HMCPSI
HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate

Serious economic and organised crime casework

How the structure, governance and assurance processes of the Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Directorate support effective case management and high-quality legal decision-making

November 2026

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Who we are

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate inspects prosecution services, providing evidence to make the prosecution process better and more accountable.

We have a statutory duty to inspect the work of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Serious Fraud Office (SFO). By special arrangement, we also share our expertise with other prosecution services in the UK and overseas.

We are independent of the organisations we inspect, and our methods of gathering evidence and reporting are open and transparent. We do not judge or enforce; we inform prosecution services' strategies and activities by presenting evidence of good practice and issues to address. Independent inspections like these help to maintain trust in the prosecution process.

Our vision

We are part of the solution to improving the criminal justice system through high-quality inspection.

We have four priorities to enable us to deliver this vision:

- we hold the CPS and SFO to account for what they deliver (we make recommendations that drive improvement)
- victims will be at the heart of inspection (where we can, we will use victim experience in our inspection)
- using our 25 years of experience we will help public prosecutors improve (their legal casework)
- inspection will identify and spread best practice.

Our values

We act with integrity, creating a culture of respect, drive innovation, pursue ambition, and commit to inclusivity in everything we do.

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1. Chief Inspector's foreword

This inspection examined whether the Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Directorate (SEOCID) has the governance, assurance and oversight arrangements necessary to support high-quality legal decision-making in some of the Crown Prosecution Service's most complex and demanding casework.

We found effective governance arrangements, strong management oversight of casework and a workforce with considerable specialist expertise

SEOCID operates in a challenging environment. Its cases are frequently high-profile, resource-intensive and legally complex, often involving substantial disclosure responsibilities, multiple agencies and lengthy investigations. Effective governance, strong leadership and robust assurance arrangements are therefore essential to identify risks early, manage them effectively and translate them into continuous improvement.

SEOCID was created by bringing together some casework divisions which we had previously inspected: the Specialist Fraud Division and the International Justice and Organised Crime Division. The merger was meant to increase organisational resilience and provide a more effective and consistent approach to the assurance and management of casework.

This inspection found that the creation of a combined division has generally achieved what the merger intended.

We found effective governance arrangements, strong management oversight of casework and a workforce with considerable specialist expertise. Senior leaders demonstrated a good understanding of operational risks and had established a range of mechanisms to assure themselves of case quality and progression. We also found evidence of strong, constructive relationships with key law enforcement partners, which were increasingly used to identify issues and support improvement.

Importantly, this inspection also demonstrated the value that independent inspection can bring even before we commence our inspection work. During our early engagement with SEOCID leadership on the scope and focus of this inspection, several issues emerged that prompted reflection and action by the division. Between those initial discussions and the commencement of fieldwork, SEOCID implemented several significant changes that addressed areas that later became part of our inspection activity.

These included introducing an administrative triage process for incoming cases, designed to improve the quality and completeness of material submitted by law enforcement agencies before legal review. Although implementation was postponed from February to April 2026 following representations from HM Revenue and Customs, the delay reflected constructive stakeholder engagement. It helped ensure that the new arrangements were introduced in a way that secured support and understanding from partner organisations.

SEOCID also refreshed the Regional and Wales Division legal leadership forum, replacing one quarterly casework quality board meeting with an in-person forum focused on professional discussion, learning and the sharing of good practice. This recognised the importance of creating structured opportunities for legal managers to consider emerging challenges, strengthen consistency and promote organisational learning.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate a leadership team willing to listen, reflect and act

In March 2026, SEOCID decided to elevate responsibility for strategic oversight of disclosure from unit head to Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutor level. This clearly recognised the significance of disclosure risk in serious and complex casework and showed senior leaders' willingness to strengthen accountability and governance where needed.

We also saw early action to strengthen relationships with His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS). This included heads of Area operations directly engaging with regional HMCTS leaders to develop a clearer and more consistent approach at all courts where SEOCID cases are listed. This builds on the engagement that has strengthened in recent times between Chief Crown Prosecutors and the Resident Judge at Southwark Crown Court, where most SEOCID cases are listed. While our inspection found that court engagement remained less mature than relationships with law enforcement agencies, these initiatives reflected a positive commitment to strengthening collaboration with court partners and addressing an area that we identified as requiring further development.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate a leadership team willing to listen, reflect and act. They illustrate how independent inspection can encourage improvement before a report is published and reinforce the importance of constructive engagement between the inspectorate and those we inspect.

Overall, we found that SEOCID has established effective governance, management oversight and assurance arrangements which support the delivery of high-quality casework in a highly complex and high-risk environment.

However, the directorate now has an opportunity to build on these strong foundations by ensuring that learning generated through its extensive assurance activity is captured, analysed and disseminated more systematically across the organisation. Doing so will help ensure that improvements are embedded consistently and that good practice is shared across all parts of the directorate.

The commitment shown by SEOCID's leaders and staff throughout this inspection gives me confidence that they are well placed to address these challenges and continue to strengthen their approach to managing serious economic and organised crime casework.



Anthony Rogers
Chief Inspector

2. Summary

Purpose of the inspection

2.1. This inspection examined how effectively the Crown Prosecution Service's (CPS) Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Directorate's (SEOCID) governance, management and assurance arrangements support the delivery of its casework, identify and manage risk, and drive organisational learning and improvement.

2.2. SEOCID is responsible for some of the CPS's most serious, complex and high-profile cases. The cases it deals with are often lengthy, high-profile and reputationally important; they are resource-intensive and involve significant disclosure, evidential and operational risks.

2.3. Effective governance and assurance are therefore essential to maintain case quality, identify emerging risks at an early stage and ensure that learning from casework is captured and applied consistently across the directorate. This inspection considered how well SEOCID's arrangements provide that assurance and support continuous improvement.

How we carried out the inspection

2.4. Inspectors reviewed documentation relating to governance, management and assurance arrangements across SEOCID. We also observed governance and assurance meetings. This helped us identify issues for further exploration through interviews and focus groups with staff across the directorate, including senior leaders, legal managers, specialist prosecutors, operational managers and operational staff.

Headline findings

2.5. SEOCID operates in a complex and demanding environment, prosecuting serious economic and organised crime cases that frequently involve large volumes of material, multiple defendants, lengthy investigations, international dimensions and significant legal, operational and reputational risks.

2.6. Against this background, we found that SEOCID has established governance, assurance, workforce and stakeholder arrangements that broadly support the delivery of high-quality and timely casework. The directorate benefits from experienced staff, close managerial oversight, well-established relationships with law enforcement partners and governance structures capable of identifying and responding to significant casework risks.

2.7. However, greater consistency is required across the International, London, and South-East Division (ILSED) and the Regional and Wales Division

(RWD), particularly in the use of assurance findings, the capture of organisational learning and more structured engagement with HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS).

2.8. SEOCID has established clear operational oversight of its casework. Senior leaders understood the principal pressures affecting case progression, and there were appropriate arrangements for escalating high-risk and sensitive cases. Regular engagement between legal and operational managers, structured monthly casework discussions, operational checks and local monitoring arrangements supported oversight. These ensured emerging risks could be identified promptly and complex cases received appropriate scrutiny.

The CMS does not have sufficient capacity to hold all the material generated by many SEOCID cases

2.9. The close working relationship between unit heads and paralegal business managers within teams was an important feature of the directorate's approach. In ILSED, aligning these functions created a clear connection between legal and operational delivery and supported joint ownership of issues affecting case progression. RWD could not replicate this model directly because of its geographical structure and the differing numbers and locations of managers. This created a risk that issues spanning legal and operational delivery might not always be followed through as consistently. RWD should consider whether it can adapt elements of ILSED's approach to strengthen collaboration and accountability within its operating model.

2.10. Local case trackers, case lists and direct management engagement were essential safeguards against case progression risks that could not readily be identified through the CPS case management system (CMS). The CMS does not have sufficient capacity to hold all the material generated by many SEOCID cases or to provide all the information needed to manage large and complex casework effectively. A hybrid case management model has therefore developed, with information held across the CMS, shared drives, locally maintained trackers and case management documents.

2.11. These arrangements provide necessary operational safeguards, but they also create inefficiency and increase the dependence on accurate manual recording. We identified variation in shared-drive structures and occasional weaknesses in the completeness of trackers and case management records. Across the division, the case management document was widely regarded as the definitive case record and was generally completed to a good standard. However, there were examples where case strategy had not been updated or where legacy documents remained in use. Although leaders had recognised

these issues and were taking action, the reliance on local systems and manual updating remains a risk to consistency, continuity and assurance.

2.12. SEOCID's casework process manual provides comprehensive guidance on case management and is valued by legal and operational staff. However, its length and format make it difficult to navigate, and the process for incorporating changes has not always been sufficiently timely. Restructuring the manual into more accessible intranet content should improve usability and make updates easier. In the meantime, accessible guidance and effective checks remain important to ensure that staff apply casework processes consistently.

2.13. We found that SEOCID's governance framework provides clear routes for strategic, divisional and casework oversight. The cross-divisional board, divisional senior leadership boards, casework quality boards and thematic groups together provide mechanisms for identifying risks, setting actions and monitoring improvement. There were examples of assurance findings being used to commission work, improve engagement with law enforcement partners and address weaknesses in disclosure and victim strategy.

Regular one-to-one meetings and case discussions support early risk identification, professional challenge and timely escalation

2.14. Approaches across ILSED and RWD have not always been aligned. However, the cross-divisional board has taken a stronger role in identifying effective practice, setting shared expectations and agreeing common approaches. This developing alignment is positive. At the same time, some senior leaders identified potential duplication and uncertainty about the respective purposes of particular boards. The review of governance arrangements provides an opportunity to clarify the boards' roles, rationalise activity where necessary and ensure the structure operates efficiently and without duplication.

2.15. SEOCID has a comprehensive assurance framework that provides effective oversight of individual cases. A particular strength is the close managerial oversight provided by unit heads. Prosecutors manage relatively small caseloads because of the complexity of their work, enabling unit heads to maintain detailed knowledge of the cases within their teams. Regular one-to-one meetings, case discussions and ongoing supervision support early risk identification, professional challenge, coaching and timely escalation. Prosecutors consistently regarded this direct engagement as the most effective assurance mechanism.

2.16. Case strategy assessments, disclosure gateway reviews, case management panels, case debriefs and casework quality assessments provide further layers of assurance. The arrangements for disclosure were the clearest example of this framework operating as intended during our inspection. Assurance activity identified weaknesses, divisional boards considered the performance implications, specialist forums developed the response, and the cross-divisional board set priorities across SEOCID. Although the impact on disclosure performance had not yet been demonstrated, there was a clear pathway for escalating concerns and coordinating action.

2.17. Case management panels also added value. The panels we observed were generally well prepared, appropriately attended and focused on significant strategic and progression issues. They provided constructive senior challenge and helped prosecutors resolve difficult questions. However, their use varied between teams, referral criteria were not always clearly understood and operational delivery staff were not consistently involved where post-charge progression issues required their contribution. Greater consistency in referral expectations, attendance and recording would strengthen the assurance provided.

2.18. The main weakness in the assurance framework was not the absence of activity, but the inconsistent conversion of assurance findings into organisational learning. We found examples where learning from individual cases had informed guidance, training and improvement activity, particularly in relation to disclosure. ILSED had a more structured approach to bringing together findings from different assurance sources and using them to identify themes. Arrangements in RWD were developing, including through its refreshed legal leadership forum, but were less mature at the time of inspection.

Sharing learning from assurance activity more consistently would strengthen practice across the directorate

2.19. SEOCID is therefore effective in identifying, escalating and managing case-specific risks, but needs to improve the feedback loops between assurance activity, thematic analysis, practitioner learning and organisational improvement. A clearer process is needed to bring together themes from case strategy assessments, disclosure reviews, case management panels, debriefs, operational assurance and stakeholder engagement. This would help ensure that lessons identified in one team or division result in shared expectations and improved practice across the directorate.

2.20. SEOCID has a highly capable and experienced workforce. Staff, managers and stakeholders consistently described legal and operational staff as

knowledgeable, professional and committed. The creation of SEOCID brought together substantial expertise from its predecessor divisions and provided a strong foundation for prosecuting serious economic and organised crime. The directorate also retained appropriate subject-matter specialisms while developing greater flexibility across its wider caseload.

2.21. A significant strength was the emphasis placed on coaching, supported casework experience and peer learning. SEOCID used case allocation, second-lawyer arrangements, unit head oversight, subject matter leads, shadowing, workshops and informal learning to build capability. Given the specialist nature of the work, this experience-based approach was appropriate. SEOCID's structured succession planning, including unit head and national lawyer shadowing schemes, was good practice. It supported knowledge transfer, developed future leaders and helped strengthen the potential recruitment pipeline for specialist prosecutors.

Operational pressures sometimes reduced opportunities to use allocation and deployment as planned development tools

2.22. Recruitment remains a significant longer-term risk. The pool of prosecutors with sufficient complex casework experience is limited, and recent recruitment campaigns did not fill all available posts. Retention was generally strong, and SEOCID was regarded as a centre of casework excellence. However, the age profile and experience requirements of the specialist prosecutor cadre make succession planning particularly important. The shadowing schemes and the establishment of the central fraud team offer potential routes to develop future specialist prosecutors.

2.23. Operational delivery staff were also highly regarded, but there were resilience pressures, particularly within RWD. Extensive travel, prolonged court attendance, changes to trial listings and turnover among paralegal officers increased the demands on experienced staff and managers. ILSED experienced different pressures, including concerns about pay and progression for staff who did not wish to enter management. Leaders recognised these issues and the people board monitored targeted actions. We found no evidence that either division lacked the capability required to deliver its work, but operational pressures sometimes reduced opportunities to use allocation and deployment as planned development tools.

2.24. Relationships with law enforcement partners were a significant strength. SEOCID had established a comprehensive framework of referral criteria, memoranda of understanding, disclosure arrangements and joint governance. Strategic and operational joint operational improvement meetings provided clear

routes for discussion, escalation and collaborative problem-solving. Stakeholders described open communication, trusted professional relationships and good access to senior leaders.

