

CPS Witness Management System - Criminal Justice

Improving services for Victims and Witnesses

CGI partnered with the police/CPS No Witness No Justice project in a business change initiative to deliver a national system to improve the care of witnesses and victims in the criminal justice process.

The Witness Management System (WMS) enables information sharing between the two agencies and enhances the support given to witnesses to enable them to give evidence at trial.

THE CHALLENGE

As part of the Government's commitment to transform the experiences of victims and witnesses of crime, the No Witness No Justice (NWNJ) team developed a strategy to ensure consistent delivery of witness care services across England and Wales.

Implementation of the initiative, which concluded in December 2005, has significantly improved the standard of service provided to victims and witnesses. Underpinning this is a set of minimum requirements which aim to ensure that victims and witnesses receive support and information delivered through a network of joint police/CPS Witness Care Units.

The CPS and police recognised that it was crucial to have the right IT support for witness care units at the outset in order to meet the objective of national best practice. CGI was engaged to build upon the successful COMPASS Case Management System and to develop a modern Witness Management System for use by joint police/ CPS Witness Care Units.

WHAT THE CPS NEEDED

Supporting people who are either a victim of crime or a witness to an incident is important in terms of a responsibility to the individual. Providing support is also crucial to the smooth progression of a prosecution case by avoiding delays and expense, due to witness non-attendance at court. Set in the broader context of improving public confidence in criminal justice, NWNJ was tasked with putting in place arrangements to ensure a consistent level of service. Many good examples existed, but without a supporting framework, achieving best practice at the national level was hard to demonstrate.

OUR ANSWER

CGI has successfully delivered a large IT-enabled business change programme with the CPS through the COMPASS partnership, with the

CASE STUDY

JUSTICE

“With WMS witness care officers are more effective but it also helps them undertake their roles more efficiently. It is simply about using the system to its maximum potential and allowing WMS to prioritise actions through the task and reminder functions. It ensures ease of access to information, provides advice and guidance on critical aspects of witness care and captures essential management information. As a system designed by users for users it really can make the difference in trying to secure witness attendance and in the delivery of high quality service”

Simon Deacy,
ACPO Head of Victim and
Witness Care Delivery Unit.

introduction of the Case Management System (CMS). This supports the end-to-end prosecution process, helping lawyers, caseworkers and administrative staff to manage a case from start to finish; scheduling tasks and helping to streamline many of the administrative activities.

The Home Office undertook a study to look at options for witness care IT support. This concluded that building on the established CMS would allow IT support for Witness Care Units to be introduced quickly and with confidence at the same time that the units were being set-up. The use of an existing system meant that the project was much lower risk than other options. The approach allowed WMS to be rolled out across the diverse police/CPS estate with minimal impact on the existing IT desktop equipment.

Building WMS as part of the national case management platform ensures that CPS staff and Witness Care Officers can work collaboratively, sharing and benefiting from up to date case and witness information.

WMS allows information such as witness name, contact details and communications to be captured and easily accessed. It helps the business to deliver efficiency gains since data does not need to be re-keyed across disparate systems and provides better continuity of witness care as each party involved has a common view of a case. WCOs can see the status of the case as recorded by the CPS. Both CPS staff and WCOs can see letters sent and telephone calls made by either party.

A key aspect of the witness care process is the "Detailed Needs Assessment" which is conducted by telephone and allows a WCO to establish the needs of each witness and to address concerns such as support needed when attending court, allowing advice to be provided on childcare arrangement, transport or provisions available in court.

Implementation of WMS was supported by CGI consultants who assisted witness care staff to adopt the new system, coached managers in using and managing WMS, resolved business issues and contributed live system experience. They helped to address a range of business issues around the structure of witness care units, local roles and responsibilities and joint police/CPS working practices, and set up and ran the WMS

User Group, particularly challenging due to the complex multi-agency responsibilities for witness care.

In order to help assess how NWNJ meets commitments to victims and witnesses and also how the improvements contribute to the overall public confidence targets, provision of management information with minimal burden on frontline staff has been an essential element of WMS.

A SUCCESS STORY

WMS has enabled achievement of significant business change and delivered benefits including:

- **Better service for witnesses:** It has become easier to meet the needs of witnesses, assessing their individual situation and ensuring they have all the support they need to turn up in court. Witness care officers may be dealing with a hundred witnesses at any one time but can treat each

"With WMS we have information at our fingertips. This allows us to concentrate on helping victims and witnesses by providing them with updates on the progress of a case. If they are asked to give evidence in a trial we can determine their individual needs and help with the practicalities of attending court."

Susan Smith, Witness Care Officer

one personally as WMS will present them with a log of previous contacts with the witness.

- **Joined-up working:** WMS has enabled collaboration across teams as timely information is shared. It has given the police, witness care officers and the CPS the right information at the right time to do their jobs effectively. There has also been a large reduction in data keying as information is increasingly being entered once and reused many times. Frontline staff are relieved of administrative burdens and can focus their efforts on delivering support to victims and witnesses.
- **Improved management information:** The reporting within WMS enables the police and CPS to have a national view of witness management across agencies, helping to promote consistent achievement of Victims' Code and Witness Charter commitments. It also provides a sample base for the national Witness and Victim Experience Survey (WAVES), which interviews nearly 40,000 victims and witnesses every year.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS FOR THE WITNESS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM)

NWNJ has rapidly achieved a transformation in the standards of care for victims and witnesses. Work is ongoing to embed best practice processes and use of WMS to ensure consistency across all criminal justice areas and to work in the most joined up manner with all the agencies involved. Key to the success is to remain responsive to evolving business needs.

As a single national system, WMS underpins witness care, helping to achieve best practice and supporting collaborative working between agencies. Constraints imposed by handling paper files are being removed and the shift towards the electronic case file across criminal justice will provide the opportunity to truly transform and rationalise working practices.

The project referenced in this case study was delivered by Logica, which CGI acquired in August 2012"

"Getting feedback from victims and witnesses about their experience is crucial if we are to continue improving the service we provide. The WAVES survey needs reliable contact details for victims and witnesses in order to give robust results. WMS gives us those details quickly and efficiently, helping us to invite victims and witnesses to participate in the survey. Results from the survey then go on to CJ Know How for use by local teams and also for analysis at the national level"

Nick Poyntz,
OCJR Victim and Witness Unit

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