

Sixty Second Briefing



Streamlined Forensic Reporting (SFR)



ASSOCIATION OF
CHIEF POLICE OFFICERS



HM Courts
& Tribunals
Service



Ministry of
JUSTICE

What is SFR?

SFR is a revised case management procedure for producing forensic evidence at court and seeks to reduce costs, bureaucracy and delays in the criminal justice system with obvious financial benefits for all stakeholders. The scheme operates by taking a more proportionate approach to forensic evidence through the early preparation of a short report (stage 1) 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 issues.

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.”

Background

Following a successful pilot in London it was agreed at a national level that SFR should be implemented across the country. SFR has received subsequent endorsement from the CPS, Judiciary and other key partners and the government have incorporated SFR within the ‘Swift and Sure’ justice white paper published in July 2012 with an expectation that the majority of areas will be compliant with SFR by March 2013.

Why?

Forensic evidence is often complex, time consuming and costly to produce. Forensic evidence is often routinely requested from forensic providers without establishing if it is required or not leading to unnecessary costs and delays in court proceedings. It also complements other criminal justice initiatives such as the ‘Stop Delaying Justice’ and ‘Early Guilty Plea’ schemes.

The main benefits of SFR are:

- A lower risk of discontinuance of court cases
- An improvement in the early guilty pleas rate
- A reduction in the number of cases requiring additional forensic evidence
- Improved and effective active case management

- Savings in time and costs across the criminal justice system

Who will it affect?

All those involved in the administration of justice but specifically:

- Police Officers & Civilian Investigators
- Crime Scene Investigators
- Forensic Examiners
- Case Builders
- Prosecution and Defence Lawyers
- Judges & Magistrates
- HM Courts Staff

Next Steps

An SFR toolkit containing information and guidance has been distributed to police forces, criminal justice partners and forensic providers across the country. This outlines how SFR should be implemented and as such practitioners will shortly receive further information from their local areas.