2.25. SEOCID actively used these relationships to improve operational performance. Joint disclosure reviews, reciprocal training, improvements to International Letters of Request and post-case debriefs demonstrated a positive culture of shared learning. The introduction of the pending response further investigation process showed that engagement was not always sufficiently effective at the outset of operational change. However, SEOCID responded constructively to stakeholder concerns, refined the process and introduced safeguards. The later handling of administrative triage also demonstrated a willingness to delay implementation, listen to partners and amend arrangements where necessary.

2.26. SEOCID's engagement with the courts was less mature. Its national and unpredictable court footprint makes it more difficult to build the consistent local relationships available to CPS Areas. Strong arrangements existed where courts regularly handled SEOCID work, particularly at Southwark Crown Court and, to a lesser extent, Birmingham and Nottingham. Elsewhere, court staff did not always understand SEOCID's role or the particular demands of its casework.

2.27. Regional arrangements with HMCTS for listing SEOCID cases at designated court centres were at an early stage. Particular difficulties arose in obtaining first hearing dates from magistrates' courts, where staff often lacked named contacts and effective escalation routes. Wider court backlogs and listing pressures are not within SEOCID's direct control, but a more structured and consistent approach to HMCTS engagement would help the directorate manage their impact. The revised Practice Direction on the listing of cases allows SEOCID, HMCTS and the judiciary to strengthen national arrangements and improve the management and listing of serious and complex cases.

2.28. Overall, we found that SEOCID has strong foundations. Its experienced workforce, close managerial oversight, comprehensive governance and assurance mechanisms, and trusted relationships with law enforcement partners support effective management of serious and complex casework. The directorate is generally successful in identifying and managing immediate risks. Its principal strategic challenges are to reduce variation between ILSED and RWD, strengthen organisational learning, maintain specialist recruitment pipelines, address operational delivery resilience and develop more consistent relationships with HMCTS.

Recommendations, strengths and good practice

2.29. We make one recommendation:

Recommendation
By May 2027, the Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Directorate should introduce a process to identify, record and share organisational learning arising from assurance activity. That process should provide a clear route for thematic learning to be reported into the legal leadership forum and the casework quality boards to inform guidance, training, shared expectations and improvement activity across the directorate. [paragraph 6.43]

Strengths
Monthly one-to-one meetings between legal managers and specialist prosecutors provide detailed oversight that allows identification and action to address issues and highlight good practice. [paragraph 6.9]
A strong emphasis on coaching, oversight and supported casework progression. [paragraph 7.10]
Strong strategic engagement, open communication and trusted professional relationships across law enforcement partners. [paragraph 8.6]

Good practice
The Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Directorate's structured approach to succession planning and workforce development, including shadowing opportunities, supported career pathways and knowledge transfer arrangements, helps sustain specialist capability and develop future leaders. [paragraph 7.16]

3. Context and background

3.1. The Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Directorate (SEOCID) is a specialist directorate within the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). It prosecutes serious economic and organised crime, including cases with an international element.

3.2. In the HMCPSI *Business plan 2025–26*[1], we set out our intention to inspect how SEOCID has developed since its creation in 2022. This inspection considers the extent to which SEOCID has embedded the structures, governance and assurance arrangements needed to manage serious, complex casework effectively.

3.3. SEOCID operates in a changing criminal landscape. Serious economic and organised crime is increasingly complex, digitally enabled and international in nature. Cases frequently involve substantial volumes of digital material, multiple suspects, cross-border evidence, asset recovery considerations and close working with a range of law enforcement and government partners. These features create significant demands on prosecutors, managers and operational systems.

3.4. For the CPS, this changing environment highlighted the need for specialist capability, resilience and flexibility. Its work on the changing nature of crime considered how specialist divisions could respond more effectively to complex casework, strengthen national coordination, share expertise and provide clearer governance and escalation arrangements.

Creation and remit

3.5. SEOCID was launched on 1 April 2022. It brought together specialist prosecution expertise from the International Justice and Organised Crime Division, the Specialist Fraud Division and the Proceeds of Crime Division (POCD) within a single directorate. Its creation was intended to support a more integrated approach to serious economic crime, organised crime, international casework and asset recovery.

3.6. SEOCID receives work from police and non-police investigators, including the National Crime Agency, HM Revenue and Customs, City of London Police and the Department for Work and Pensions. Its work requires sustained engagement with investigators and other partners throughout the life of complex cases.

[1] *Business plan 2025–26*; HMCPSI; April 2025. hmcpsi.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/report/hmcpsi-business-plan-2025-26/

3.7. The CPS's *Economic crime strategy 2025*[2] emphasised the importance of strengthening capability, improving digital case management, supporting victims and witnesses, and maintaining effective relationships with investigative and criminal justice partners.

3.8. The *CPS serious economic and organised crime strategy 2030*[3], launched in June of this year, further reflects the increasing convergence between fraud, organised crime, cyber offending and hostile state activity. The strategy set out how SEOCID forms part of the CPS's wider response to the increasing prevalence and complexity of economic crime.

Current structure

3.9. At the time of this inspection, SEOCID comprised three divisions:

- the International, London and South-East Division (ILSED)
- the Regional and Wales Division (RWD)
- POCD.

3.10. ILSED and RWD contain specialist multidisciplinary teams dealing with serious and complex organised crime and economic crime casework. POCD focuses on recovering assets obtained through criminal activity.

3.11. RWD is responsible for the prosecution of serious economic and organised crime across the Midlands, the South West, the North and Wales. Its casework is managed through regional structures led by senior legal managers. During the evidence gathering phase of our inspection, the division also included the Organised Child Sexual Abuse Unit; by time of writing and publication, however, the unit had moved to align with CPS Cymru Wales.

3.12. ILSED is responsible for serious economic and organised crime casework in London, the South East and East of England. It also includes international and extradition teams, which provide specialist expertise on mutual legal assistance, extradition, asset recovery and international engagement.

3.13. SEOCID was undergoing structural change at the time of inspection. During our evidence-gathering stage, a new Chief Crown Prosecutor had been appointed to the Regional and Wales Division, and three fraud hubs based in

[2] *Economic crime strategy 2025*; CPS; May 2025. cps.gov.uk/publication/economic-crime-strategy-2025-final-progress-report-may-2025
[3] *Crown Prosecution Service serious and economic organised crime strategy 2030*; CPS; June 2026. cps.gov.uk/publication/crown-prosecution-service-serious-and-economic-organised-crime-strategy-2030

CPS Wales, CPS Wessex and CPS Mersey Cheshire were being consolidated into a central fraud team within RWD.

3.14. The inspection took place while SEOCID was embedding these changes to its structure and governance arrangements. However, those changes were not significant enough to impede our ability to assess performance or draw conclusions. Our findings therefore provide an evidence-based assessment of the effectiveness of governance, oversight, escalation, decision-making and assurance arrangements during a period of organisational change. They may assist both SEOCID and the wider CPS by informing the ongoing development of governance arrangements and highlighting areas of effective practice alongside opportunities for further improvement.

Scope of the inspection

3.15. This inspection provides an opportunity to assess how far SEOCID has embedded the intended benefits of its creation since 2022. These include strengthened governance, clearer escalation arrangements, resilience, consistency of approach, effective stakeholder engagement and its response to the changing nature of crime.

3.16. Our inspection focused on the serious economic and organised crime casework teams in ILSED and RWD. It assessed casework management and the assurance mechanisms in place for serious and complex cases.

3.17. POCD was out of scope because it has limited operational interaction with the two divisions that were the focus of this inspection and was also considered in a relatively recent inspection[4]. The Organised Child Sexual Abuse Unit was also out of scope because it is moving from RWD in SEOCID to align with CPS Cymru Wales. The international and extradition teams within ILSED were excluded because of their highly specialised remit and the nature of their overseas and international work. Future inspections of these teams will be considered on a risk-based approach.

[4] *Proceeds of Crime Divisions CPS and SFO*; HMCPSI; July 2021. hmcpsi.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/report/proceeds-of-crime-divisions-cps-and-sfo/

4. Framework and methodology

Inspection framework

4.1. In line with our published inspection methodology, we framed this inspection around one overarching question. This helped us gather and assess evidence consistently. The inspection question was:

"Does the Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Directorate (SEOCID) efficiently manage serious economic and organised crime casework, with effective assurance and governance in place to promote high-quality legal decision-making and keep pace with the changing criminal landscape?"

4.2. We developed inspection criteria to structure the gathering of independent evidence to allow us to reach findings and judgments to answer that question. The inspection criteria covered four aspects of SEOCID's work:

Aspect	Inspection criterion
Casework quality and delivery	Do SEOCID's structure, systems and practices support timely, high-quality casework?
Governance, oversight and assurance	Do assurance arrangements identify risk, support oversight and drive improvement?
People and skills	Does SEOCID have the capacity, skills and support to deliver specialist casework?
Stakeholder relationships	Do SEOCID's relationships support effective case progression, communication and shared accountability?

4.3. Each criterion was supported by sub-questions. These helped us examine the relevant evidence in more detail. The framework is in annex A.

Methodology

4.4. We used a range of methods to gather evidence.

Document review

4.5. We reviewed key documents to understand SEOCID's structures, operating model and assurance arrangements. This included terms of reference for governance boards, recent board minutes, the casework process manual, stakeholder meeting records and sensitive and high-risk case logs.

On-site evidence gathering

4.6. The on-site phase took place in May and June 2026. Inspectors visited the International, London and South-East Division's (ILSED) London office, and the Regional and Wales Division's (RWD) offices in Manchester and Birmingham, carrying out interviews, focus groups and observations.

Observations

4.7. We used observations of boards, local case management panels and case debriefs to triangulate evidence from documents, interviews and focus groups. This helped us assess how governance and assurance arrangements operated in practice.

4.8. Inspectors observed six local case management panels, three in ILSED and three in RWD, to assess senior leader scrutiny of high-risk cases, risk identification and oversight of case progression and decision-making. We also observed two case debriefs involving legal managers, specialist prosecutors, operational delivery staff and law enforcement partners.

4.9. We also observed six SEOCID boards during the inspection, including the cross-divisional board, senior leadership board, casework quality board, digital and change group and people board.

Interviews and focus groups

4.10. We interviewed senior legal and operational delivery leaders and held focus groups with staff across ILSED and RWD. These sessions included representatives from all legal and operational delivery roles that support casework.

4.11. We interviewed the Director of Legal Services, who oversees the directorate, to understand SEOCID's purpose, governance, assurance arrangements and response to the changing criminal landscape.

4.12. We interviewed senior representatives from four key law enforcement stakeholders: His Majesty's Revenue and Customs, the National Crime Agency, the Department for Work and Pensions and the City of London Police. This evidence helped us test whether SEOCID's stakeholder relationships support effective communication, case progression and shared accountability.

4.13. We also interviewed senior staff from His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) at court centres that regularly handle SEOCID cases and at regional level. This evidence helped us assess whether SEOCID's relationships with HMCTS support effective case progression.

Inspection team

4.14. This inspection was led by legal inspectors Jonathan Ellis and Giles Bridge. Legal inspectors Siaf Alam and Helen Lee assisted them. Shauna Compton provided business support while senior legal inspector Rachael Pavion supervised the inspection.

5. Governance, casework quality and delivery

5.1. The Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Directorate (SEOCID) operates in a complex and demanding casework environment that includes serious, sensitive and resource-intensive prosecutions with high volumes of material, multiple defendants, lengthy investigations, and international elements. Effective governance, operational oversight and recording arrangements are therefore central to high-quality and timely casework.

5.2. SEOCID receives cases from a range of agencies, unlike the casework dealt with by the geographical Areas, which is almost exclusively investigated by the 43 police forces in England and Wales. SEOCID receives most of its casework from the National Crime Agency (NCA) and His Majesty's Revenue and Customs. SEOCID has proactively engaged with these stakeholders to set clear standards, expectations and terms of reference around engagement on casework and case file submissions. This is further supported by regular internal SEOCID operational and strategic meetings that provide a structure for monitoring performance and supporting the quality of casework within the division.

Oversight and structure

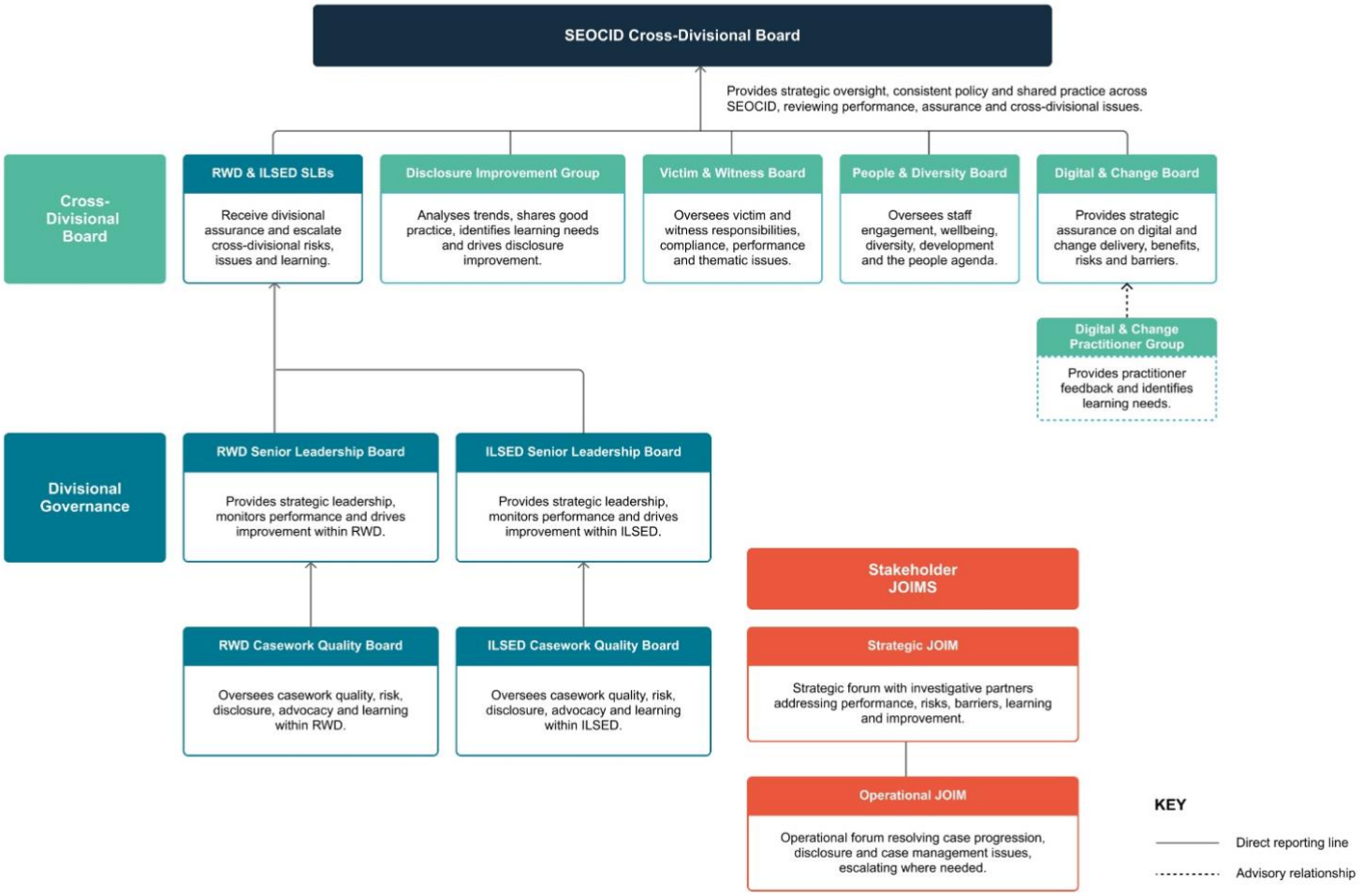
Internal governance structures

5.3. SEOCID's governance structure is led by the cross-divisional board which provides strategic oversight and high-level decision-making across both the International, London and South-East Division (ILSED) and the Regional and Wales Division (RWD). Its remit includes ensuring consistency in policy and business processes, promoting and embedding good practice, providing leadership assurance, and identifying strategic performance improvement priorities. It also considers cross-divisional risks, issues and learning to ensure a coordinated approach across SEOCID.

