

Child robbery initiative – swift justice pilot

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) working with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to build stronger cases to secure a charging decision within 10 days (rather than 28 days) where the offender is a child for a robbery offence involving a knife.

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Key details

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| Stage of practice | Untested |
| Purpose | Organisational |
| Topic | Robbery Investigation |
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| Region | London |
| Partners | Police Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) |
| Stage of implementation | The practice is implemented. |
| Start date | October 2024 |
| Scale of initiative | Local |

Key details

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| Target group | Children and young people |
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Aim

- support frontline investigators to improve the timeliness of investigations and case file submissions and therefore receive a CPS charging decisions within 10 days following case file submission
- identify and resolve the barriers to improve file quality
- reduce the number of action plans and ensure that all plans are proportionate and necessary
- review best practice, lessons learnt and embed within BCUs
- expedite decision-making in cases involving children in line with CPS Guidance and in the spirit of the principal aim of the youth justice system, preventing offending by children and young people

Intended outcome

MPS:

- reduced time from complaint to charge
- increased percentage of cases of all qualifying cases
- percentage of cases that are referred within agreed time frames
- reduced time from charge to first hearing and trial

CPS

- improve compliance with national filing standard (NFS)
- improve compliance with director's guidance on Charging (DG6)
- improve timeliness of charging decision
- improve proportionality and necessity of actions

Description

Background

Poor quality case files, poor quality disclosure and a lack of targeted and proportionate pre-charge action plans were all learnings taken away from a previous version of the trial in 2022 which looked into barriers to the current charging processes in youth robbery cases involving knives. The initiative by being centered on building a stronger, closer and faster working collaborative relationship between the CPS and Police. It is envisaged that it will help to remove some of the current back and forth approaches to resolving issues and challenges that currently exists between partners.

Initiative

The CPS London South and the MPS are working in partnership for the CPS Child Robbery Initiative which commenced on 23 October 2024 in area south comprising of Lambeth and Southwark as well as south area with Bromley, Sutton and Croydon.

Targeted disclosure training delivered by MPS Prosecutions to investigators and supervisors and the use of Early Advice Channels between CPS and investigators are both key mechanisms that have been set up in the initiative to help achieve such aims. Where a case is a knife enabled robbery committed by a youth under the age of eighteen on bail. The officer in charge of the investigation will prepare an early advice case file containing a summary of the interview and victim statement, reasonable lines of enquiry taken and any other relevant consideration. Nominated single points of contacts (SPOCs) on basic command units (BCUs) will then refer these cases for review to the CPS ready for a team's appointment set up between the investigator, Senior Crown Prosecutor and Youth Specialist.

Following discussion between the Senior Crown Prosecutor and Investigator. Action plans will be set by the CPS which will be targeted and proportionate to the case in order to bring it to a full code test ready for a charging decision. Officers will be supported with strong oversight by supervisors to help ensure that the reasonable lines of enquiry that have been set are completed in a timely manner. The case file after being quality assured by an evidential review officer will then be submitted to the CPS with a view to a charging decision being made within 10 days, rather than 28 days as is standard practice.

The aim of the initiative is to see how early advice can positively impact the charging process by the setting up of dialogue between both investigator and CPS. A number of performance indicators have been set to help measure the impact of the initiative. This will include review of the length of time taken from complaint to charge and from charge to first hearing and trial. As well as for the CPS the timeliness of charging decision and proportionality and necessity of actions. Monitoring will take place throughout the pilot to help ensure that those investigations and arrests that meet the criteria and are eligible will be picked up early for the initiative.

Youth support

A key focus of the pilot is early intervention and disruption of identified suspects who are by law children but in the main young people under 18 year old.

The current process map for engagement of a young person once arrested and detained in custody is as follows:

Entry made onto custody record using the 'CHILD' mnemonic

- C – change presumption on legal advice
- H - have a conversation with AA
- I – inform local authority
- L – legal representative
- D – direct the investigation

Contact is made with the local authority (LA) and details passed to agencies such as social services to check whether the child is already known and has a case open to them. The dedicated Engage staff assigned to each custody will also speak with the young person whilst they are detained in custody. The Engage staff will pass on any further necessary information onto local youth justice services (YJS).

