



Corporate Plan

April 2023- March 2026

March 2023



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1. Introduction

1.1 Our purpose

1.11 Everyone at the CCRC is driven by our common purpose, which is finding, investigating, and referring potential miscarriages of justice and thereby protecting the integrity of, and promoting confidence in, the criminal justice system.

1.12 We do this by:

- Investigating and reviewing cases proactively, effectively and efficiently;
- Referring appropriate cases to the appellate courts;
- Demonstrating independence and impartiality in our casework;
- Being thorough, proportionate and conscientious;
- Using our unique knowledge and experience to help improve the criminal justice system;
- Working constructively with stakeholders; and
- Maintaining awareness of, and adapting to, change in the wider criminal justice system

1.2 Progress during the last corporate plan

1.21 The past three years have seen a great deal of progress against the priorities that we set ourselves in the previous plan despite dealing with the challenges presented by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Our strategic aims 2020-23 were:

- **Excellence in Case Review**
- **Enhanced Engagement with Stakeholders and Media**
- **Be an Employer of Choice**
- **Smarter Agile Ways of Working**

- 1.22 This has been a period of great transformation at the Commission, whilst at the same time we have been incredibly busy in delivering our casework. Over the last three years we have reviewed 3,479 applications and referred 119 cases for review by the appropriate court, this has resulted in 100 miscarriages of justice being overturned. This has covered a range of cases, including 57 (64 total referred) Post Office cases, in what is widely seen as the most widespread miscarriage of justice in British legal history. Other cases of note were the Shrewsbury 24, Stockwell 6 and Oval 4 cases, all of which resulted in successful referrals.
- 1.23 In casework, in addition to the introduction of a new Case Management System, we have developed the casework structure introducing two new roles: Trainee Case Review Manager, and Senior Case Review Manager. This has for the first time provided a career pathway for Case Review Managers, which will help us to continue to find, develop and retain the highly skilled staff that we rely on to deliver excellence.
- 1.24 We conducted an internal review of our approach to applicant communications. We looked at decision documents, the use of provisional decisions and exceptional circumstances and are implementing improvements; whilst also introducing a Youth Justice Champion and delivering youth justice training.
- 1.25 We launched a new website, which includes the ability for people to make online applications. We also expanded our social media presence to Instagram, aiming to reach a younger demographic, a need that we identified through our analysis of applications.
- 1.26 We continued to focus on building relations with our stakeholders and have made efforts to widen the awareness of our work across the criminal justice system. The Stakeholder Forum has been involved in shaping developments, helping us to discuss our work with our stakeholders on a regular basis. It has provided an effective place to discuss improvements to areas of our work, for example helping us to shape our new decision templates. We have also continued to work with other charities and organisations who support people with convictions including Women in Prison, Advance, Sussex Prisoners families, 3Pillars, Working for Justice Group and Prisoner Advice Service.
- 1.27 In respect of smarter agile ways of working, all elements of our transformation programme were completed, and the organisation started to reap the benefits. Key successes included the overhaul of many systems and processes, in particular the new Case Management System, based on Microsoft Dynamics. This has been a real success enabling much easier management of cases, simplifying collaboration between teams, and giving a clearer picture of the flow of cases through the process. In addition, new systems are now in place

to support finance, business support and human resources. All of these new systems have streamlined processes and will offer the opportunity for further developments over the coming years.

1.28 The new systems and the associated technology that have been implemented over the last two years have enabled the CCRC to become a remote first organisation. This has meant we are able to widen the areas from which we can recruit, enabling us to bring invaluable new perspectives to the CCRC, with staff living in all parts of the United Kingdom. The move to remote first was supplemented with a successful move to a modern new office hub and decommissioning of the old office. Without these developments we would have struggled to recruit the number of excellent people we have appointed over the past two years.

1.29 We have enhanced our approach to managing quality in our work and have made good progress towards completing the introduction of a Quality Management System throughout the organisation, our goal is to complete this work within the first two years of the plan period. This will mean that our policies and procedures will have been reviewed and formalised for every function including casework, support areas and the corporate functions.