5.4. Beneath the cross-divisional board sit the separate senior leadership boards for ILSED and RWD. These boards provide divisional strategic leadership, oversight and decision-making for legal and operational delivery. They monitor local performance, receive assurance from the casework quality boards, oversee improvement activity, and escalate matters to the cross-divisional board where strategic oversight or cross-divisional alignment is required. The ILSED and RWD senior leadership boards retain autonomy for decisions relating to performance and operational matters within their respective divisions.

5.5. The casework quality boards operate beneath the divisional senior leadership boards and provide detailed oversight of casework quality from registration to final disposal. Their responsibilities include scrutiny of case handling, early advice, casework risks, disclosure, advocacy quality and learning arising from assurance activity. This provides a clear governance route through which casework quality issues can be identified, considered and, where necessary, escalated.

Figure 1: SEOCID governance structure



Governance boards

SEOCID cross-divisional board

5.6. Strategic oversight and high-level decision-making for SEOCID. Promotes consistent policy, shared practice, performance improvement, leadership assurance and escalation through strategic area performance reviews.

5.7. Members: Chief Crown Prosecutors (CCPs), heads of Area operations (HAOs), Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutors (DCCPs), business centre manager (BCM), and one divisional business manager (DBM) per division on rotation.

RWD and ILSED senior leadership boards

5.8. Divisional strategic leadership, oversight and decision-making. Monitors local performance, receives assurance from the casework quality board, promotes improvement and escalates cross-divisional risks, issues or learning where wider alignment is needed.

5.9. Members: CCP, HAO, DCCP, BCM and DBM.

RWD and ILSED casework quality board

5.10. Promotes casework quality from registration to final disposal. Oversees case handling, early advice, casework risks, disclosure, advocacy quality and learning from assurance activity.

5.11. Members: CCP, HAO, DCCP, unit heads, specific legal subject leads, and casework quality lead.

5.12. There are also cross-SEOCID thematic boards that focus on specific aspects and within that include elements that are either directly or indirectly casework focused. These are the disclosure improvement group, the victim and witness board, the digital and change board, the digital and change practitioner group, and the people and diversity board. These thematic boards feed into the cross-divisional, senior leadership, and casework quality boards.

Findings

5.13. We found that the approaches and ways of working across RWD and ILSED have not always been aligned. There is a renewed focus in SEOCID on promoting a more consistent approach. The cross-divisional board is proactively identifying what works well and using that to set clear standards and expectations around casework, process and engagement.

5.14. For example, we found that ILSED and RWD had not always been consistent in their approaches to shared risks, cross-divisional working arrangements and the escalation of issues with law enforcement agency stakeholders. The cross-divisional board has increased its focus on considering and agreeing shared working arrangements with law enforcement agency stakeholders, supporting a more consistent approach across both divisions. The cross-divisional board agreed and oversaw the implementation of the administrative triage process with stakeholders (we discuss this process further in chapter 8), which has improved efficiency and effectiveness.

5.15. This increasingly consistent approach is positive. Senior leaders have reflected critically on the sufficiency of their own governance arrangements. In RWD, senior legal and operational leaders identified possible duplication between boards and a need to clarify whether the cross-divisional board was intended for decision-making, escalation or high-level risk oversight. SEOCID should continue the work already commenced to review and refine the terms of reference for each board to provide clarity and ensure they operate effectively, efficiently and without duplication.

5.16. The documents we examined from the senior leadership boards in both ILSED and RWD included consistent standard agendas and action logs covering compliance monitoring, priority casework risks and casework quality themes. Leaders used the assurance information presented at these meetings to set actions, commission work and drive improvement activity, and they actively reviewed action logs at each meeting. For example, over several meetings in 2026, the RWD casework quality board allocated and monitored actions to improve liaison with the NCA, ensuring staff shared and acted on learning from case debriefs and joint disclosure reviews. The learning from individual case debriefs and disclosure reviews was then used to set actions across the division.

5.17. Minutes of the March and June 2026 cross-divisional victim and witness board meetings identified weaknesses in victim flagging on the case management system (CMS) and in consideration and updating of victim strategy. The June meeting agreed a six-month action plan, including using the case strategy assessment process to address individual issues with prosecutors

and to monitor performance so further issues can be identified and actions set to improve.

5.18. We saw examples across all boards of assurance work being carried out and actions being taken to address identified issues.

Corporate oversight

5.19. The Director of Legal Services (DLS) was confident that SEOCID's governance mechanisms, together with the DLS's regular review of overall performance, provide appropriate oversight of casework quality and risk. This confidence was supported by evidence of regular DLS engagement in high-risk cases, including national case management panels, which scrutinise particularly significant or high-risk cases and challenge and oversee case strategy and progression.

5.20. In addition to SEOCID's internal governance arrangements, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has strengthened corporate performance oversight through a revised Area performance review (APR) approach. From 1 April 2026, the CPS moved from relying mainly on performance against key performance indicators (KPIs) to a wider operational performance indicator (OPI) framework that provides a broader view of quality, grip, timeliness and service to victims.

5.21. The OPI framework gives Areas and Divisions a clearer basis for self-assessment before DLS and Director of Operations scrutiny in a quarterly meeting. Senior leaders in SEOCID and the DLS told us that the broader measures would focus attention on operational priorities, including older cases and cases returned to law enforcement agencies. To provide effective oversight, leaders must bring together data on timeliness, high-risk casework, disclosure issues and local knowledge of complex cases. As explained in paragraph 5.40, this will require the use of resources to supplement the management information from the CPS's case management system with information from manual trackers and additional assurance given that SEOCID's casework, due to the scale and complexity of the individual cases, cannot be exclusively contained within the case management system. The framework's effectiveness will largely depend on the quality of SEOCID's self-assessment and manually collated assurance data, and the extent to which the DLS tests and challenges it.

5.22. SEOCID has briefed staff and managers on the move from KPIs to OPIs and provides quarterly internal performance updates to support understanding of operational priorities and progress. Through its board structures, SEOCID assesses performance and sets improvement objectives.

5.23. Although the framework is in its infancy, the steps taken to embed OPIs and strengthen performance scrutiny demonstrate a greater focus on understanding and managing operational performance beyond the traditional KPI measures.

Working with the Director of Legal Services' team and the Attorney General's Office

5.24. SEOCID is a specialised CPS casework division under the operational leadership of the DLS. Certain high-level cases must be referred to the DLS for strategic decision or approval, while the Attorney General's Office (AGO) provides external oversight through its constitutional superintendence of the CPS. Operational casework remains independent, flowing through the DLS to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

5.25. SEOCID's direct dealings with the AGO are limited to cases requiring specific consent to prosecute, such as cross-border conspiracy cases. Other engagement is managed through the DLS and her team. The DLS told us that SEOCID provided high-quality briefings on very serious cases, helping ensure ministers are properly sighted on significant risks.

5.26. High-risk case logs and sensitive case lists maintained by unit heads support information sharing with the DLS. Senior managers described the relationship as professional, with direct contact between specialist prosecutors and the DLS team where appropriate. Unit heads generally viewed engagement as reporting-based and transactional. They valued the check and challenge provided by the DLS and would welcome earlier engagement and greater feedback on the quality of briefing documents to maintain and improve quality.

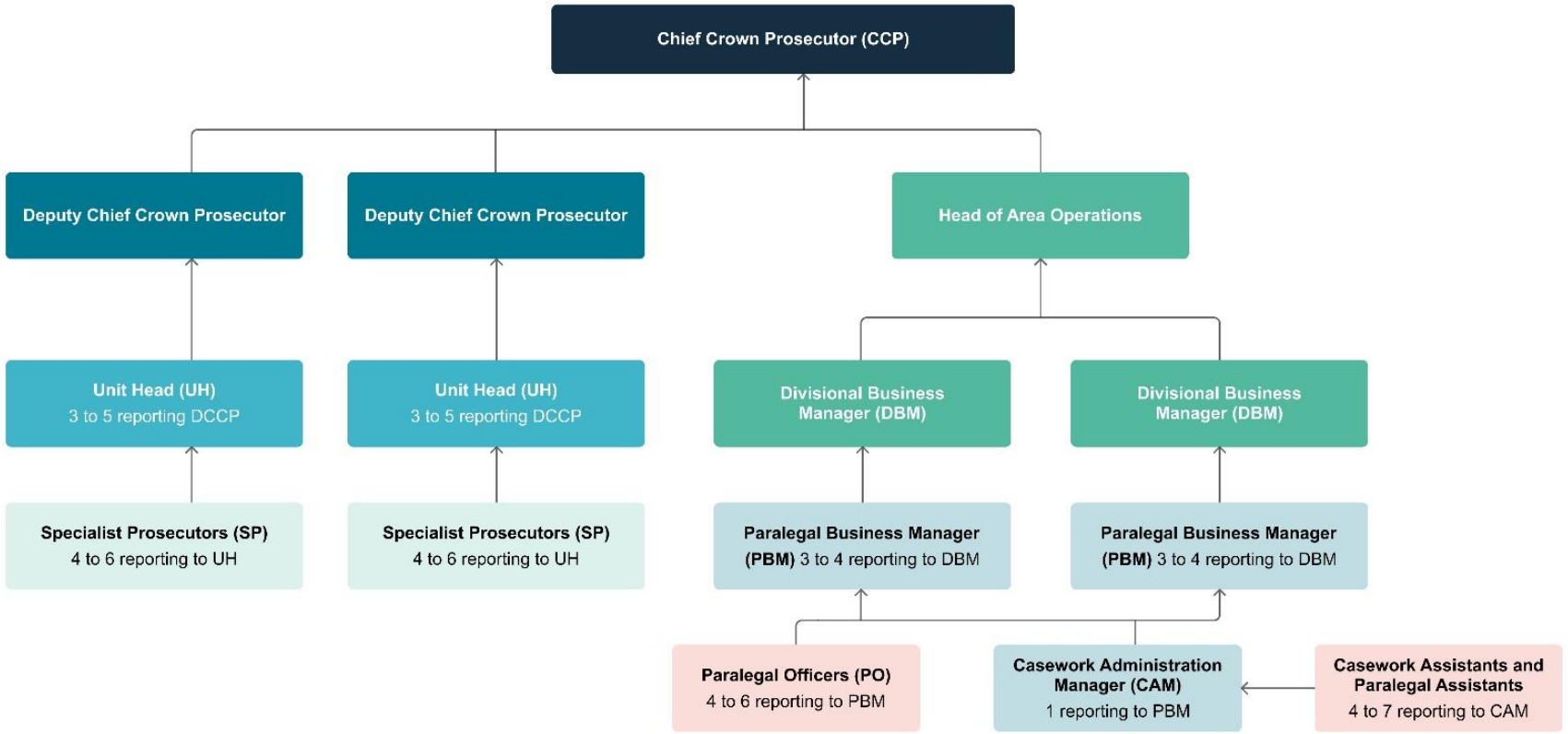
5.27. We found that SEOCID maintains effective information-sharing arrangements with the DLS team and the AGO, supported by established governance structures and clear escalation routes for high-risk cases. These arrangements provide appropriate oversight, support the management of strategic and reputational risk, and help ensure that significant cases are communicated effectively within the CPS and to government where required. While we generally viewed engagement as professional and constructive, earlier involvement and more systematic feedback could further strengthen the value of oversight and support.

Operational oversight

5.28. We found that operational oversight of casework is clear, and we heard from senior leaders and front-line legal managers that the structure in place allows them to grip casework across the division. Layers of scrutiny start with unit heads' oversight of their teams' cases and feed up through SEOCID's structures to provide assurance to Chief Crown Prosecutors via Chief Crown Prosecutor and Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutor monthly casework meetings, casework quality boards and senior leadership boards. Case management panels and assurance work scrutinise the highest-risk cases and inform the high-risk case logs and sensitive case logs, escalation arrangements, and reporting to the Directors of Legal Services, as set out above.

5.29. The diagram below sets out the organisational structure for the delivery of serious economic and organised crime work within SEOCID. RWD and ILSED each have one Chief Crown Prosecutor, one head of Area operations, two Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutors and two divisional business managers responsible for this work. Each team has a head of unit, a legal manager who works closely with a paralegal business manager. The numbers of teams and staffing arrangements below the senior level set out above differ within and between the two divisions; the ranges shown in the diagram are therefore indicative of the numbers reporting upwards at each level. The diagram includes staff providing legal and operational support to legal delivery but excludes other functions, including the business centre.

