



Extract from the report to the
Public Accounts Committee on
the processing of criminal cases

January
2014

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I. Introduction and conclusion

1. This report is about the coherence of the Danish criminal justice system and covers the process from a crime is being reported to the police and to case is closed.

Rigsrevisionen initiated the examination.

2. Smooth passage of criminal cases is essential for the solving of crimes and conviction of culprits, but it is also important for the citizens' sense of justice and for the victims of crime. The efficiency of the criminal justice system is also – seen from a legal protection perspective – of importance to the citizens and businesses in cases where the police drops a charge, the prosecution withdraws a charge, or the defendant is acquitted in court. In the opinion of Rigsrevisionen it should be transparent to the general public how long it takes to process a criminal case. In order to contribute to enhancing the transparency of the criminal justice system, Rigsrevisionen has mapped out the turnaround times for criminal cases closed in 2012.

3. Several government bodies, including the police, the prosecution, the courts and the Danish Prison and Probation Service, are generally involved in processing criminal cases. Collaboration at central and local level between the bodies involved is a prerequisite for swift criminal justice. The Ministry of Justice is responsible for the bodies that are controlling crime and imposing penalties, and should therefore – in the opinion of Rigsrevisionen – supervise and support a coherent criminal justice system. With this report, Rigsrevisionen wishes to focus on the role and responsibility of the Ministry of Justice in securing the efficiency of the Danish criminal justice system.

4. The purpose of the report is to contribute to improving the transparency of the processing of criminal cases and to examine how the Ministry of Justice supports the connection between the various government bodies and systems in the criminal justice system. The report answers the following questions:

- Do the current overviews of case processing times for criminal cases elaborated by the authorities, provide adequate information on how long it takes for a case to pass through the system, i.e. from the case is reported to the police to the case is closed?
- What was the turnaround time for criminal cases closed in 2012 broken down on different categories of crimes, and is it possible to improve the efficiency of the processing of criminal cases?
- Has the Ministry of Justice had sufficient focus on supervising the coherence of the criminal justice system across the public bodies involved and on the collaboration between the same bodies?

Turnaround time is the time it takes to process a criminal case from the moment the crime is reported to the police and to the case is closed.

The Norwegian and the Swedish Supreme Audit Institutions have both carried out several examinations of the administration of criminal cases. Their examinations have addressed, for instance, implementation of digital solutions, turnaround times, detection rates and the criminal justice system in general.

MAIN CONCLUSION

The Ministry of Justice and the public bodies have not focused sufficiently on establishing a coherent and transparent overview of the criminal justice system. Although criminal cases flow between several bodies, the current summaries of turnaround times have primarily been focused on the performance of the individual institutions, which means that no data have been available on the turnaround times for the criminal cases from beginning to end, i.e. from the crime is being reported to the case is closed. It is a statutory requirement that criminal cases should be processed as fast as the nature of the respective cases allows, and Rigsrevisionen is therefore of the opinion that the Ministry of Justice is responsible for providing evidence in this respects.

Rigsrevisionen has mapped out the turnaround times for criminal cases closed in 2012 in order to enhance the transparency of the processing system. In 2013, the Ministry of Justice took steps to establish a controller forum, which was to support efforts made to procure turnaround data from the bodies in the criminal justice system. Rigsrevisionen finds that this initiative will contribute to strengthening the supervision carried out by the ministry.

Collaboration between the bodies – in particular on local level – contributes to ensure efficient passage of cases through the criminal justice system, yet Rigsrevisionen finds that the Ministry of Justice has been too reluctant to insist on implementing cross-sectoral solutions. Having the overall responsibility for the services provided by the bodies in the criminal justice system, the ministry is well positioned to implement shared solutions, and Rigsrevisionen is therefore of the opinion that the ministry should have insisted on the implementation of, in particular, shared digital solutions earlier. Rigsrevisionen welcomes the steps taken by the ministry in 2013 to improve collaboration across the criminal justice system and ensure on-going strategic focus on the coherence of the criminal justice system.

Rigsrevisionen's mapping showed that it in 2012 took between 287 and 714 days for a case to pass through the system, i.e. from reporting of the crime to the convicted started serving his or her sentence. The mapping also showed great variations in turnaround times between the bodies – and within the individual types of crimes.

Rigsrevisionen recommends that:

- the Ministry of Justice should analyse the outcome of Rigsrevisionen's mapping of turnaround times for criminal cases from reporting of the crime to closing of the case, and assess whether the results are satisfactory and reflect efficient use of resources;
- the Ministry of Justice should use the data - that will be collected from all the bodies involved in the criminal justice system in the future - to calculate and add transparency to the turnaround times for all criminal cases – from reporting of the crime to closing of the case;

- **the authorities should analyse the turnaround times and variations between the different elements of the criminal justice system to determine whether the cases with the shortest turnaround times may serve as examples to follow;**
- **the Ministry of Justice and the government bodies should – when the challenges affect some or all the bodies involved in the criminal justice system – consider including more cross-functional targets in the bodies' performance contracts;**
- **the Ministry of Justice should consider defining and monitoring a number of performance indicators, which would allow the ministry to identify areas where the efficiency of the criminal justice system could be further improved.**