If the suspect is known to YJS, then a meeting will be arranged with that young person to speak about the alleged new offence(s) alongside any impending investigation, court issued orders and monitoring schemes that are in place.

If the suspect is unknown to services, then an appointment is made by Engage worker for a date in near future to meet again with engage and discuss further the needs of the young person and

signpost them to relevant and helpful agencies. This is purely voluntary and can be declined with by the young person of parent/guardian. All details still passed to YJS for monitoring purposes should recurring themes of alleged criminality or arrests become apparent.

If the young person and their family choose to engage and accept the meeting, then one is arranged at earliest opportunity and conversations held in order to try and address any issues or concerns that are raised. Referrals can be made to relevant services if required and the process of diverting that young person away from crime and related activities can begin.

The initiative did not require any funding to implement.

Overall impact

Three cases have met the criteria for the pilot. The officer in charge of the case has met with the CPS for early advice and charging decisions are due within 14 days.

All young people involved have been referred to the divert and engage programme who provide intervention as early as possible. This is with a view to provide support and prevent re-offending of the young people whilst on bail.

Feedback from the participating BCUs has been positive on whole. Investigating officers speak highly of the early advice session they receive with the allocated CPS lawyer, they find it very useful for gaining knowledge on case file quality. On the other hand, we have had feedback that the criteria the CPS will consider for a case is fairly narrow, they won't accept cases where the knife has actually been used, as this is then classed as a stabbing. Neither will they accept cases where there are more than three suspects involved.

19 cases submitted to the CPS, of which:

- five cases declined due to not meeting the criteria set by the CPS
- 12 cases are with the CPS pending either a charging decision or an early advice session
- four cases have been charged

Learning

As part of the initiative, a number of knife-enabled youth robbery legacy cases that exist on both BCUs have been reviewed that are currently awaiting charging decision from the CPS. From this it has been found that the main barrier to the timely securing of these decisions are a number of basic disclosure issues.

Another challenge has been smoothly flagging and submitting cases to the CPS. Currently due to the relatively low numbers of cases and due to the initiative only operating in select regions of London, upon the creation of a new case that meets the criteria, the central team overseeing the pilot email the case reference number to the senior crown prosecutor who then checks if the case has appeared on their own system before arranging a session on MS teams with an available lawyer. This deviates from the typical case submission process and we are yet to embed a pathway that removes the need for a dedicated person in the MPS and CPS to exchange an email and manually arrange a meeting.

Training

Frontline officers and detectives are also being supported with the targeted disclosure training and assistance by their supervisors to help ensure that these issues are addressed. In collaboration with the contact management team, BCU supervisors are also receiving refreshed disclosure training to quality assure case files. This will help expedite decision-making in line with CPS guidance and in the spirit of the principal aim of the youth justice system preventing offending by children and young people. The training has been a mix of face to face and online depending on availability of staff. The trainers are existing MPS staff or officers from MPS Prosecutions who are conversant and experienced in building strong cases at no extra cost to the organisation.

Youth support

Engage, a custody-based intervention Programme is also embedded within the initiative helping form a welfare diversional tactic for longer term reduction in offending.

Governance

Ongoing review of the initiative, feedback and learning is being captured and disseminated in weekly task and finish groups attended by the frontline policing delivery unit (FLPDU) investigation leads and BCU leads.

Next steps

Monitoring for cases that are eligible for early advice will continue throughout the pilot. FLPDU will also work with the BCU SPOCs to go through their legacy cases to help ensure they are in a position to support the officers in charge in addressing the basic disclosure issues and submitting the cases to the CPS. Cases will be prioritised of those where the child is about to turn 18. A workshop will be held where the CPS and BCU SPOCs will discuss and address any further points around barriers faced. All the learning from the initiative will be captured to identify how it can help be embedded widely to positively impact charging processes for youths across the MPS.

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