Figure 2: Broad structure for serious economic and organised crime in SEOCID



5.30. We were told that the unit heads and paralegal business managers work closely, particularly around allocation and escalation. This ensures emerging issues can be identified promptly and complex cases receive appropriate oversight. In ILSED, each team has a unit head and a paralegal business manager who work together to deliver the unit's work. This creates a direct link between legal and operational delivery and clearer ownership of actions where casework issues cut across both functions. This joint working approach is good practice and something we highlighted as working well in our report setting out our findings from phase three of our Area inspection programme[5]. RWD cannot replicate this model directly because both legal and operational delivery/paralegal staff are spread across several offices, and the numbers of unit heads and paralegal business managers do not align. This creates a risk of an inconsistent joint legal and operational approach to issues and improvement. RWD should therefore consider what it can learn from ILSED's approach and whether adapted linking arrangements between unit heads and paralegal business managers could strengthen collaboration and accountability.

5.31. Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutors (DCCPs) and their unit heads hold scheduled monthly meetings at which they use a casework tracker that sets out the details of all the unit's cases to identify casework pressures, emerging issues and risks. DCCPs and unit heads across SEOCID told us these meetings were of real value because they provided a structured forum to maintain oversight of casework allocation and planning, including identifying areas of concern early and enabling early resolution.

5.32. Operational checks provide an additional layer of control over case progression risks. Paralegal business managers across ILSED and RWD told us that daily checks they completed helped them to identify progression risks and ensure targeted escalation to colleagues within SEOCID or to law enforcement agency partners, when required. They said the checks also helped compliance with court directions. Examples included checking custody time limit expiry dates and hearing outcomes, monitoring outstanding court directions, reviewing overdue actions, identifying missing or incomplete bundles and escalating administrative or compliance issues to lawyers and managers.

[5] *Composite report of the phase three inspections of CPS Yorkshire and Humberside and CPS Cymru/Wales*; HMCPSI; March 2026. hmcpsi.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/report/composite-report-of-the-phase-three-inspections-of-cps-yorkshire-and-humberside-and-cps-cymru-wales/

5.33. We found that local trackers, case lists and close management engagement provide an important safeguard against case progression risks in these more complex cases that managers in SEOCID cannot readily identify using CMS alone. Their effectiveness depends on accurate local updating and active management.

Systems and recording

Case management system

5.34. The CPS case management system (CMS) records most case details, electronic case material, actions, reviews, correspondence and court hearings. However, it does not have sufficient capacity to hold the volume of material generated by many SEOCID cases. A hybrid system has therefore developed within SEOCID, with significant volumes of material and correspondence stored on shared drives, separate from the CMS.

5.35. SEOCID has developed locally maintained spreadsheets to monitor progress, risks and milestones in pre-charge and charged cases. These trackers supplement CMS reporting by recording case-specific risks, custody or trial timetable pressures, linked investigations, resourcing implications, escalation actions, stakeholder concerns and other high-risk matters requiring management oversight. Operational delivery and legal staff update them as cases progress, and they are maintained separately within the two divisions, ILSED and RWD. They draw on material held on both CMS and the shared drives and therefore cannot be generated through standard CMS reporting functions.

5.36. We found inconsistencies in how shared drives were used. We were told that shared drive structures differed between geographical parts of SEOCID. SEOCID recognised that this variation could make assurance more difficult and complicate transferring cases between prosecution teams. In addition, as those structures develop and evolve, older cases may retain earlier folder structures and, because of their scale and complexity, cannot always be moved into newer structures. Senior leaders recognised the risk this poses to casework, and at the time of inspection a standard folder structure was being developed to address this, with the expectation that once implemented, it would be adopted across the division.

5.37. The CMS's limitations, particularly in relation to tracking pre-charge cases returned to law enforcement agencies for more work, and their subsequent return to SEOCID, create inefficiency. As a result, staff must record and maintain key case information outside CMS, including in case management documents, case lists and shared drives. Evidence from specialist prosecutor, paralegal officer and paralegal business manager focus groups showed that this

additional recording is necessary to preserve continuity, support handover and respond to later queries, including counsel fee queries. The arrangements therefore provide an essential operational safeguard but create additional work and require active oversight to remain accurate and effective.

5.38. The risks arising from this reliance on local tracking were evident in occasional issues with the completeness and accuracy of the various trackers.

5.39. At the February 2026 RWD casework quality board meeting, there was recognition that recording local case management panel meetings and the actions arising from them were inconsistent. The agreed action was to improve and monitor both the recording of local case management panel issues and the actions arising through the local case management panel tracker.

5.40. The implications extend beyond individual trackers. Existing systems do not always provide the data leaders and managers need to measure performance comprehensively. We were told that concerns about the reliability of some CMS data, particularly regarding timeliness, require managers to supplement formal reporting with manual trackers and additional monitoring activity. SEOCID therefore relies on a combination of formal management information, local knowledge, assurance activity and qualitative oversight. This provides useful control, but it is resource-intensive and does not remove the underlying limitations in the available data.

5.41. SEOCID is aware of the digital limitations and is engaged in improvement activities through the CPS's national digital change board, practitioner groups and the future casework tools team. Digital and change board minutes from February 2026 recorded SEOCID's participation in the Large and Complex Cases project to create a replacement tool for the CMS. This is a long-term investment and project for the CPS, and at the time of evidence gathering, there was no date for when that system would become available.

Casework process manual

5.42. The CPS has developed clear step-by-step standard operating procedures (SOPs) for most Area casework. Given the complexity of SEOCID casework and the volume and variety of material submitted, SEOCID's work is not covered by a SOP or national operating model. Instead, SEOCID has developed a casework process manual.

5.43. Staff at all levels across operational delivery and legal roles viewed the casework process manual positively, describing it as comprehensive and capable of answering most questions about casework management. However, the extent of the guidance makes it difficult to navigate. The SEOCID change manager, whose role includes supporting business change and improvements to casework processes, and the change and assurance manager, whose role includes oversight of assurance activity and the implementation of change, identified accessibility and speed of amendment as issues. For example, the casework process manual was published in January 2026 but was not updated until June 2026 to reflect a new admin triage system introduced in April 2026. SEOCID is working with the national CPS and the digital change practitioner group to divide the manual into individual intranet sections and improve accessibility.

5.44. We found that the casework process manual provides clear guidance on case management. While the speed of amendment remains a challenge, the work underway with the digital and change practitioner group should help address this issue.

Case management document

5.45. Prosecutors and operational delivery staff use the case management document (CMD) to record action taken on cases. This audit trail is particularly important and is the definitive case management record, as the record on the CMS is not complete due to the hybrid nature of casework using both CMS and shared drives. Clear guidance has been provided to staff on the requirement to make entries and the format for those entries, including setting out case strategy.

5.46. In our focus groups, we heard that prosecutors across SEOCID viewed the CMD as essential in providing an audit trail of activity and supporting continuity, handover and unit head oversight. Unit heads also identified it as the most useful document to support their oversight of cases. They were confident that CMDs were generally completed comprehensively and consistently.

5.47. Although the current case management document is used in most cases, we heard that there remained some use of old case management forms that has

created issues and inconsistencies. This has been recognised and is being addressed. The January 2026 RWD legal leadership forum found that overall completion of the current version of the case management document was good. However, it also identified examples where the CMD was used mainly as an audit trail to record actions in chronological order, without setting out updates to case strategy. The standards and expectations for record keeping and updating are clear, but compliance is inconsistent. SEOCID leaders will want to continue to ensure consistent completion of the case management document, given its central role in case oversight and progression.

5.48. Paralegal business managers carry out quarterly casework quality assessments. These assessments check the completeness and consistency of recording on case management documents and the CMS by paralegal officers. Unit heads also complete checks on completion of the case management document as part of the case strategy assessments. We explore how these checks feed into wider assurance and improvement plans in chapter 6.

6. Assurance systems and management of casework risk

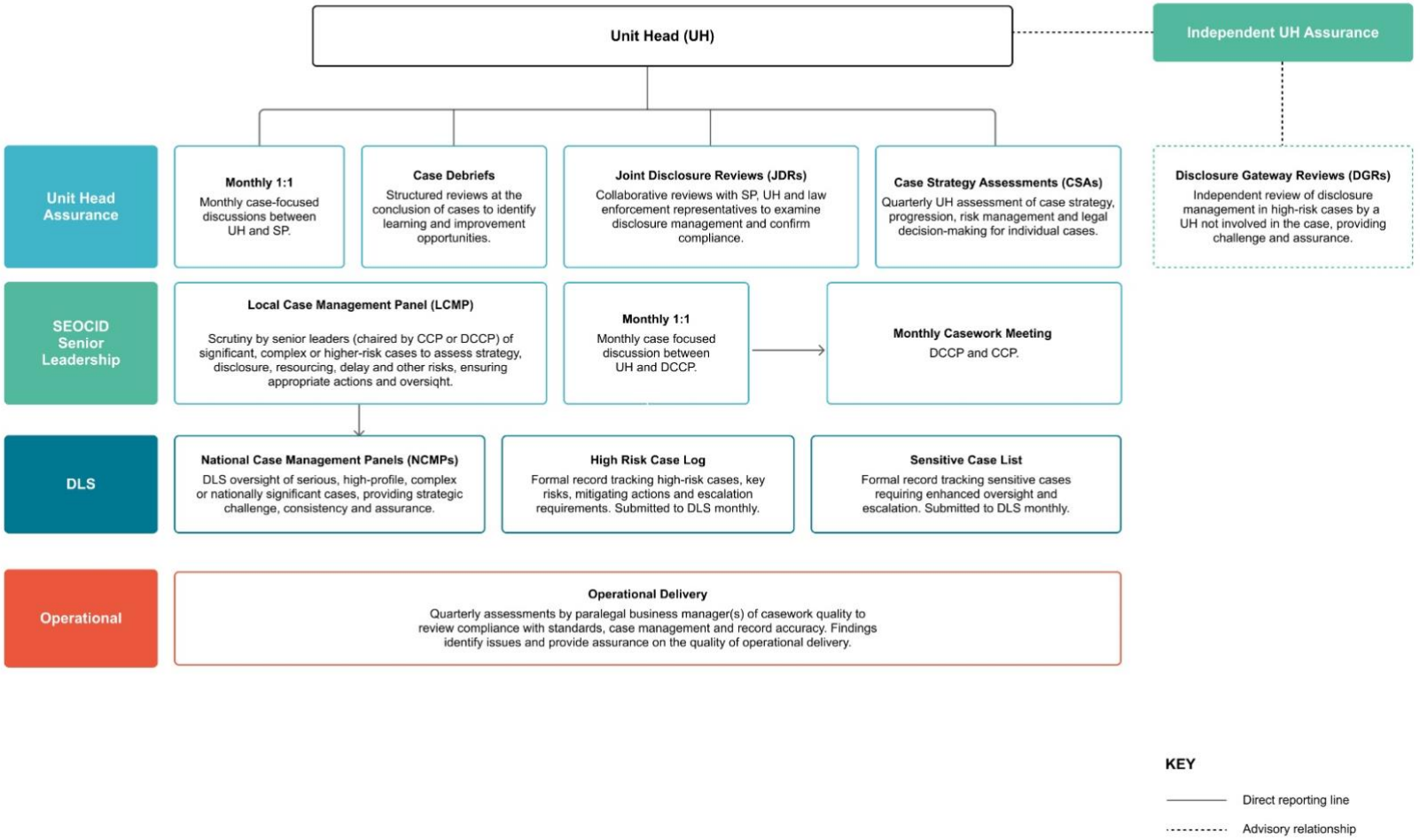
6.1. As set out in chapter 5, we found that the Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Directorate's (SEOCID) structure and governance arrangements broadly support the delivery of high-quality and timely casework. This chapter looks at the effectiveness of the assurance system: how risk is identified, escalated, managed and converted into learning.

Assurance activity

6.2. Effective assurance should not only identify concerns in individual cases, but also identify recurring themes, support an understanding of their causes and use that information to improve future practice. We therefore considered whether learning from mechanisms including case reviews, case strategy assessments, disclosure assurance activity, case management panels, post-case debriefs and casework quality assessments is analysed, shared and translated into operational improvement.

6.3. These mechanisms are supported by unit head supervision, operational delivery checks, casework quality boards, senior leadership boards and the cross-divisional board. The evidence shows the framework can provide effective oversight, with boards reviewing assurance findings, allocating actions and following up. However, implementation is not yet consistent across the International, London and South-East Division (ILSED) and Regional and Wales Division (RWD), and some processes are still becoming embedded.

Figure 3: SEOCID assurance processes



Identifying risk in live casework

6.4. SEOCID prosecutors carry relatively low caseloads because of the complexity of their work, typically managing 10 to 15 cases compared with 150–200 cases for prosecutors in Area Crown Court units and 20 to 40 for prosecutors in Area complex casework units. Unit heads hold regular one-to-one meetings with each of their prosecutors to discuss and review their individual cases. Unit heads, who do not carry a caseload, manage four to five specialist prosecutors. These numbers allow them to maintain close oversight of their team's casework through regular one-to ones, case strategy assessments and ongoing case discussions. This allows the unit head to support and mentor prosecutors, identify and escalate issues as necessary, and add real value to the casework on their teams.

Informal mechanisms

6.5. Our discussions in focus groups of specialist prosecutors and unit heads highlighted several mechanisms that support peer learning and knowledge sharing across ILSED and RWD. Unit heads hold regular team meetings with the specialist prosecutors they manage to discuss casework and share knowledge. The consistency and effectiveness of the meetings varied between unit heads. Some specialist prosecutors found them very valuable; others said they were sometimes focused on procedure, with insufficient emphasis on identifying and sharing learning from casework. Staff said they use 'lunch and learn' sessions to share learning from particular cases and can suggest topics for future discussion. Experienced prosecutors act as leads for specialist areas, such as cybercrime and organised immigration crime, and advise colleagues as needed. Microsoft Teams channels also enable prosecutors to raise queries and receive timely responses from colleagues.

