tackle specific shared issues in a co-creative endeavour. Some of the underpinning issues relating to the National and LCJBs are discussed in the report, and I specifically welcome the recommendation for national governance in which strategic approaches to addressing some of the structural issues – such as a much-needed integrated IT system – could be developed.

With respect to the recommendations to Chief Constables, I note the challenges and risks inherent in the current system as a result of IT failures, differences in case file building approaches and the degree to which the CPS and police work jointly. While acknowledging the increasing burden on the Constabulary as a result of the HMICFRS’s successive recommendations for further training, from a victim’s and the public’s perspective it is imperative that these recommendations are implemented to enable better and more effective progression of cases through the criminal justice system.

For Office Use Only:

- Response forwarded to the Chief Constable.
- Response forwarded to the Norfolk Police and Crime Panel.
- Response submitted to the HMICFRS monitoring portal.
- Response published on the OPCON website.