1.3 Context for the next three years

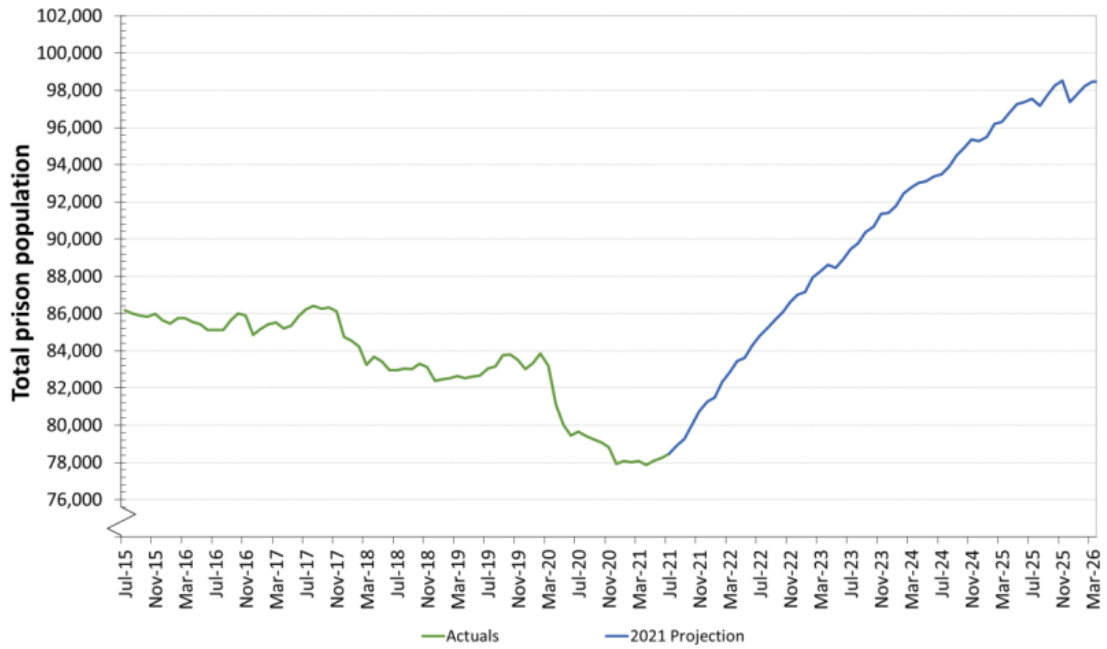
1.31 Over the next three years there will be many challenges for the country, and the wider public sector. We will not be alone in facing them, and the developments that we have put in place over the past three years will mean that our ability to meet those challenges will be greatly enhanced. However, with the country in a challenging economic period it is clear that all of the public sector will be affected. We have not had the funding settlement necessary to do all that we need to do; and we expect that going forward there will be continued pressure on resources and funding. This puts at risk our ability to act in areas such as developing our systems, or in promoting ourselves to potential applicants.

1.32 The economic climate and our underfunding also brings challenges in recruiting and retaining staff. This is common across the whole public sector but we feel it keenly in respect of our casework staff. For some time we have not been able to match salaries that other attractive employers offer and as a result we have an enduring trend of losing staff. This salary challenge suggests that inevitably people with the particular set of skills we look for when recruiting will have a range of employment options. This means we cannot compete on salary alone. It will also mean that our current colleagues will struggle with the cost of living and retention will need to be a key focus for us in the coming years.

- 1.33 When speaking to our stakeholders at our Stakeholder Forum meetings, they were telling us about the difficulties that they will face because of the challenging economic situation. For charities there was concern that they would struggle to secure the funding to continue to offer all the support that they do.
- 1.34 Our stakeholders in the legal sector outlined concerns over the amount of legal aid that would be available to support potential applicants to the CCRC, or to support with appeals.
- 1.35 These challenges could have the potential to lead to an increased workload for us, both from an increase in applicants who haven't yet exhausted their rights of appeal, and also a continued increase in the number of applicants who are not supported in their application to us. We know that in general the quality of applications can be better when the applicant has good quality legal representation. In cases where an applicant isn't supported, whilst they will receive the same thorough review, it may take our Case Review Managers longer to work through submissions to ensure that potential concerns or potential applications of our powers are identified even if applicants were unaware of them.
- 1.36 Another external development that will have an impact on the CCRC is the planned increase in prison numbers over the period of the corporate plan. The graph below, from the MOJ Bulletin issued in November 2021 (to support departmental planning), "Prison Population Projections 2021 to 2026, England and Wales" shows that there is a projected increase in prisoner numbers from around 84,000¹, at the time of writing, to 98,000 by the end of the plan period, this planned increase is corroborated by the capital allocation that the government has set aside to build extra prison capacity. Given that around 70% of our applications are from serving prisoners, we should therefore expect to see an increase in our applications over that period. We are currently seeing an increase in applications over the previous two years, and this is largely being driven by an increase in applications from prisoners, back to the around 1,000 applications per year that we averaged in the five years before the pandemic.