Formal meetings

6.6. The strongest formal mechanism is the monthly one-to-one meetings, where unit heads discuss specialist prosecutors' overall caseloads, with a particular focus on high-risk cases and current ongoing work. Case review discussions on individual cases supplemented these meetings.

6.7. Specialist prosecutors told us that unit heads were well informed about risks in their cases, and they consistently identified monthly one-to-one discussions as the most effective assurance mechanism. Unit heads also described spending significant time quality assuring live cases, case reviews and high-risk case logs. They estimated this would account for around 80% of their time and enable greater, more detailed oversight of all casework in their teams than would be possible for a legal manager dealing with volume crime in Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) Areas. Risk identification and case assurance

therefore do not depend solely on formal reporting or management information. They are also supported by regular professional discussion and close managerial engagement on all cases.

6.8. That approach is particularly important in SEOCID's casework environment, where risks can emerge gradually and may not always be apparent from standard performance data. Direct discussion enables managers to identify and address issues relating to disclosure, delay, case strategy, welfare and resourcing before they become acute, or to highlight good practice. It also provides a route for prosecutors to seek guidance and escalate concerns informally when needed. Unit heads also use regular one-to-one discussions as a structured framework to mentor and coach prosecutors new to the unit, helping identify where additional support or guidance is needed and reducing risks arising from inexperience.

6.9. Regular one-to-one discussions provide an effective mechanism for unit heads to maintain detailed oversight of prosecutors' overall casework, including identifying issues, supporting them and highlighting good practice. The one-to-one meetings are then replicated at more senior levels. Unit heads have monthly case-focused discussions with their Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutor (DCCP), who then has monthly casework meetings with their Chief Crown Prosecutor (CCP). Where individual cases require more focused scrutiny, case management panels can complement that oversight through structured discussion of case strategy, risk, progress and decision-making. We discuss case management panels in more detail in paragraph 6.18.

Strength
Monthly one-to-one meetings between legal managers and specialist prosecutors provide detailed oversight that allows identification and action to address issues and highlight good practice.

Risk escalation

6.10. The close legal manager oversight of casework assurance underpins SEOCID's approach to managing and escalating significant casework risk. Effective risk escalation and management is important because significant demands can arise at short notice as cases approach trial, placing pressure on limited time and resources. Early escalation enables additional support and oversight, helping mitigate the risk of delay, disruption and adverse impacts on case progression. Unit heads are central to that process: their direct oversight of live casework enables early risk identification, prompt management action and, where necessary, escalation for senior oversight through the one-to-one meeting structure. Specialist prosecutors and stakeholders told us that escalation in individual cases is proactive and timely: the risks are visible to the experienced cohort of managers and are regularly reviewed.

Case strategy assessments

6.11. Case strategy assessments[6] are intended to strengthen assurance of case strategy and legal decision-making. They replaced individual quality assessments at the beginning of 2026. The developing model requires unit heads to consider case strategy assessments in real time with specialist prosecutors when discussing cases. We found that ILSED had embedded this more than RWD at the time of inspection. The ILSED April 2026 casework quality board meeting reviewed the assessments conducted in quarter 4 of 2025–26, used them to identify casework issues around recording review decisions and disclosure steps, and agreed actions to improve. As a result, there was a training session and a standard-setting consistency exercise on expectations in case strategy assessments delivered at the team's legal leadership forum. This illustrates how these assessment findings are used to identify quality issues, agree action and reinforce standards through a management forum.

[6] Case strategy assessments take place every quarter and are when the unit head considers an individual case of a specialist prosecutor against a bank of questions that assess performance. The intention is to do this in real time and use it as a debrief to discuss the case. Case strategy assessments were introduced in quarter 4 of 2025–26, when they replaced the previous system of individual quality reviews, to implement a recommendation of an HMCPSI report: *Individual Quality Assessment (IQA) — an inspection of how the CPS uses IQA to monitor and improve casework quality*. hmcpsi.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/report/individual-quality-assessment-iqa-an-inspection-of-how-the-cps-uses-iqa-to-monitor-and-improve-casework-quality/

6.12. In March 2026, RWD completed a similar consistency exercise related to case strategy assessments. The RWD casework quality board then considered its first round of case strategy assessment results in its May 2026 meeting and identified that findings should be shared across SEOCID because the issues arising in RWD and ILSED differed. The board also noted incomplete coverage across RWD, with fewer assessments completed in Midlands and Wales than in the Northern region. In interviews, DCCPs across SEOCID recognised the need to keep comparative case strategy assessment performance under review. Specialist prosecutors gave mixed evidence: some valued assessment where it produced practical suggestions, while others described limited engagement or follow-up. The prosecutors most positive about the process said it was done in real time with the unit head. Case strategy assessment is therefore a positive assurance tool, but it needs more consistent application across RWD and ILSED, real-time use and review of themes to drive consistent learning, and improvement in casework quality across both teams. Taken together, the evidence shows progress in using case strategy assessments to strengthen assurance of case strategy across SEOCID. However, as case strategy assessment is still embedding, it was too early at the time of inspection to assess whether it has delivered consistent improvements in case strategy across RWD and ILSED.

Disclosure gateway and joint disclosure reviews

6.13. Disclosure is the clearest example of assurance work being used to identify, escalate and manage a cross-divisional risk. Disclosure gateway reviews (DGRs) are quarterly agenda items for casework quality board meetings in ILSED and RWD. They provide independent unit head review of disclosure handling in cases meeting agreed risk criteria, allowing scrutiny of disclosure practice and assurance that obligations are being managed properly.

6.14. The February 2026 RWD casework quality board meeting focused on disclosure and considered quarter 3 (2025–26) DGR findings, which identified problems with recording disclosure decisions and a training need. Records were not always updated and, in some cases, captured actions without setting out the rationale for the disclosure approach. This provided limited assurance that disclosure was being managed through a clear, reasoned and properly recorded strategy. The board referred the issues to the cross-divisional disclosure improvement group, providing a clear link between case-level assurance, divisional review and cross-divisional action.

6.15. Disclosure assurance also includes joint work with law enforcement partners. The February 2026 RWD casework quality board meeting identified further work on HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) Disclosure Management Plans and joint disclosure reviews with HMRC. These plans set out the

approach to managing disclosure in individual investigations, including unused material, risk and compliance. Joint disclosure reviews allow the Crown Prosecution Service and HMRC to scrutinise disclosure management together, identify common issues and agree improvement activity. The casework quality board reviewed progress in May and linked the work to the disclosure improvement group. It also recognised wider SEOCID issues in updating cases on disclosure, identifying disclosable material and accurately recording it on schedules.

6.16. We found that the escalation route for disclosure was effective. The RWD casework quality board escalated concerns to the disclosure improvement group, which is a joint ILSED and RWD board with responsibility for disclosure issues, and also to the 30 June 2026 cross-divisional board. The board agreed disclosure priorities for the next four quarters, starting with improving the quality of prosecutors' decisions on considering and scheduling unused material. This demonstrates the assurance system working as intended:

1. DGRs and joint disclosure work identified risks
2. the casework quality board reviewed the performance implications
3. the disclosure improvement group provided a specialist forum to address the issue
4. the cross-divisional board set priorities across SEOCID.

6.17. This is a positive example of SEOCID's assurance arrangements identifying a risk, escalating it through the governance structure and setting cross-divisional priorities in response. It is too early to assess the impact of this work in improving disclosure, and senior leaders will want to assure themselves that the agreed priorities result in better and more consistent disclosure practice on cases**.**

Case management panels

6.18. Local and national case management panels are an important part of SEOCID's assurance arrangements for higher-risk, complex or sensitive casework. They provide a route for senior scrutiny, shared ownership and practical decision-making where risks require oversight beyond routine management arrangements. Local case management panels consider case-specific risks, disclosure problems, delays, resourcing concerns or difficult strategic decisions. They may be chaired by a DCCP or CCP, depending on the level of oversight required. National case management panels are reserved for the most serious, sensitive, high-profile or nationally significant cases requiring Director of Legal Services (DLS) involvement and national oversight.

6.19. The SEOCID casework process manual describes local and national case management panels as active forums for resolving disputes, managing delays and agreeing strategy in complex or sensitive cases. Cases are identified for panel consideration through several routes, including high-risk case logs, monthly case list meetings, prosecutor referrals, unit head judgement, DCCP oversight and review of the sensitive case list. This flexibility matters because it provides multiple ways to escalate high-risk cases and obtain the scrutiny needed.

6.20. We observed six local case management panels during the inspection and found that all the cases met the criteria[7]. All panels had senior and proportionate attendance, of CCP, DCCP, unit head and specialist prosecutor. We found attendees had appropriate experience and case knowledge, and that local case management panels added value, were used for genuinely high-risk cases and were prepared effectively.

6.21. The discussions were case-specific and legal in focus, covering issues such as charging, disclosure, indictment strategy, confiscation and restraint, international issues, bail, trial grouping, counsel, listing and stakeholder engagement. The prosecutor produced clear briefings before the meeting and shared them with senior leaders, which helped them demonstrate detailed case knowledge and provide constructive challenge. Actions were linked to progression, including evidential assessment, charging, disclosure, counsel input and stakeholder engagement, and there was broad alignment on risks and next steps.

6.22. In one local case management panel, where participants appeared to have less of a grip on the details of the case, the CCP provided clear and constructive challenge on the issues under consideration, not only progressing issues in the case but coaching, mentoring and setting standards and expectations.

6.23. Evidence from interviews and focus groups with all legal staff and managers across SEOCID was consistent — local case management panels are a good and valuable mechanism for developing strong case strategy and maintaining momentum in aged or contentious cases. In the panels we observed, senior leaders played a proactive and constructive role, contributing views on case strategy that added value to the case itself and through sharing experience with others. We were also told that, over time, local case management panels had become a less challenging and more collaborative forum. Specialist prosecutors felt that the emphasis had shifted from focussing purely on issues to problem solving and developing a clear case strategy. As a

[7] We did not observe a national case management panel.

result, prosecutors felt that local case management panels were very useful, supported them in their role and were held in an appropriate range of cases. Several prosecutors told us that they had requested local case management panels on specific cases to assist them.

6.24. Although we saw real value being added by the use of local case management panels, and unit heads across SEOCID describing them as effective, they also conceded that they were used infrequently, with their use being varied across teams. Some saw the referral criteria as too onerous. Senior leaders in ILSED felt unit heads should hold case management panels with their specialist prosecutors to develop case strategy in a more structured way. RWD unit heads described local case management panels as very effective where used, while acknowledging variation in how and when they were convened.

6.25. Our findings support the value of panels, but SEOCID should build on the good practice by clarifying referral criteria and setting standards for consistent practice across ILSED and RWD.

6.26. Operational delivery attendance will not be required at every local case management panel. At the pre-charge stage, panels focus almost exclusively on case strategy. However, for post-charge cases, local case management panels are likely to cover case management and progression issues as well as strategy. In those cases, paralegal officer attendance can be important to ensure that they are aware of and involved in discussions about operational issues that would fall to them. Operational delivery staff were not consistently included in the panel process in the evidence we observed during the inspection. Paralegal officers told us that they were not always invited to post-charge local case management panels. Operational delivery managers told us that operational delivery staff did not always attend panels and/or receive messages arising from them. This matters because operational risks relating to bundles, directions, custody time limits, disclosure handling and case progression can be central to effectively managing complex cases.

6.27. During the inspection, RWD considered this issue at a joint legal and operational delivery leadership away day on 22 July 2026. It agreed that paralegal officers should attend local case management panels in post-charge cases, and this is now standard practice in RWD. SEOCID will want to ensure that this approach is applied consistently and that panels include the appropriate prosecution team members, including operational delivery staff, where their involvement is needed to support effective case progression.

6.28. A DLS holds national case management panels in a small number of the most serious and sensitive cases. The high-risk case log and sensitive case list are shared monthly with the DLS. This provides a route for the DLS to identify cases that may require escalation to a national case management panel and helps ensure that cases subject to national scrutiny are drawn from existing assurance information. The DLS told us that national case management panels were extremely useful because they allowed participants to step back, create shared recognition of the problem and provide assurance and scrutiny of these cases.

Case debriefs

6.29. Case debriefs provide assurance at the conclusion of cases. The relevant unit head coordinates post-case debriefs, which take place at the conclusion of all cases, except where a unit head decides a debrief would not serve a useful purpose. Learning from adverse outcomes is explicitly linked to disclosure assurance and debrief processes.

6.30. We observed two debriefs and found both had structured discussion, clear expectations and constructive engagement by those involved. In one, the debrief critically assessed the presentation of agreed evidence at court, with arrangements for the unit head to share the point across SEOCID. In the other debrief, the unit head chaired a discussion involving the specialist prosecutor, paralegal officer, police investigators and a colleague from the CPS Proceeds of Crime Division. The unit head identified the key points in a concise debrief note, the prime one relating to the appropriate court for the trial and witness arrangements. An action was taken to feed those findings into the RWD casework quality board and then to court stakeholders.

6.31. These examples show case debriefs operating as an assurance mechanism where outputs are recorded, owned and fed into governance. The RWD casework quality board has case debriefs as a standing agenda item, which gives the board a regular route to consider issues arising from completed cases. ILSED does not have debriefs as a standing agenda item, but they are included as part of the casework strategy report and action plan. Debriefs can therefore connect individual case experience to board-level scrutiny when actions are captured and passed up to the casework quality board for consideration. There is a comprehensive assurance process, but one that still depends on consistent use and follow-up across SEOCID.

Operational delivery assurance and casework quality assessments

6.32. Operational delivery assurance provides another layer of control over case progression and compliance risks. Casework administration staff and managers responsible for preparing magistrates' court first hearings said they could raise issues directly with lawyers and escalate concerns where necessary. They also felt confident that managers checked their work and provided feedback. SEOCID's performance in serving initial case details in good time before first hearings in quarter 4 of 2025–26[8] supported this. Where operational assurance identified issues, defined routes for early intervention helped ensure cases were ready for the first court hearing.

6.33. Casework quality assessments support operational delivery assurance by checking compliance with the casework process manual and identifying issues in case preparation and progression. The evidence was positive but uneven. RWD paralegal officer focus groups highlighted inconsistent quarterly paralegal business manager checks of casework quality assessments. In ILSED, senior leadership board minutes showed that issues in individual assessments were fed back to the relevant paralegal officer, while themes across assessments were addressed through the ILSED paralegal officer champion. Casework quality assessments therefore provide a useful assurance mechanism, but consistent checking, thematic analysis and feedback to staff need to be strengthened across SEOCID.

