

***CROWN PROSECUTION SERVICE  
INSPECTORATE***

**PRESS RELEASE**

19 May 2000

53/00

**CPS DORSET**

The Dorset Area of the Crown Prosecution Service was the first to undergo formal inspection since the Crown Prosecution Service, a national service, was restructured on a decentralised basis in April 1999. Under the new arrangements, each Area is led by a Chief Crown Prosecutor who enjoys substantial autonomy, but the Area is subjected to a rigorous inspection regime.

The inspectors found that the overall standard of casework in Dorset was good, although a small number of cases were handled uncertainly with some cases having been dropped which should have been prosecuted. They recommended enhanced monitoring of casework by senior managers and that steps be taken to provide greater continuity of casework decision-making, handling and presentation wherever this is feasible.

The inspectors noted significant progress by CPS Dorset in the development of constructive working relationships with other agencies in the criminal justice system in order to take forward overarching aims set by the Government for the criminal justice system as a whole. In particular, the inspectors noted determination to achieve the Government's target of dealing with persistent young offenders within 71 days of arrest. At the time of the inspection, Dorset was the third fastest Area in the country but national figures subsequently published place it in second position.

Specific findings in the report include:

- Generally sound pre-charge advice to the police but some attention required to achieve consistency of quality and timeliness.
- Standard of review of cases was sound although the inspectors found a small number of wrong or premature decisions.
- Case preparation in both the magistrates' courts and the Crown Court needs attention to improve the readiness of cases for trial.
- The overall standard of advocacy is satisfactory, but presentation of trials could be enhanced by greater continuity of case ownership.
- The management of the Area works cohesively with a view to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of casework and to reduce delay. Some aspects of communication between management and staff need further attention.

Publishing the report, the Chief Inspector, Stephen Wooler, said:

“CPS Dorset has achieved a sound performance in its first year of operation under the new structure. The progress achieved against a background of extensive change, both within the CPS and the criminal justice system, is creditable. Provided the matters identified as requiring improvement are addressed, CPS Dorset is well placed to offer the county a sound and effective prosecution service.”

The inspectors commended six aspects of the Areas work in relation to particular initiatives or good practice. They included:

- The handling of persistent young offenders
- The provision of legal seminars to ensure that prosecutors keep up-to-date with the law
- The use of special files to improve compliance with the prosecution's obligations of disclosure

- Some features of its system for monitoring custody time limits
- Its relationships and communications with other agencies in the criminal justice system.

Responding to the report, the Chief Crown Prosecutor, John Revell, said:

“I welcome the findings of the Inspectorate that CPS Dorset is held in high regard by most of the representatives of the criminal justice agencies in Dorset and that its performance is often impressive. These conditions were reached despite the fact that during the preceding 12 months staff have had to deal with a number of major changes to working practices. These have included the introduction in November 1999 of procedures designed to speed up the way cases are dealt with in the courts; the reorganisation of the Crown Prosecution Service nationally from 13 Areas to 42 Areas with Dorset becoming an Area in its own right; and changed internal office structures with two units, one of which specifically covers the magistrates’ courts work, and the other Crown Court work.

“I and all those working in the CPS Dorset want to ensure that we provide a high quality service and the Inspectorate has made some very useful recommendations which are designed to improve the way cases are dealt with. A detailed action plan which deals with each of the recommendations is currently being drawn up. This will lead to changes in some of the office procedures.

“There is a great willingness by all the criminal justice agencies in Dorset to provide a higher quality service and I am pleased that the Inspectorate has praised the contribution made by the CPS Dorset towards this.”

### **Notes to Editors**

1. An Executive Summary is attached.
2. The CPS Inspectorate was set up in 1996. Its task is to inspect and evaluate casework decision-making together with the overall performance of the CPS,

identify areas of work which need to be improved, disseminate best practice and provide quality assurance to the Director of Public Prosecutions. It is embarking upon a two-year cycle of inspections which will cover all 42 CPS Areas and certain parts of CPS headquarters.

3. The Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Bill is presently before Parliament and will place the Inspectorate on an independent statutory basis.
4. For further information please contact either Grace Moronfolu at the CPS Inspectorate (tel: 020 7210 1166) or Janet Lennon at CPS Dorset (tel: 01202 498704).