¹ According to the Prison Population Weekly bulletin for February 17, the prison population on 10th Feb was 83,469, with a prison capacity of 84,733. These are an increase on the figures 12 months before which were population of 79,721, with a capacity of 81,451. It should be noted that the projected number for March 2023 was 88,000, so current number is below projection.

Figure 1.1: Total prison population projection, July 2021 to March 2026⁶ (Source: Table A5).



2. Our Values

Effective organisations know what they stand for and what is important to them, and they express this through a set of collective values that articulate the way that they work, how people within the organisation treat each other, and how they interact with their stakeholders.

2.1 How we developed our values

2.11 Over the course of 2022 we have been talking with our staff and Commissioners, about what matters most to them, including what are the collective values that we hold, and what drives us to do a great job every day.

2.12 We held a series of workshops to discuss what our values are and how we make sure they are evident throughout the organisation.

2.13 At our staff development day, attended by seventy-five members of staff, our Commissioners and our independent non-executive directors, everyone was given the opportunity to comment on the themes that emerged from staff and Commissioners at the workshops, and identify the values that they felt most closely reflected their work at the CCRC. During the discussions, people felt that it would be most effective to have a few simple values, with a short explanation to show what each word means to us as an organisation.

2.2 Our values

2.21 At the core of what we do is finding, investigating, and referring miscarriages of justice and - as we make clear to our applicants, and our stakeholders – we do not work for the courts, or the police or our applicants. Our purpose is to identify when justice might not have been served, in effect we work for justice, and our work must be above reproach. In the discussions with our colleagues, it became clear very quickly that what was most important to all staff, Commissioners, and independent non-executive directors right across the organisation, was that there was no external influence over us whilst we conduct our work, that the process was independent, and that the only thing that should guide our work was whether a miscarriage of justice might have occurred. Alongside this, they felt it was important that we continue to speak up when we think that the criminal justice system can be improved, and that we give our opinion without interference. Therefore, the thing that people wanted to say that they valued most was:

Independence

Our work is independent. It will not be influenced by external partners, and our only consideration is whether a miscarriage of justice might have occurred. We will provide feedback on developments in the criminal justice system without

influence or interference, based on what we see is necessary to ensure justice is served.

2.22 After establishing this, the discussions focussed on what personal values we felt represented the way that we approach our work.

2.23 What came through clearly in the workshops was that people chose to work at the CCRC because they believe strongly in the purpose of the organisation, and that this inspired them in their work. To balance this passion for our work, people were clear that because of the impact our work can have on people's lives it must be done well, with skill and competence in a professional manner, taking advantage of all the technology and resources available. This is captured in the two values below:

Passion

We are passionate about our work. We believe strongly in the importance of our role in the criminal justice system.

Professionalism

We are professional. We work with skill and competence, delivering quality work to meet our high standards.

2.24 Our next value reflects that a sense of justice runs through the organisation, not just in our decision making on casework, but in the way that we work with each other, our stakeholders and our applicants:

Fairness

We are fair. Our work is impartial and we treat everyone with respect, taking account of people's needs to ensure equal access to justice.

2.25 We are acutely aware of the fact that we are the only organisation of our kind, having the powers to obtain information and to refer cases to the Court of Appeal in England and Wales, and the Court of Appeal Northern Ireland, as well as to the Crown Court. Because of that we have a responsibility to be accountable for our work, both as individuals and collectively. As an organisation that was created because the criminal justice system can make mistakes, we recognise that we too can make mistakes, and when we do we will learn and improve:

Accountability

We are accountable. As a unique organisation we must, both individually and collectively, take responsibility for our work, maintain our quality, and continuously improve.

2.26 Over the period of the corporate plan we will make sure that our values are at the heart of the organisation. They will become a key part of our annual objective setting process for individuals and will be part of our recruitment process. Staff will be able to use them as a guide to nominate colleagues as a part of our reward and recognition process. We will also use them in our corporate communications – helping our stakeholders to understand what is important to us, and what shapes our work.