6.34. Taken together, the operational delivery evidence supports a qualified positive assessment. Staff described practical escalation routes, managers checking work and assurance activity identifying case progression risks. Performance data on initial case details also supported the view that these controls were effective for first hearing preparation. RWD and ILSED's quarterly performance review meetings, chaired by the CCP and attended by senior legal and operational managers, provide a mechanism for discussing casework quality assessment completion rates and themes, exploring issues and setting actions. However, casework quality assessment evidence shows variation between teams and divisions in how consistently checks are undertaken, analysed and fed back, and in the effectiveness of these arrangements. RWD is trialling a revised assessment template, for implementation in quarter 3 of 2026–27, to reduce the burden of completing assessments, improve consistency and focus scrutiny on the most significant casework risks. While operational assurance provides a mechanism to identify and manage immediate case

[8] The figures improved for both ILSED and RWD between quarter three and quarter four. ILSED went from 88% in quarter 3 to 91.7% in quarter 4, being served in good time. The figures for RWD showed an improvement from 85% to 98.6%. In quarter 4, across the Crown Prosecution Service, 96.6% of cases had initial case details served on time.

progression risks, ILSED and RWD need to ensure boards consistently review casework quality assessment themes and operational assurance findings, follow through agreed actions and use them to inform performance oversight.

Organisational learning

6.35. We found that SEOCID has established a range of mechanisms to identify and manage risk in individual cases, but its arrangements for capturing and applying organisational learning from assurance activity are less developed. Unit head oversight, debriefs, high-risk logs, case trackers, local case management panels, case strategy assessments, disclosure gateway reviews and board-level scrutiny all provide evidence of active management grip. The developing challenge is to ensure themes from these activities are consistently brought together, analysed and translated into training, guidance, governance action or wider cross-divisional changes in practice.

6.36. There were examples of assurance activity leading to learning and improvement. Following a disclosure-related case failure, RWD held a detailed debrief, involving senior leaders. The RWD then shared the learning from that debrief with legal managers through the legal leadership forum and with prosecutors through a disclosure improvement group workshop. SEOCID also decided that responsibility for disclosure across the division needed to be raised from unit head to DCCP level. This was a positive example because it connected case review, governance oversight and practitioner learning. It also demonstrated that disclosure was recognised as an active risk area requiring continued senior management attention.

6.37. The strongest evidence of a structured approach to organisational learning was in ILSED. Its casework quality board, and later the senior leadership board, brought together case strategy assurance, quality assessment findings, compliance monitoring and casework risk. Senior leaders and managers described how they used dip sampling, pending return further investigation monitoring and casework quality assessment activity to scrutinise aged cases, progression issues and compliance. They did this through weekly performance meetings, where alignment between unit heads and paralegal business managers supported a more coherent link between legal and operational assurance. Themes were used to identify trends, monitor compliance and shape improvement activity. This provided a more structured mechanism for identifying delays, allocating work, and escalating risks.

6.38. This level of maturity was not evident consistently across SEOCID. Focus group evidence from unit heads and specialist prosecutors in both ILSED and RWD indicated greater confidence in ILSED that thematic learning from DGRs, case debriefs and case strategy assessments were shared with

practitioners. RWD has strengthened this through recent refreshes of both the casework quality board and the legal leadership forum. The legal leadership forum now meets quarterly and in-person with a focus on current challenges, good practice and judicial relationships. These are constructive developments, but at the time of inspection it was too early to assess their full impact.

6.39. The legal leadership forum provides a useful mechanism for professional discussion and shared learning, but its contribution depends on how consistently it is used. Across the CPS, forums are held in each Area and Division and are intended to support legal managers in discussing strong legal practice, case strategy and learning. In ILSED, it supported consistency in completing case strategy assessments. In RWD, the refreshed forum was intended to help unit heads and senior leaders identify good practice and share learning. Used effectively, the forum can help convert themes from unit head oversight, case strategy assessments, debriefs, disclosure gateway reviews and local case management panels into clearer expectations for practitioners.

6.40. The legal leadership forum is not a formal assurance route and should not be treated as one. The RWD terms of reference describe it as a forum for considering specific themes or aspects of casework, while the casework quality board remains the decision-making body on wider casework. The forum does not receive formal performance reports and is not a reporting mechanism. Its value is in supporting professional discussion, sharing learning and helping legal managers cascade key messages. Formal assurance remains with the casework quality board, senior leadership structures and cross-divisional governance.

6.41. Stakeholder governance also showed how structured oversight can support learning and improvement. The City of London Police described regular contact with SEOCID, supported by shared trackers, issue-led escalation and discussion of cases through the Criminal Justice Delivery Group. Stakeholders reported that issues were often resolved before they became significant barriers to case progression. This evidence supports the finding that joint working mechanisms can help identify emerging risks and improve communication, but the learning from them needs to be captured systematically.

6.42. Our judgement is that SEOCID is effective in identifying, escalating and managing case-specific risks, but more needs to be done to embed learning systematically across the division. The issue is not a lack of assurance activity; the feedback loops between assurance, thematic analysis, practitioner learning and improvement activity are not yet sufficiently consistent or developed across ILSED and RWD. The refreshed economic crime prosecutors forum also provides a potentially important mechanism for sharing organisational, thematic and operational learning within SEOCID and across CPS Areas. However, the

forum is new and had met only twice by the end of the inspection. It is therefore too early to assess its impact.

6.43. SEOCID should strengthen its arrangements for identifying, recording and disseminating organisational learning from assurance activity. A clearer mechanism for reporting themes into the legal leadership forum, while preserving the distinction between learning and formal assurance, would help ensure that lessons from case strategy assessments, debriefs, disclosure gateway reviews, local case management panels, case trackers, operational meetings and stakeholder escalation are considered consistently. It would also provide a stronger basis for converting learning into shared expectations, guidance, improvement activity and, where appropriate, learning with wider application across the CPS.

Recommendation
By May 2027, the Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Directorate should introduce a process to identify, record and share organisational learning arising from assurance activity. That process should provide a clear route for thematic learning to be reported into the legal leadership forum and the casework quality boards to inform guidance, training, shared expectations and improvement activity across the directorate.

7. People and skills

7.1. The Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Directorate (SEOCID) has strong specialist capability and retains a highly experienced workforce able to prosecute serious and complex economic and organised crime. Staff, managers and stakeholders consistently described legal and operational staff as knowledgeable and professional. However, the long-term sustainability of this capability depends on maintaining recruitment pipelines for specialist prosecutors, developing future leaders and addressing resilience pressures within some operational delivery roles.

Capability

7.2. In creating SEOCID, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) brought together specialist prosecutors and operational staff from the previously separate casework divisions, retaining substantial expertise from individuals who understood the demands of complex casework, therefore creating a strong foundation of capability across the directorate.

7.3. The Director of Legal Services (DLS), who oversees the whole of SEOCID, expressed confidence that staff had the right skills to deal with serious economic and organised crime-related work, including newly emerging crime types such as small boats and cybercrime. Senior leaders, managers, staff and stakeholders consistently described both legal and operational delivery staff as highly capable. Staff and managers also described strong levels of expertise and a supportive professional culture.

7.4. Law enforcement stakeholder evidence also supported this finding. The National Crime Agency, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) described improved engagement, consistent service, strong governance and constructive working relationships, and valued SEOCID's specialist capability and professionalism. While HMRC noted the importance of retaining specialist fraud expertise within the wider directorate, stakeholders reported that SEOCID remained effective in supporting complex economic and organised crime casework.

Flexibility and national coordination

7.5. One of the aims of SEOCID was to increase flexibility and agility by bringing together work previously undertaken by the Specialist Fraud Division (SFD) and the International Justice and Organised Crime Division (IJOCD) under one directorate. Staff entered the directorate with established specialisms, and retaining subject-matter expertise is appropriate in such a specialist environment.

7.6. We found evidence of some initial resistance to broader working from established specialist prosecutors from SFD and the IJOCD, but newer staff in particular described themselves as developing a wider skill set and becoming more confident across a range of work. This is a natural and appropriate evolution. For example, City of London Police told us that new lawyers were adapting well to a more streamlined, focused prosecution approach, concentrating on principal defendants in complex frauds. They also said informal early conversations helped determine initial case parameters which helped avoid investigations becoming too broad. City of London Police cited a specific operation as a recent example where SEOCID worked with them to secure necessary expert input early on.

Developing and maintaining specialist capability

7.7. SEOCID has formal structures that support learning and development. These include formal induction arrangements, a training board that sits across all CPS casework divisions, CPS learning resources, the casework process manual (CPM) and one way of working principles. We found that the CPM sets out clear guidance on the roles and responsibilities of different staff grades during the life of a case and is a useful reference point for new starters. Similarly, one way of working guidance provides clear direction on storing case material across both the shared drives and the case management system (CMS), and on managing correspondence.

7.8. However, the specialist nature of SEOCID's work means that capability cannot be developed solely through formal training programmes. Staff and managers consistently described learning as being built through experience, casework exposure, management oversight and peer support. As noted above, in our view, this is an appropriate model for a specialist directorate, provided that the associated risks are recognised and mitigated.

7.9. The main mechanisms for developing specialist capability include:

- allocation of cases as a development tool
- appointing a second lawyer on particularly complex or novel cases to upskill that lawyer through working with a more experienced colleague
- unit head oversight and coaching
- specialist prosecutor leads for specialist and developing areas
- crib sheet guides
- lunch-and-learn sessions presented by subject matter experts and stakeholder-led training
- shared learning from case management panels and other assurance activity to identify learning themes.

7.10. We found that the use of case allocation and second-lawyer roles was a practical way of building capability. Unit heads described deliberately allocating work to broaden experience, using buddying and peer learning, and giving newer lawyers supported exposure to complex and unfamiliar work. Specialist prosecutors also described developing skills through these methods, with examples of deployment being aligned to development needs. However, this was currently limited in Regional and Wales Division (RWD) North due to workload pressures.

Strength
A strong emphasis on coaching, oversight and supported casework progression.

7.11. We also found that subject matter leads, including in evolving crime types such as cybercrime, help maintain specialist knowledge and support SEOCID's response to the changing nature of the criminal threat. For example, during the inspection fieldwork, we were told that the International, London and South-East Division (ILSED) specialist prosecutor cybercrime lead was about to hold a workshop for other prosecutors across SEOCID to share expertise, and RWD was planning an "AI scam" presentation to share knowledge, practice and the technology used in this emerging area of criminality.

Succession planning

7.12. The cross-divisional board and people board have recognised the need for effective succession planning to protect specialist knowledge, support resilience and maintain a pipeline of staff able to move into key roles. In April 2024, SEOCID launched a 12-month succession planning programme, allowing SEOCID staff at all grades up to unit head to shadow specialists for a minimum of two hours a month and gain insight and hands-on experience across a range of roles within the directorate.

7.13. We found that senior leaders recognised the risks of relying on individual specialist experience and the need to retain specialist knowledge across the directorate. Since SEOCID came into being, a unit head shadowing scheme was rolled out to develop existing specialist prosecutors into unit head roles. This scheme had two principal aims; to retain specialist casework knowledge within the directorate and to provide a development and progression route for specialist prosecutors. This has been successful in maintaining a strong cadre of experienced senior lawyers at unit head level able to provide the assurance, coaching and support noted above.

7.14. Most recently, in early 2026, as an extension to the unit head shadowing scheme, a national lawyer shadowing scheme was launched in both RWD and ILSED. This enables lawyers from CPS Areas to join SEOCID and buddy up with specialist prosecutors. The lawyers are then released for a set number of days within a six-month period to assist SEOCID with its casework. As noted below, recruiting specialist prosecutors in both ILSED and RWD remains challenging, with the position particularly acute in RWD, where not all available posts have been filled. Some applicants have also expressed a preference for London-based roles. We were told that the limited number and geographical spread of RWD's five designated offices also acted as a barrier to recruitment, as staff could be required to travel considerable distances. RWD senior leaders have recognised this and put in place a mechanism that allows staff to work from a local CPS office while retaining a designated RWD office as their main base. This has now been implemented. It is a positive response which has the potential to widen the recruitment pool and reduce the travel burden on staff.

7.15. Potential applicants need a degree of exposure to complex casework before joining SEOCID to function effectively as specialist prosecutors within a reasonable time. Such experience is difficult to obtain for prosecutors in Areas, so the pool of prosecutors suitable for specialist prosecutor roles is somewhat limited, generally to those already working in Area complex casework units.

7.16. The shadowing scheme seeks to bridge this gap by exposing Area prosecutors to the work of SEOCID, giving applicants relevant experience to support applications for future roles, and upskilling Area prosecutors to deal with complex case matters when they emerge back in Area. The scheme launched in early 2026 in both RWD and ILSED, with specialist prosecutors taking the role of mentors. They reported back positively on the development opportunities the scheme provided. We consider the shadowing scheme to be *good practice*.

Good practice
The Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Directorate's structured approach to succession planning and workforce development, including shadowing opportunities, supported career pathways and knowledge transfer arrangements, helps sustain specialist capability and develop future leaders.

7.17. To support this, Areas should consider the development needs of individuals who have participated in the shadowing scheme and those who express an interest in working in the casework divisions during one-to-ones and, when the opportunity arises, allocate prosecutors' complex casework to support them in becoming suitably experienced to secure future roles as specialist prosecutors in SEOCID.

7.18. SEOCID launched the central fraud team within RWD in June 2026. This unit will take on lower-level fraud work (mostly coming from HMRC and DWP) previously covered by the local fraud hubs attached to the 14 geographic CPS Areas. Legal staff in the central fraud team will be at Senior Crown Prosecutor (SCP) grade. Senior managers noted that by bringing this work under RWD, the central fraud team is expected to provide a further pipeline of suitably experienced prosecutors to potentially develop into specialist prosecutors dealing with serious and organised economic crime in the future.

