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SENIOR PRESIDING JUDGE
FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

The Early Guilty Plea Scheme.....

The Early Guilty Plea Scheme is an initiative of the Senior Presiding Judge which aims to reduce delays and unnecessary paper work and increases productivity for all Criminal Justice partners. The principle of the Early Guilty Plea Scheme is to identify those cases where a defendant is likely to plead guilty and to expedite those cases to an early guilty plea hearing.

The aim is not to deter defendants from pleading at the magistrate's court, but to provide another opportunity for defendants to plead at an earlier point in the process.

The Early Guilty Plea Scheme acknowledges that around three quarters of Crown Court cases plead guilty on the day of trial and is designed to encourage the guilty plea where appropriate to be entered at an earlier opportunity to prevent delaying justice unnecessarily.

The Early Guilty Plea Scheme allows the defence and CPS to identify those cases likely to plead guilty and offers a credit on sentence for the defendant where they plead guilty at the Early Guilty Plea Hearing. The Scheme encourages discussion between the CPS and defence practitioners before the Early Guilty Plea Hearing takes place where any issues such as basis of plea can be agreed. This discussion can be undertaken using secure email as a way of ensuring that the CPS are able to respond quickly to any queries. This ensures that all parties are ready for the Early Guilty Plea Hearing where, providing the National Offender Management Service have a pre-sentence report, sentencing can occur at the Early Guilty Plea Hearing avoiding additional hearings for sentence.

One of the benefits of the Scheme for defence practitioners is to enable them to secure maximum credit on sentence for their clients and reducing the number of hearings that they are required to attend. This also relieves the stress and anxiety felt by victims, witnesses and defendants whose case is finalised more quickly.

Other benefits of the Scheme for defence practitioners are:

- Reducing the number of hearings to which an advocate attends and the number of times files must pass through case tracking systems;
- Reduces re-work in preparing for hearings;
- Early service of papers allows for early advice to client on plea;
- Earlier resolution of proceedings against client;
- Improved dialogue with CPS Advocates in advance of the Early Guilty Plea Hearing; and
- Enables advocates to use secure email to improve the dialogue with the CPS.

The Scheme will be in place at all Crown Court centres by Spring 2013 with the majority of Crown Court centres operating the Scheme by December 2012.

If the Crown Court where you attend has started the Scheme you should have been invited to a defence event held by the Resident Judge at the Crown Court, you should be receiving notification that your cases are being listed as Early Guilty Plea cases, and the CPS should now be discussing your cases with you at an earlier stage.

If you have any queries please direct them either the Crown Court centre you attend or to:

EGPImplementationenquiries@judiciary.gsi.gov.uk

Vanessa Castle
Implementation Manager Early Guilty Plea Scheme

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