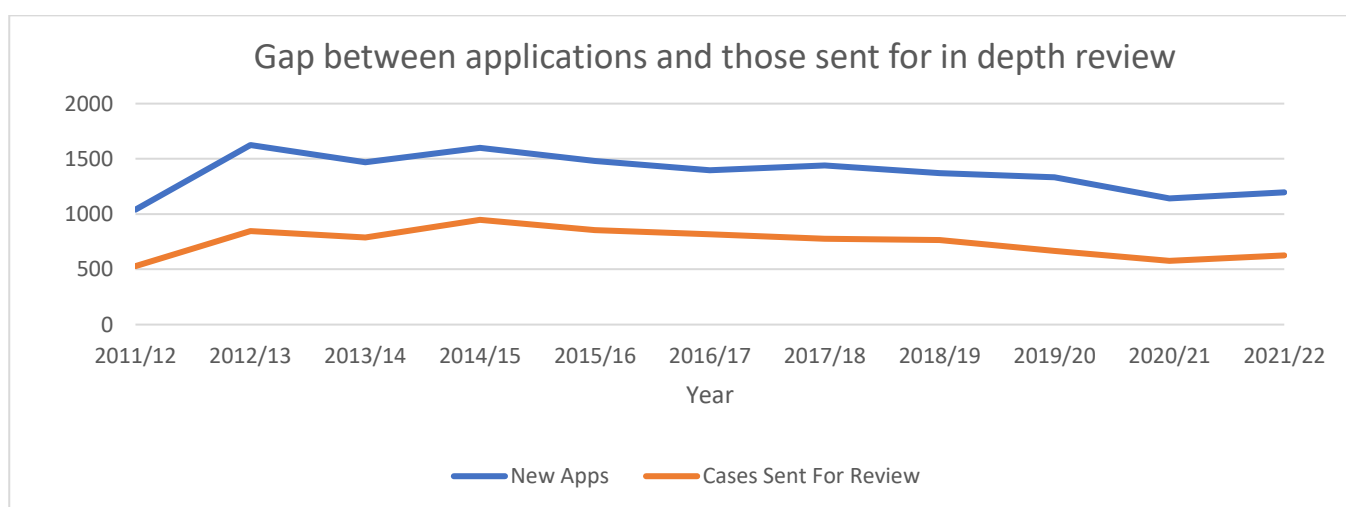
3. Our Strategic Priorities

- 3.1 As discussed, the next three years will bring challenges for everyone in the UK, and we need to remember that context as we think about what developments we should prioritise over the next three years and recognise that we will need to be aware of what is possible within the resource available.
- 3.2 During our discussions, both internally and with our stakeholders, what was clear is that there is a passionate desire to not miss any potential miscarriages of justice. We think from our discussions with our stakeholders and by looking at the numbers of failed appeals at both the Crown Court and Court of Appeal Criminal Division, that there are potentially more cases of miscarriages of justice which we need to find.
- 3.3 A good example of this is cases that originate in the Magistrates' Courts. On average, we get around 155 applications from Magistrate Court cases every year. This is equivalent to less than 2% of the number of unsuccessful appeals from Magistrates' Courts to the Crown Court. This does not include people who have pleaded guilty in Magistrates' Courts, an area that has produced many referrals in previous years (Post Office and Asylum and Immigration cases are two good examples). We know just from the Post Office cases that a conviction in a Magistrates' Court can have a long-lasting impact on people, limiting their future opportunities and isolating them from their community.
- 3.4 By comparison, we see a much higher number of applications per year from people who have appealed unsuccessfully to the Court of Appeal (on average around 700) – which is around 18% of the number of unsuccessful cases at the Court of Appeal.
- 3.5 Our assumption, therefore, is that there is likely to be increased miscarriages of justice for us to find that originate from Magistrates' Courts. To test that assumption and understand how best we can tackle this discrepancy over the next three years, in the first year of the plan period we will undertake a data led pilot. This pilot will seek to identify, investigate, and review potential applications, learning how best we can focus our efforts on finding cases from Magistrates' Courts. After evaluating the pilot we will then use the findings to roll out more widely in years two and three.
- 3.6 We recognise that if we are looking for more potential miscarriages of justice this will mean that we are likely to see an increase in applications. This will be in addition to the current rise in applications that, as we predicted, has followed the ending of COVID restrictions in prisons.
- 3.7 We predict that, with the factors discussed above, the on-going trend in applications will be up, so to be able to meet the extra demand we need to

have the capacity to carry out extra investigations and reviews. Over the coming three years we will be looking to take advantage of the improved systems we have, and the increase in data that they provide to understand better where we can gain time in our processes, what the blockers are and how we can reduce them. Combining this with improvements in the way we share knowledge, we think that we can reduce the time burden on our staff, and ensure they have more time to use their expertise on appropriate areas of work. This will allow us to meet some of the predicted increase, however we know that there will still be a need to increase the number of casework staff and Commissioners to be able to ensure swift access to justice.