Recruitment and retention

7.19. Recruiting specialist prosecutors remains challenging despite the attraction of serious economic and organised crime work, the specialist prosecutor grade and the opportunity to prosecute complex, high-profile cases. As explained in paragraph 7.14, the difficulties reflect both the limited pool of lawyers with relevant complex casework experience and, particularly in RWD, the geographical constraints created by its five designated offices. RWD's introduction of more flexible office arrangements is a positive response which should widen the potential recruitment pool and reduce the travel burden on staff.

7.20. The scale of the recruitment challenge was illustrated by two recent joint RWD and ILSED specialist prosecutor recruitment campaigns. In June 2026, 32 applications were received for five vacancies: two in ILSED and three in RWD. Eight candidates passed the sift and three were offered roles after the assessment centre. In August 2026, there were 28 applications for four vacancies: one in ILSED and three in RWD. Ten candidates passed the sift and four were offered roles after the assessment centre. This meant that, across the two campaigns, 60 applications resulted in seven appointments against nine available posts. As SEOCID is not always able to recruit to all available posts, the work being undertaken to offer shadowing opportunities is important to help develop interest in RWD work and strengthen the potential regional pool of applicants.

7.21. A degree of experience in complex casework in new starters is highly desirable, but there remains a risk to SEOCID if they are unable to recruit sufficient suitable candidates. We welcome the specific focus on this issue we observed at a recent cross-divisional board meeting.

7.22. Retention is generally strong across SEOCID. Staff and stakeholders regarded it as a centre of casework excellence and specialist lawyer roles remain attractive. Workforce stability helps retain expertise, provides continuity and contributes to the high level of assurance and support provided by experienced staff.

Operational delivery and staff capability

7.23. RWD paralegal officers described pressures arising from court coverage, extensive travel and supporting complex work across multiple locations. Long trials away from home, last-minute changes and inadequate travel and subsistence arrangements affected workload and work-life balance. RWD North paralegal officers also described bunched and relisted trials, long days and difficulties handing work over to other colleagues to attend the trial after they had prepared the case for trial.

7.24. These pressures were compounded by paralegal turnover. National CPS recruitment does not always give applicants a full understanding of RWD's travel and operational requirements, which are greater than those associated with working in a local CPS Area. Security clearance can also delay staff taking up a post, while some paralegal officers use the role to gain experience before qualifying as lawyers and moving to other CPS roles. Although this supports individual career development, repeated turnover places additional demands on experienced staff responsible for inducting, mentoring and supporting new starters.

7.25. Taken together, the evidence indicates that RWD's headline retention figures do not fully reflect the resilience risk within its paralegal workforce. In RWD focus groups with paralegal business managers and paralegal officers, we heard operational pressures related to court coverage, travel and turnover as factors affecting longer-term retention and capability. ILSED's more immediate retention risk appeared to stem from different factors, with staff more commonly citing pay and limited career development opportunities for those who did not want to seek promotion into management roles.

7.26. We found that the people board recognised that the divisions required targeted responses. It considered separate Civil Service People Survey action plans covering leadership, workload and wellbeing, learning and development, career development, retention, inclusion and safety to challenge. It also established divisional sub-groups, reviewed staff representation and developed a workplace stress and wellbeing action plan. During fieldwork, we observed the board monitoring progress against these actions.

7.27. Operational delivery staff are an important part of SEOCID's capability. Staff, managers and stakeholders were generally positive about their knowledge and effectiveness. Formal induction arrangements were in place, and the specialist nature of the work meant that buddying, mentoring and experience-based learning remained particularly important for new starters.

7.28. Leaders had identified and acted on some capability gaps. In ILSED, they introduced paralegal principles and a paralegal officer champion role. However, RWD's operational pressures and paralegal turnover created a continuing need to recruit, induct and support new staff, increasing reliance on experienced officers and managers.

7.29. Court coverage pressures also affected resilience across SEOCID. Paralegal officers at ILSED described supporting RWD trials, showing that pressures from travel, trial listing and staff availability were not confined to RWD.

Consistency across divisions

7.30. We found no evidence that RWD lacked the capability required to deliver its work. It faces challenges arising from its wide geographical spread, limited office footprint, extensive travel requirements, court coverage responsibilities, and turnover among paralegal staff. These pressures affected workforce resilience and could restrict opportunities to use allocation and second-lawyer arrangements as planned development tools.

7.31. Some ILSED staff described more deliberate deployment aligned with development needs. In contrast, staff in RWD North told us that operational demands could make this more difficult. They also reported that some structured learning opportunities had reduced or ceased and that guidance required updating.

7.32. We found strong management support for developing staff capability across RWD and ILSED. The evidence demonstrates different operational pressures and varying maturity in learning arrangements, rather than a lack of capability in either division. SEOCID should continue to consider whether structured approaches used in ILSED can be adapted for RWD, while recognising the constraints created by its operational model.

8. Working with stakeholders

Scale and complexity

8.1. The Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Directorate (SEOCID) operates across a wider stakeholder landscape than Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) Areas, working with numerous law enforcement agencies (LEAs)[9] and managing cases across courts throughout England and Wales. Given the complexity of the cases it prosecutes, effective collaboration with investigators, stakeholders and the courts is critical to successful case progression. The table below summarises the referral coverage for the International, London and South-East Division (ILSED), Regional and Wales Division (RWD) Midlands and Wales, and RWD North.

Division	Non-police LEAs	Regional organised crime units	Police forces	CPS Areas
ILSED	7	3	13	6
RWD Midlands and Wales	9	4	16	4
RWD North	10	3	12	4

8.2. Cases that meet SEOCID's referral criteria (see below) are allocated to either ILSED or RWD on a broadly geographic basis based on the location of the investigative case team. However, some stakeholders deal exclusively with one part of the directorate; for example, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) works only with RWD North.

[9] See annex A for a comprehensive list of SEOCID stakeholders.

Referral and governance arrangements

8.3. SEOCID has established a comprehensive framework to manage relationships with a wide range of LEA stakeholders. Clear referral criteria, agreed roles and responsibilities, disclosure arrangements and casework standards set expectations for joint working. Governance structures reinforce this approach, while joint operational improvement meetings (JOIMs) provide strategic and operational oversight with key partners. Together, these arrangements support consistent engagement, escalation and collaborative resolution of stakeholder issues.

No.	Structure	Summary
1	Referral criteria	Clear, detailed criteria specify where each LEA should refer cases and the required level of seriousness and complexity. SEOCID staff and LEA stakeholders reported no issues interpreting them.
2	Memoranda of Understanding	A comprehensive suite of memoranda of understanding, agreed with LEA stakeholders, defines respective roles and responsibilities, including expectations for file submission and the service SEOCID provides.
3	Disclosure management frameworks	SEOCID's disclosure standards set expectations for prosecutors and LEAs. Agreed disclosure management frameworks with several LEA partners clarify disclosure responsibilities and provide a basis for managing issues in serious and complex investigations.
4	Joint operational improvement meetings	Senior leaders hold regular strategic and operational JOIMs with key stakeholders, including the National Crime Agency and HM Revenue and Customs. The meetings provide joint oversight, clear escalation routes and a forum for collaborative problem-solving; leaders from SEOCID and the agencies said they worked effectively.

Law enforcement agency relationships

8.4. Relationships with law enforcement agencies were consistently described as a strength by both SEOCID staff and stakeholders. We found evidence of strong strategic engagement, open communication and trusted professional relationships across a range of enforcement partners, including HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), the National Crime Agency (NCA), DWP and the City of London Police (CoLP).

8.5. We found that this was evidenced in practice. Senior staff highlighted regular, long-term engagement with principal partners, supported by both strategic and operational joint operational improvement meetings. At the same time, stakeholders described frequent access to senior SEOCID leaders and an ability to raise issues informally and directly. For example, the strategic and operational JOIM minutes with HMRC show that JOIMs provide a clear mechanism for resolving issues with law enforcement agencies, including redaction, training, disclosure and post-case debrief arrangements.

8.6. Stakeholders gave similar examples of constructive engagement. CoLP described the relationship as “good”, with open dialogue and the ability to engage informally with SEOCID staff. It also valued SEOCID’s active involvement in CoLP’s work to streamline complex fraud investigations. The NCA described a strong relationship and expressed confidence that SEOCID and the CPS shared the same objectives of presenting effective prosecutions for serious and complex cases. DWP and HMRC also described strong relationships and effective information sharing, while recognising that professional challenge can arise at operational level in serious and complex cases when strategy is being discussed.

Strength
Strong strategic engagement, open communication and trusted professional relationships across law enforcement partners.

Using relationships to improve operational performance

8.7. We found strong evidence that established stakeholder relationships are used proactively to resolve operational issues and improve casework processes. Stakeholders consistently described concerns being raised, discussed and addressed through established channels rather than becoming entrenched disputes. The following examples show that the overall relationship with law enforcement partners was strong, but also that some operational changes, including pending response further investigation (PRFI)[10], were not initially supported by sufficiently effective engagement. Where this happened, SEOCID and its partners used existing relationships to address concerns, refine processes and improve performance.

Pending response further investigation

8.8. SEOCID cases can remain at the investigative stage for long periods when no direct prosecutor intervention is required. Keeping such cases long-term in the CPS's case management system can distort prosecutors' apparent caseloads and hamper effective resource planning.

8.9. After a review in late 2024 identified large numbers of such dormant cases, SEOCID launched the PRFI process in early 2025.

8.10. Three of the four LEAs we engaged with during this inspection raised concerns about this new process. The NCA told us they had recognised the need to reduce aged cases but were concerned that if the CPS did not check in with them, NCA staff might not realise the need to resubmit when further advice was needed. In response, a joint presentation in September 2025 explained the position to all relevant NCA staff. To reduce risk, the SEOCID/NCA strategic JOIM also monitors the number of aged cases, and senior leaders from SEOCID and NCA meet to discuss individual cases.

8.11. HMRC also raised concerns about cases being prematurely finalised as PRFI, practical difficulties in re-registering cases, ensuring the same prosecutor was re-allocated the case and the potential impact on investigative pace. These concerns show that, when PRFI was introduced, engagement with some stakeholders had not been sufficiently effective to secure shared understanding or confidence in the process. However, the evidence also showed that SEOCID responded constructively once HMRC raised concerns. Through further

[10] PRFI requires that, where there is no expectation of a need for prosecutor intervention for a significant period, the case should be finalised and removed from the prosecutor's case list. When prosecution intervention is needed, the LEA should resubmit the case, and it will then be reactivated.

discussion with HMRC and other partners, the process was refined, and a separate escalation route was established. The revised process was working effectively. Staff told us that direct management oversight and strong working relationships meant formal escalation was rarely required, and senior prosecutors were confident managers could intervene appropriately if escalation became necessary.

Administrative triage

8.12. While operational delivery staff generally described positive relationships with law enforcement stakeholders, they reported some variation in the quality and timeliness of file submissions, particularly in larger and more complex investigations involving the NCA and HMRC. Staff told us that managing disclosure requirements across multiple LEAs can be challenging, and that limitations in the IT systems used to receive large volumes of materials can add to these difficulties. They also noted that resource pressures and staff turnover within LEAs could at times affect case progression and continuity, including in NCA, HMRC and DWP investigations.

8.13. To deal with these issues and improve the quality and consistency of LEA submissions to SEOCID, an administrative triage system has been introduced where case files are assessed and will be sent back to the LEA if they are inadequate or missing key information.

8.14. As with the SEOCID roll-out of PRFI, it was positive to see that the directorate was willing to consult with its LEA stakeholders and take on board concerns. The original roll-out date was 16 February 2026. However, this was postponed after discussion at the cross-divisional board so concerns raised by stakeholders, most significantly by HMRC, could be addressed and minor amendments made to the policy.

8.15. The roll-out was staggered, with NCA coming on board at the beginning of March and HMRC in April 2026. At the time of the inspection, it was too early to draw any definitive conclusions about the scheme's effectiveness, but we did hear positive comments from staff and stakeholders. The scheme has potential to provide useful data around the reasons for triage rejection, which may help to drive subsequent improvement in file quality.

Joint disclosure reviews, training and debriefs

8.16. We found clear evidence that, notwithstanding the earlier concerns about PRFI, stakeholder relationships were being used to support practical improvements. SEOCID staff pointed to securing the NCA's agreement that disclosure officers should be appointed early in cases, helping to identify and manage disclosure risk from the outset. They also described close work with HMRC on disclosure, including updates to its approach to Legal Professional Privilege, joint reviews of disclosure processes with both HMRC and the NCA, and detailed discussions about training needs. These examples were consistent with stakeholder views that SEOCID staff engage constructively and are focused on improving the quality and progression of serious and complex casework.

8.17. We found evidence of a positive culture of openness, information sharing and joint learning. Staff spoke highly of their invitation to attend the recent NCA disclosure conference and of the NCA's invitation for SEOCID to take part in its quarterly internal assurance review of cases. They mentioned that HMRC was keen to listen and engage, with reciprocal training being offered between HMRC and the CPS. This included HMRC providing awareness training to RWD's new central fraud team at the time of the inspection fieldwork. SEOCID staff also described work with the NCA to improve the quality of International Letters of Request (ILORs)[11]. The NCA stated that after a complicated operation with ILORs that required SEOCID support, learning was now being shared across the NCA, with positive results and improved ILOR quality.

8.18. Joint debriefs provided another example of relationships being used to identify learning and improve future practice. All stakeholders considered debriefs with SEOCID case teams at the conclusion of cases useful for identifying shared learning and lessons to take forward. HMRC raised a specific point that representatives of its Disclosure Policy Unit do not regularly attend joint debriefs. SEOCID should consider this, given the central importance of effective disclosure processes in the cases it prosecutes.

[11] An International Letter of Request is a formal request sent to an overseas authority for evidential or investigative assistance in support of a criminal investigation or prosecution in England and Wales.

Working with the courts

8.19. In addition to the challenge of working with a wide range of LEA stakeholders, ILSED and RWD also have cases listed across England and Wales. This differs from CPS Areas, which normally deal with cases listed in a limited range of local magistrates' courts and Crown Court centres and maintain relationships with the local judiciary and listing officers through regular contact and forums such as court user groups. SEOCID has a wider and less predictable court footprint, which makes consistent court engagement more difficult.

