

***HM CROWN PROSECUTION SERVICE
INSPECTORATE***

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CPS CLEVELAND

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its report on the inspection of CPS Cleveland. Inspectors found that the standard of casework decision-making is good and the overall standard of advocacy satisfactory; the majority of CPS advocates observed were entirely competent. However, inspectors were concerned that insufficient attention had been paid to operational and quality assurance issues and as a consequence previous good performance in some key areas had started to deteriorate. The quality of file endorsements recording the reasons for decisions and steps taken in relation to cases was one area where standards had deteriorated. On the positive side, the Area had made considerable efforts to target persistent young offenders resulting in an improvement in the figures for the final quarter of 2000.

Stephen Wooler, Chief Inspector of HMCPSI, said:

“This report shows that CPS Cleveland has both strengths and weaknesses. It is to the credit of the Area that the quality of its casework decision-making and many aspects of performance have remained fundamentally sound despite the pressures faced by staff and the extent of the change programme within the CPS as a whole, including Cleveland. There are, however, some weaknesses and the report contains recommendations as to how they should be addressed.

I am confident that the experience and commitment of the staff in Cleveland is such that the necessary improvements can be achieved.”

There has been some progress made since the last report in 1997 but some key issues raised then had yet to be fully addressed, including the accuracy of performance indicators, learning lessons from experience and handling of sensitive material.

The team of inspectors found that CPS Cleveland had recognised the need to think strategically in its planning for the reorganisation and had taken action to improve performance against national CPS targets, but needs to pay more attention to performance related issues locally. There is scope for greater use of local performance measures. Inspectors found that the establishment of the Committals Unit had resulted in a significant improvement in the timeliness of the service of committal papers to defence. The improvement of the timeliness of delivery of briefs to counsel at Crown Court had been secured, however, at the expense of the quality of content.

In relation to decision-making, the evidential test contained in the Code for Crown Prosecutors was correctly applied in 98.3% of cases and the public interest test applied in a random sample of cases examined.

The inspectors considered that there is some way to go before the Area can fully contribute to the successful delivery of national objectives and that the Area staff have the ability, experience and commitment to ensure that the necessary improvements are achieved.

Specific findings by the Inspectorate include:

- The quality and timeliness of pre-charge advice is satisfactory but allocation did not always match cases to lawyers with the most suitable skill and experience.
- The standard of decision making is generally good, however timeliness of initial and ongoing review needs to be improved.

- That there is a lack of any formal system for lawyers and caseworkers to learn from adverse cases
- That all lawyers and caseworkers need to be made aware of the need to reduce delay in all youth cases and particularly PYOs and that agents and counsel are instructed to take proactive steps to reduce delay in these cases.
- Briefs to counsel should be improved and monitoring by management put in place to ensure appropriate instructions are given.

Responding to the report Chief Crown Prosecutor, David Magson, said:

“CPS Cleveland accept the findings contained in the report of HMCPSI. The favourable comments on the continuing good quality of our decision-making is particularly welcome.

“The Area has benefited from a substantial increase in its budget allocation for this financial year commencing 1 April 2001. The increase will enable the Area to recruit a further 21 full-time permanent members of staff this year. This represents an increase of 30% on current staffing levels.

“The additional resources will enable the Area to deal with the pressures faced by staff during the extensive change programme referred to in the Inspectorate report.

“We have already taken action to implement the recommendations and suggestions for improvement contained in the report.”

Notes to Editors

1. This is the latest report of Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate in the cycle of inspections based on the 42 Area structure adopted by the CPS on April 1 1999. The CPS is a national service, but operates on a decentralised basis with each Area led by a Chief Crown Prosecutor who enjoys substantial autonomy.
2. CPS Cleveland as an Area comprises of one Branch. The Area serves three magistrates' courts at Middlesbrough, Hartlepool and Langbaugh East and the Crown Court at Teesside.
3. CPS Cleveland employs the equivalent of 69.5 full time staff; this figure includes a number of part-time staff.
4. In the year ending September 2000 the area handled approximately 20,656 cases in the magistrates' courts. 1, 896 Crown Court cases were handled during the same period and advice was given to the police before charge in a further 756 cases.
5. Before visiting the area the team of inspectors examined a total of 214 cases from the Area. The team visited the area for a total of two weeks during December 2000 and January 2001. The inspectors interviewed CPS staff of all levels. The team also spoke to representatives of other criminal justice agencies in the Area. Observations were made on 22 advocates at magistrates and crown courts, these included CPS lawyers, agents and counsel. The team was also assisted during the on-site phases by a lay inspector who looked at the public interest side of casework decisions, the handling of complaints and the treatment of victims and witnesses.
6. Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate was established by the Crown Prosecution Act 2000, which came into effect on 1 October 2000 as a statutory body. The Inspectorate had, previously, been a unit within the CPS headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by and reports to the Attorney General.
7. For further information, please contact either Jan Wilson at HMCPSI (tel: 01904 545488) or Tina Woodrow at CPS Cleveland (tel: 01642 204530).