3.8 Our stakeholders told us that digitalisation of prisons will be moving forward over the coming years, and this will present us with opportunities to improve access to information for serving prisoners, and potentially make it easier for our casework staff to talk directly with applicants through video link, which would reduce barriers to access. These developments might not be immediate, but over the course of the plan it is important that we lay the groundwork, so we are ready to take advantage in this area.

3.9 We will look at how we communicate about our work, both with the criminal justice system, and with our potential and current applicants. If we can improve the understanding of what might constitute an application with potential for referral, we might be able to reduce the number of applications that don't progress to an in-depth review. Every application that falls within our remit² is reviewed first at the triage stage, and if there is potential, it will progress to an in-depth review and investigation. The graph below shows the number of applications that progress to the in-depth review stage. If we can improve understanding, and close the gap between the lines, then this will free up casework resource to meet the predicted increase.



² Around 5% of applications are not within our remit, for example were there was no crime committed)

3.10 Most importantly, we recognise that to achieve our ambitions we need the best people, and we will, through strong leadership focus on what matters most to our people. By ensuring that we are an employer of choice it will enable us to retain and develop our staff, recruit to a high standard, invest in our people and provide them with the support they need to deliver excellence, and to feel valued for the work that they do. Our most recent staff survey results confirm what staff told us during the values workshops, that people feel engaged with the work that they do and are passionate about it. We recognise that the economic situation and our funding challenges will provide challenges for our staff, and we will do all that we can, with the resources we have, to remain an employer of choice.

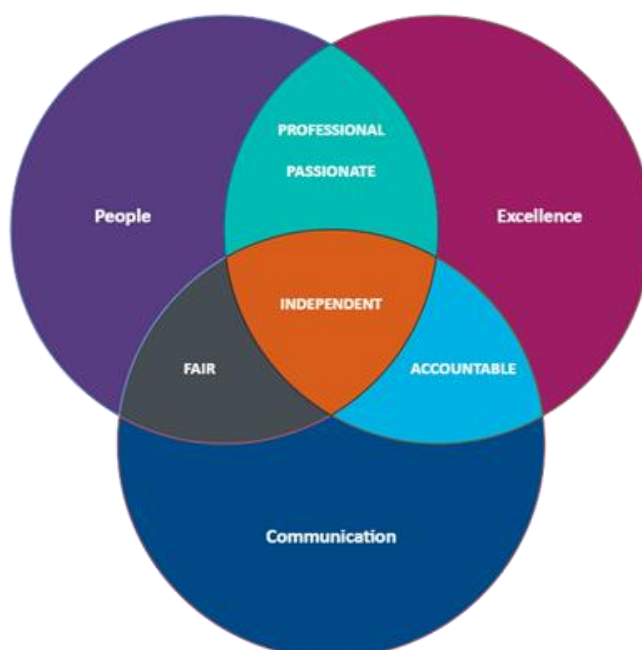
3.11 Being clear on what we want to achieve we have identified three key areas which comprise our strategic priorities for the corporate plan period. These are:

People: Being an employer of choice

Communication: Enhanced engagement with applicants and stakeholders

Excellence: Continuously improving how we work

3.12 The delivery of these priorities will be driven by our values, the interrelationship of which is shown below.



4. People

Being an Employer of Choice

- 4.1 As a small organisation, we are acutely aware of the important role that every person who works in the CCRC fulfils. To make sure we can deliver the excellent outcomes that we want we must be able to retain and attract good people and support them in their development. The link between excellent people and excellent outcomes for the CCRC is clear; hence placing People at the head of our strategic priorities.
- 4.2 Being an employer of choice is about good leadership, being clear on the direction and priorities of the organisation, and about creating an environment that people choose to join and where they want to stay. It is about leaders across the organisation understanding the needs of their staff, motivating and developing them, being responsive to concerns, ensuring that all staff feel valued, and letting them know their good work is recognised.
- 4.3 We will continue to build on the positive steps we have made in this area, as reflected by the improved engagement shown by our staff survey results, and will work to further enhance a culture, which:
- Retains, attracts and develops talent at all levels throughout the organisation;
 - Ensures our values remain current and are lived; and
 - Recognises the challenges and opportunities that new ways of working bring.
- 4.4 In order to deliver on these aims, we have developed a people strategy that will be in place for the next three years, and which will support leaders across the organisation to ensure the CCRC is an employer of choice.