8.20. The court system is currently experiencing significant delays for SEOCID cases. These delays form part of the wider backlog of criminal cases across the criminal justice system. SEOCID cases are complex and long-running. They seldom involve defendants in custody or direct victims and, while unquestionably serious, they tend to receive lower listing priority than cases that do involve defendants held in custody. We were told that some long-running and complex investigations were not listed for trial until 2029.

8.21. An updated Practice Direction[12] on listing in the criminal courts, issued by the Lady Chief Justice, came into operation on 1 October 2026. It establishes a national listing framework, including a specific section on SEOCID cases, recognising that they often involve large volumes of material and complex legal issues requiring close management.

8.22. The Practice Direction effectively restates the aims of previous arrangements between HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) and the CPS, while embedding specific consideration of SEOCID cases within a national listing framework. It gives economic crime cases their own priority category and provides a mechanism for transferring SEOCID cases between regions where capacity pressures require it. The Practice Direction provides an opportunity to strengthen joint working between SEOCID and HMCTS nationally. We were told that the Chief Crown Prosecutor (RWD) intends to write to each Resident Judge and follow up with meetings, and that the Director of Legal Services intends to meet with the Senior Presiding Judge to support this work.

8.23. The Practice Direction also acknowledges the need for SEOCID cases to be managed in appropriate court centres with the facilities and judicial expertise required to progress them effectively. In particular, it provides that cases should normally be heard at designated court centres, that a trial judge should be nominated at the earliest opportunity, and that SEOCID and HMCTS should

[12] *Practice Direction on listing in the criminal courts*; Courts and Tribunals Judiciary. judiciary.uk/courts-and-tribunals/the-crown-court/practice-direction-on-listing-and-criminal-remote-participation-guidance/

nominate single points of contact for each HMCTS region, with the cluster manager acting as that contact on behalf of HMCTS[13].

8.24. There have been recent efforts by the two heads of Area operations to establish more effective relationships with HMCTS managers at regional level, but this was at a very early stage at the time of our fieldwork. When we spoke to the HMCTS contacts provided by SEOCID, they reported varying and limited levels of engagement. For example, the contact from the South East region felt a suitably senior point of contact was in place. In Wales, RWD had a dedicated representative who attended each Cardiff Crown Court user group meeting, providing a regular forum for engagement with HMCTS and other court users. However, the issue identified by HMCTS related specifically to liaison with court administration: it described contact as sporadic, with no ongoing structured relationship and low visibility of SEOCID as a distinct part of the CPS.

8.25. We found, understandably, that relationships were more established where a higher volume of SEOCID cases passed through a particular court centre. Southwark Crown Court is the primary trial centre in England and Wales for serious, complex fraud and financial crime cases. It deals with all such cases scheduled to last six or more weeks and can host six or seven fraud trials at any one time. SEOCID has an established and effective relationship with Southwark, including regular meetings between SEOCID Chief Crown Prosecutors (CCPs), CPS London CCPs and the Resident Judge to discuss and resolve issues. This is supported by an effective protocol governing the relationship, which is regularly updated and includes specific SEOCID input. The protocol covers key issues such as early allocation of a trial judge and management of the disclosure process, both of which are particularly relevant in SEOCID prosecutions.

8.26. We also found evidence of positive working relationships at other courts which more regularly deal with SEOCID cases, including Birmingham and Nottingham Crown Courts. In Birmingham, for example, the Crown Court has allocated a specific listing officer to deal with SEOCID cases.

8.27. At those court centres where SEOCID cases are rarely listed, engagement was less consistent. SEOCID staff reported that some courts had limited awareness that SEOCID was a specialist CPS directorate and did not always appreciate the particular issues that can arise in its cases. This made it harder to build the relationships and shared understanding needed to support effective case progression.

[13] Save for the South East region, where the regional listing co-ordinator should take the role.

8.28. We found some structural focus within the directorate on supporting effective court engagement. The casework process manual emphasises early listing, compliance with judicial directions and prompt recording of court outcomes. The divisional business plans refer to trial readiness, digital working and reducing delay, but do not address in detail the challenges created by SEOCID's national court footprint and limited recognition at court centres where its cases are uncommon.

8.29. Senior leaders told us that the arrangements now set out in the Practice Direction are implemented inconsistently. A system of HMCTS regional single points of contact was only being established at the time of the inspection. Leaders acknowledged that relationships with HMCTS are less developed than those with LEA stakeholders, and that SEOCID needs a clearer and more consistent approach. The new listing Practice Direction provides a timely opportunity to refresh these links. SEOCID should use its implementation to establish clear, suitably senior points of contact and regular, structured engagement with HMCTS across regions, so that issues can be identified early, escalated where necessary and addressed jointly.

Listing arrangements in the magistrates' courts

8.30. Defendants in criminal cases come to court broadly by two routes: either after being charged by the police or summonsed by a postal requisition issued by the relevant magistrates' court. Most SEOCID cases come to court by postal requisition. For police investigations, the police will usually issue the requisition. For cases investigated by other law enforcement agencies, including much SEOCID casework, the CPS drafts and issues the summons and liaises with the relevant magistrates' court.

8.31. This reflects the nature of SEOCID work, which often follows lengthy investigations involving numerous suspects in different locations who have not been in custody or on bail. SEOCID therefore needs to decide the appropriate magistrates' court for the first hearing before sending the case to a Crown Court designated to deal with SEOCID work.

8.32. In practical terms, the prosecutor drafts the postal requisition and sends it to the operational delivery team. A casework assistant then contacts the relevant magistrates' court to arrange an initial hearing date. SEOCID needs that date before it can issue the postal requisition, so defendants know when and where to attend court. The court will have to accommodate the case in the court list.

8.33. Staff who liaise with HMCTS to obtain first hearing dates reported delays in getting cases into the court system. They described variation across court

centres, inconsistent engagement and courts' limited understanding of SEOCID's complex casework. Casework assistants reported particular difficulty making effective contact with magistrates' courts, particularly those that rarely deal with SEOCID work. In one case, it took two months to secure a first hearing. Staff also reported a lack of named contacts or escalation routes, leaving them reliant on generic email addresses that could take significant time to receive a response.

8.34. This issue was not confined to courts with little SEOCID work. HMCTS representatives from Westminster Magistrates' Court, which regularly deals with SEOCID cases, told us that most of them, unless suitable for an application to the Chief Magistrate as a special jurisdiction case, had to be registered through an email address that often had more than 1,000 unanswered emails.

8.35. We found that magistrates' court engagement arrangements were variable and often dependent on local systems and contacts. While many delays reflect wider pressures in the criminal justice system, inconsistent access to named contacts and escalation routes limits SEOCID's ability to progress cases efficiently and resolve issues when they arise.

8.36. Overall, the evidence suggests that SEOCID has effective court relationships where its work is concentrated and recognised, but that those relationships are less consistent nationally and need to be further developed. The Practice Direction provides a clear framework for improvement, but sustained engagement with HMCTS at regional level will be needed if that framework is to operate effectively in practice.

Annex A
Inspection framework

Framework

The framework for this inspection consisted of the overarching inspection question and a set of 10 questions.

Inspection question

Does SEOCID efficiently manage serious economic and organised crime casework, with effective assurance and governance in place to promote high-quality legal decision-making and keep pace with the changing criminal landscape?

Objective

To examine whether SEOCID provides the resilience and expertise needed to make robust, high-quality and timely legal decisions. We will review existing systems and processes to understand how effectively they support assurance and governance.

Casework quality and delivery

1. Does the structure of SEOCID support the delivery of high-quality casework in a timely manner?

2. Are the use of standard case management documents and recording of casework on case management systems consistent across the breadth of SEOCID work?

Governance, oversight and assurance

3. Does the current system of assurance and reporting provide sufficient oversight of SEOCID casework?

4. Do local and national case management panels and quality assessments provide the information the CPS need to manage casework risk?

People and skills

5. Has the creation of SEOCID built a workforce that is skilled in handling the most complex economic and organised crime cases?

6. How does SEOCID attract, recruit and retain staff?

7. Do SEOCID staff have the training, skills and tools together with support from managers to provide them with the confidence to prosecute serious economic and organised crime cases?

Stakeholders

8. Does SEOCID have mature and effective relationships with investigators to effectively manage its cases at all levels?

9. Does SEOCID have mature and effective relationships with HMCTS to ensure effective case progression at court?

10. Are there effective internal and external relationships to ensure relevant information is shared in a purposeful and timely manner between SEOCID, the Directors of Legal Services and the Attorney Generals' Office?

Annex B
Glossary

Administrative triage

A process used by SEOCID to check whether case files submitted by law enforcement agencies contain the information required before a prosecutor reviews them.

Area performance review (APR)

A quarterly CPS performance meeting used to review how an Area or directorate is performing against key operational and casework measures. It supports senior leaders to identify risks, monitor progress and agree improvement activity.

Attorney General's Office (AGO)

The government department that supports the Attorney General. It has oversight responsibilities for the Crown Prosecution Service but does not make operational prosecution decisions.

Business centre

A central team that provides business, finance and administrative support to SEOCID. It also collates and monitors performance information to help managers identify issues and oversee improvement.

Case management document (CMD)

A working document maintained throughout the life of a case that records actions, decisions and developments, provide an audit trail and also support continuity in complex cases.

Case management system (CMS)

The Crown Prosecution Service's electronic case management system, used to record case information, reviews, actions and court hearings.

Casework administration manager (CAM)

An operational manager who oversees the administrative work supporting cases. The role includes allocating tasks, monitoring correspondence and casework actions, quality checking work and escalating outstanding or urgent issues.

Casework assistant

A member of operational delivery staff who carries out administrative work throughout a case. This includes registering cases, checking and storing material, preparing case documents, obtaining hearing dates and updating case records.

Casework process manual (CPM)

SEOCID's main guidance document describing how cases should be managed and what staff in different roles are responsible for.

Chief Crown Prosecutor (CCP)

The senior legal leader of a CPS Area or specialist division. The role provides strategic leadership and oversight and considers matters requiring the highest level of legal, operational or financial authorisation.

Civil Service People Survey

An annual Civil Service survey, administered by the Cabinet Office, that measures employees' attitudes and experiences at work across participating organisations. Participation is voluntary but strongly encouraged.

Court user groups

Forums that allow legal professionals, court staff and support services to meet and share feedback and improve court services.

Cybercrime

Crime committed using computers, networks, or the internet, either to target technology and data or to help carry out other offences. Examples include crimes against individuals like identity theft and cyberstalking, crimes against property such as ransomware and data breaches, and crimes against government or society including cyberterrorism and cyber warfare.

Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutor (DCCP)

A senior legal manager who supports the CCP and oversees casework quality, risk and assurance within a division. The role includes considering significant or escalated casework issues and providing senior authorisation and oversight in sensitive, complex or high-risk cases.

Director of Legal Services (DLS)

The senior CPS director responsible for overseeing SEOCID and providing strategic oversight of high-risk, sensitive and nationally significant casework.

Disclosure management framework (DMF)

An agreement between the CPS and a law enforcement agency setting out responsibilities and expectations for managing disclosure — the process of identifying, reviewing and providing material that may be relevant to a criminal case.

Divisional business manager (DBM)

A senior operational delivery manager with responsibility for divisional business controls and oversight. The role supports casework through financial management, security and access arrangements, administrative processes and the escalation of operational risks.

Economic Crime Prosecutors Forum

Brings together economic crime leads from SEOCID and CPS Areas to share organisational, thematic and operational learning across the CPS. Its role is to disseminate learning beyond individual cases and divisions into wider organisational learning.

Future casework tools team

Part of the Digital Improvement Directorate, the team develops and delivers user-centred digital tools to improve casework processes and support the CPS's transition from legacy case management systems.

Head of Area operations (HAO)

The senior operational delivery leader responsible for the resources, business controls and support arrangements that underpin casework delivery within a CPS Area or specialist division.

Law enforcement agencies (LEAs)

Organisations that investigate suspected criminal offences and may refer cases to the CPS for charging advice or prosecution. SEOCID works with police forces and other agencies, including the National Crime Agency and HM Revenue and Customs.

Memorandum of understanding (MoU)

A written agreement setting out how organisations intend to work together, including their respective roles, responsibilities and expectations.

One way of working

CPS guidance setting out how case material and correspondence should be stored and managed consistently across its casework systems.

Operational delivery

The teams and staff who support the preparation, administration and progression of cases. Their work includes maintaining case records, preparing material for court, supporting hearings and trials, and carrying out operational checks and assurance.

Operational performance indicators (OPIs)

Measures used by the CPS to monitor operational performance and identify where improvement may be needed, including in casework quality, timeliness and service to victims.

Paralegal assistant

A member of operational delivery staff who supports Crown Court casework and court hearings. The role includes preparing hearing documents, updating case records and supporting trial coverage.

Paralegal business manager (PBM)

An operational manager who allocates and oversees paralegal work, manages court coverage and resources, and provides assurance that important casework processes are completed properly and on time.

Paralegal officer

A member of operational delivery staff who works with the prosecutor to prepare and progress serious and complex cases. The role includes managing case records and court material, serving evidence and disclosure, liaising with courts, counsel and investigators, and attending trials to support the prosecution case.

Pending response further investigation (PRFI)

A process used when a case is returned to the investigating agency because no immediate prosecutorial action is required. The case will be reactivated if further advice is needed, when the case is resubmitted by the agency.

Postal requisition

A legal document requiring a defendant to attend court to answer criminal charges. It is commonly used in SEOCID cases.

Practice Direction

Formal guidance for courts and criminal justice agencies that supplements procedural rules and explains how particular types of court business should be managed.

Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Directorate (SEOCID)

The specialist CPS directorate responsible for serious economic crime, organised crime and international casework. This inspection focuses on its serious economic and organised crime work.

Small boats cases

Cases involving people who enter the UK illegally by crossing bodies of water, such as the English Channel, in small or unsafe boats.

Specialist prosecutor

A senior prosecutor who provides legal advice, makes charging and other prosecution decisions, and develops the strategy for serious and complex cases. The role includes working with investigators, paralegal staff and advocates to prepare and progress the case.

Unit head

A legal manager who supervises specialist prosecutors and oversees the allocation, quality and progression of their casework. The role includes providing advice and challenge, monitoring risk and escalating significant or sensitive matters when necessary.

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