

Support for police's criminal investigations

Summary

Audit approach

Background

The Parliament and the government have set up goals for criminal investigative activities within the judicial system. These are to encourage the increase of criminal proceedings, to accelerate trials, and to solve more everyday crimes. Furthermore, the activities must maintain high quality and be carried out efficiently with more cooperation between the various players in the judicial process. One important prerequisite for this is that criminal investigations are given the support they require to link perpetrators to crimes, bring charges, and for courts to establish liability for the crime. This support is given, among other methods, by *forensic* and *medicolegal* specialists producing technical evidence.

Activities investigated

The Swedish National Audit Office (SNAO) has investigated the areas which give support needed by police to solve crimes. Forensic activities are carried out at the 21 police authority technical departments and at the National Forensic Laboratory (SKL). Medicolegal activities are carried out by the National Board of Forensic Medicine at its medicolegal and forensic departments.

The SNAO also investigates the control of forensic and medicolegal activities. That is why the audit includes, in addition to the above operative players, the Ministry of Justice and the National Police Board.

Audit question

The following audit question is posed on the basis of requirements from parliament and the government:

• *Are forensic and medicolegal activities carried out in a fashion that corresponds to the requirements placed upon investigative activities by parliament and the government, such as faster processing and more criminal proceedings?*

To answer this audit question, the SNAO has investigated the support given to criminal investigations by police with regard to

- *commissions* for those authorities that carry out forensic and medicolegal activities
- how activities are *organized* by the authorities
- how the activities are *dimensioned*
- *processing times*
- *specialization* of the activities
- how the forensic, medicolegal and crime investigative players *cooperate*
- the *follow-up system*
- *quality assurance*.

Overall conclusions of the SNAO audit

Commissions for the police, National Forensic Laboratory and the National Board of Forensic Medicine

The audit shows that there is no cohesive view and overall strategy for all the forensic and medicolegal activities. SNAO believes that the government should to a larger extent view forensic and medicolegal activities as a strategic resource for solving crimes. An overall strategy for forensic and medicolegal activities would contribute to achieving parliament's and the government's goal of more legal proceedings and faster processing in the entire judicial process. Such a strategy could include when investigations would be carried out, how cases would be prioritized, and how long the investigations would take. Issues such as long-term supply of competence, work distribution and specialization between players involved could be included. It is therefore urgent that the government ensure that such a strategy is produced.

At present, developed follow-ups are missing. The government has not quantified goals for crime investigative activities, i.e. the level of legal proceedings or how quickly processing should take place. Neither has the government qualified goals for different types of crimes. Both parliament and the government have been content to state that legal proceedings must increase and processing times must decrease, but not by how much. SNAO judges that there is a need to distinguish between different types of crimes. On the basis of this, it is possible to set goals for how much legal proceedings must increase and processing times decrease for each type of crime. In this way it will become clear what priorities are set for different types of crime and what the results are. SNAO considers that the National Police Board should be able to create conditions for a clear prioritization between different types of crime.

Organization of activities

Forensic activities are carried out on several levels: by SKL, the technical departments and in certain cases by the police in intervention activities. There is no clear and established distribution of work between the levels. Even the distribution of specialist competence varies between different technical departments. The consequence of this is that what is carried out and how it is carried out varies between different parts of the country. SNAO is of the opinion that a clearer distribution of work based on relevant quality requirements would facilitate the achievement of the goals for more legal proceedings and faster processing times. It is the National Police Board that has the overall responsibility for achieving a clearer distribution of work between the forensic players. The National Police Board, however, has not acted on this issue.

Specialization of activities

There is a certain specialization within police technical departments, but this is not based on any overall strategic considerations. Specialist competence within a certain department is not utilized by other departments. The apparently more or less random specialization does not support parliaments' or the government's stated goals of increasing legal proceedings and decreasing processing times. Certain medicolegal departments have made special efforts in medicolegal investigations that have a tangible effect on parliament's and the government's goal to increase legal proceedings. Victims and suspected perpetrators are examined by public medicolegal officers directly after severe violent crimes (so-called live investigations). However, these efforts have not taken place at all medicolegal departments. If the extent of live investigations continues to vary between different medicolegal departments in the future, the prerequisites for legal proceedings will continue to vary in different parts of the country.

Dimensioning

The demand for forensic and medicolegal services will probably continue to increase. For this reason, an overall strategic view of the dimensioning of forensic and medicolegal activities is needed. To solve increasing demand only through further contribution of resources is, according to SNAO, not a long-term and sustainable solution.

It is not possible to make a statement regarding whether or not the police technical departments have the right dimensions to achieve parliament's and the government's goal of increased legal proceedings and faster processing times. The technical departments do not have a functioning follow-up system, which makes it difficult to assess and draw conclusions about dimensioning. SNAO believes that the National Police Board should follow-up activities at the technical departments.

Processing times

Both the National Board of Forensic Medicine and the National Forensic Laboratory have experienced an increase in the number of cases. Processing times have increased for medicolegal and forensic activities at the National Board of Forensic Medicine during the past five years. Processing times at the National Forensic Laboratory have decreased during the same time period. However, the National Forensic Laboratory has not achieved the goals for processing times in accordance with its undertakings to the National Police Board, especially not concerning DNA cases. This audit has shown that there is no information on processing times at police technical departments. There is uncertainty regarding what departments do and how long they take, and whether the resources are well balanced.

Cooperation

One important conclusion of the SNAO audit is that support from forensic and medicolegal activities works well for serious crimes. This is possible because serious crimes are given high priority. Where it concerns everyday crimes, public medicolegal officers are not involved – only forensic and forensic chemical support is asked for. There are relatively few cases of everyday crimes for which forensic examinations are carried out. Neither is it justified to secure evidence in all types of everyday crimes. Technical departments have a responsibility to train police in further services for securing evidence, so that it is de facto the police that search for and secure evidence from everyday crimes, and that they do this with acceptable quality. Education and motivation are therefore key issues in achieving success in combatting everyday crimes.

Follow-up

To achieve the goals of increased legal proceedings and faster processing times, it is urgent that the government and the National Police Board draw up a strategy for forensic and medicolegal players. One prerequisite for this is functioning follow-up work, so that the players are aware of what is done and what the results of the activities are. Follow-up of the work of technical departments is deficient, concerning the number of cases, types of crime, and processing times. At present there is no information regarding processing times for different cases, and the categorization of different types of investigation has shortcomings. As a result, there is no reliable basis for calculating the need for resources in the technical departments.

Quality assurance

SKL and the National Board of Forensic Medicine forensic chemical departments are quality certified, meaning that the activities comply with international standards. The medicolegal departments at the National Board of Forensic Medicine have been subjected to a partially independent quality audit.

The police technical departments are not quality assured. However, the departments participate in a quality assurance project led by SKL. Much work remains for the technical departments before their activities are quality assured. If activities at the technical departments often maintain sufficient quality, it is necessary that all departments participate actively in the quality assurance project. SNAO considers that the National Police Board is responsible for the technical departments' compliance with quality assurance.

The National Police Board mandate to control can be utilized more
The National Police Board has a comprehensive mandate to control the police authorities, including forensic activities. According to SNAO, the National Police Board does not utilize this mandate fully. The majority of shortcomings shown by this audit could be rectified through stricter control of the police authorities by the National Police Board.