The people strategy is supported by the following 5 interconnecting plans:

- **Recruitment** to recruit and retain the right people, with the right skills, at the right time, and at the right cost, whilst reflecting the diverse nature of the communities we serve.
- **Learning & Development** to create a supportive and positive environment that empowers our people to reach their full potential and have long and satisfying careers with us; developing their skills and capabilities to help us achieve our strategic priorities.
- **Wellbeing** to continue developing a working environment that promotes wellbeing and enables our people to flourish.

- **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.** The Commission is committed to ensuring that all staff and Commissioners are treated with equity. This means equal access to opportunities, bespoke and individual support in the staff career journey, as well as creating an equitably focused working environment and culture.
- **Supporting our People** to provide a first class HR service that enables and supports our people to understand their value and role in achieving CCRC's objectives and perform at their best.

4.5 The key risk associated with this priority is lack of Staff and Commissioner resource.

4.51 This is currently our highest risk and due to the small size of the CCRC the organisation has a number of 'single points of excellence' in its staffing structure plus limited ability to instigate succession planning because of our size. This could result in vital areas of work being either not undertaken or taking longer to complete if the staff member or Commissioner is absent. Of particular concern is succession in casework; the rate of pay means recruitment campaigns (for Commissioners, Case Review Managers and other casework staff) may not be successful, resulting in insufficient numbers in post which will negatively impact the services provided by the CCRC and our ability to fulfil our purpose.

4.52 Whilst the people strategy will not necessarily be able to tackle the pay challenge because this is something controlled by central government, it will focus on ensuring that we are able to mitigate this risk by retaining, developing and recruiting good people, and by enabling us to be an employer of choice.

5. Communication

Enhanced engagement with applicants and stakeholders

- 5.1 In the previous corporate plan, we identified enhanced engagement with stakeholders and media as one of our strategic aims. We have done a great deal in this area but there is still more that we want to do and have requested funding to help us. With a new structure for the communications team a newly developed communication strategy will be in place and delivered over the three-year period of the Corporate Plan.
- 5.2 When talking with our stakeholders they felt it was important to highlight our special powers, our independence, and the lack of cost or jeopardy involved in applying to us. They felt that we could be clearer in laying out our timescales and the rates of referral up-front to manage expectations. Many potential applicants have been led to believe that there is a fee to come to us when there is not. Some of our past successful applicants spoke about the emotional challenges involved in applying, not because of the process, but because of the difficult memories that were brought up by revisiting their case. It is important that the applicant engagement elements of the communication strategy pick up on these elements going forward.
- 5.3 In the communication strategy the proposed purpose of our communications will be:
- To educate potential applicants about what circumstances are most likely to merit an in-depth review and investigation;
 - To improve our legitimacy and increase trust in our services, to increase brand awareness of the CCRC and celebrate our real world impact, and through this increase applications;
 - Support the recruitment and retention of a high calibre workforce of both staff and Commissioners; and
 - Increase the CCRC's position as thought leaders – to share our knowledge with the wider criminal justice system
- 5.4 The communication strategy will be delivered through a variety of means, and will be focussed on the following areas:
- Applicant Outreach
 - Digital and social media
 - Stakeholders
 - Traditional and Citizen Media
 - Internal Communications

5.4.1 The Internet gives the CCRC a fantastic opportunity to directly engage with potential applicants, the legal sector and the general public. The new External Affairs strategy will see a renewed focus on social media, to give us a greater ability to directly communicate with our audience.

Doing so will create a better chance to positively influence the public narrative around the CCRC and provide an opportunity to educate potential applicants (and those who might influence potential applicants) about the CCRC and our application process.

We will tailor our messaging for different objectives and audiences for each social media platform – for example, using LinkedIn to support recruitment and promote the CCRC’s thought leadership, Instagram to drive applications and Twitter for more broad messaging about historic referrals.

5.5 One of our key risks is that there might be a lack of awareness of the CCRC’s role and function which would mean that potential applicants are not able to apply because they do not know that there is that option in law, or that there is a free, independent organisation that can help them. This is why communication is one of our three strategic priorities, and it is intended that the new strategy in this area will reduce this risk.

6. Excellence

Excellence in our work

- 6.1 This strategic priority is about how we deliver excellence in our work. In the previous corporate plan we focused on excellence in casework, however throughout the staff engagement, it was clear that people, no matter what their role in the organisation, wanted to do the best job that they could because we are all contributing to the work of finding, investigating and referring miscarriages of justice.
- 6.2 In order to deliver on this priority we will focus the work around two main areas the first of which is:
- 6.21 Maintaining the quality and independence of our casework. This will include:
- Developing a new casework strategy – looking at our ambition around finding more potential miscarriages of justice and balancing it with the challenges that we will face over the coming years around resources.
 - Looking at how the new systems can help us use better data to find blockages and delays and overcome them.
 - Looking at ways we can improve access to our services, especially for people who may have additional needs. We will be utilising the emerging digital technology in prisons to let people know what we do, and to provide more direct access.
 - Embedding quality management through casework – building on the work of the past few years and ensuring all of the casework elements of the Quality Management System (QMS) are in place, are being used and are reviewed in line with best practice. We will use the QMS to drive continuous improvement and learning.
 - Delivering an improved knowledge sharing platform - as an organisation that conducts complex investigations, and works across the wide, and ever developing field of criminal law, it is important that we have easy access to a wide range of knowledge, best practice and guidance.
- 6.22 Ensuring the professionalism of all elements of the organisation. This will include:
- Delivering the expanded QMS throughout the organisation, ensuring that our procedures are clear, are implemented and are regularly reviewed.

- Using the new systems to aid management, developing our operational performance indicators, and becoming more aware of the data that we create and how we can use it to inform our decision making.
- Develop an enhanced approach to business planning for all departments, building on the current whole organisation plan.
- Delivering a new IT strategy that looks to maximise benefits of the modernised systems that have been delivered over the past three years.

6.3 The key strategic risks that are associated with this priority are insufficient operational resource as well as the inability to predict or control casework demand.

6.31 The prospect of insufficient operational resources has been discussed in the context section and will mean that it will continue to be challenging to recruit and retain staff, and without outstanding staff it will be difficult to deliver the excellence we strive for.

6.32 By working through the data that is collected in the new systems, and by working within the QMS, and its inbuilt review processes, it is expected that we will develop a greater understanding of how casework demand will impact on elements of our casework, and whilst demand will still be largely beyond our control, we should be able to anticipate what effect it will have on us, and how that will flow through the system during the duration of the reviews.

6.33 Similarly, by embedding the QMS, and the development and learning associated with it, and by striving for excellence and professionalism throughout our work, this should help to reduce the exposure to legal action.

6.34 To support our ambitions, our new IT strategy will have a strong focus on continuing to deliver improved cyber/data security, to meet emerging threats, this has been aided a great deal by the improved systems delivered through the transformation programme during the previous plan period.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 We recognise the vital role we play in promoting confidence in the criminal justice system, through our work in finding, investigating and referring miscarriages of justice, and through the effort we make to promote ourselves and the findings we uncover.
- 7.2 Right across the Commission there is a passion to ensure that every potential miscarriage of justice is investigated, and that this is done as effectively as possible.
- 7.3 The upcoming corporate plan period will bring challenges for the whole public sector, but we will benefit from the excellent work done in the previous three years to transform the systems and processes of the Commission.
- 7.4 During the next three years we want to increase the number of applications that lead to an in-depth review, believing that there is opportunity to do so, and recognising that there might be areas where we are not seeing as many applications as we would expect.
- 7.5 To be able to fulfil our ambitions we need to retain and recruit outstanding people, and through strong leadership we aim to do this by being an employer of choice.
- 7.6 We do recognise, however, that the economic challenges facing the public sector may mean that we need to adjust our ambitions, and during the plan period we will closely monitor the situation, keeping our plans flexible, and changing to meet the circumstances.

We very much welcome your feedback on our corporate plan. For contact details, see overleaf.

Further information about the Commission can be obtained from our website. We are very happy to receive comments about this plan or any other aspect of our work.

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