

***HM CROWN PROSECUTION SERVICE  
INSPECTORATE***

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**PROSECUTORS MAKE PROGRESS IN GWENT**

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published the report of its inspection of CPS Gwent. The inspectors found that performance of the Area to be good in respect of both its casework and its management. There has been considerable progress in relation to issue raised and the recommendations made in the last inspection report (1998). They also found that CPS Gwent handle cases involving persistent young offenders well and have been a driving force in expediting the progress of persistent young offenders through the courts. However, several aspects of performance were identified where development is necessary including the timeliness of review decisions, the quality and timeliness of submission of files from the police and the accuracy of performance indicators.

Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of the Crown Prosecution Service, said:

“The managers and staff in CPS Gwent have worked well together to provide the police and the public with an efficient and effective prosecution service. Although good progress has been made on many issues identified in the last inspection report, there are aspects of development which require development. If those are addressed, CPS Gwent has the potential to become a high performing organisation.”

Other main findings include good quality casework decision-making against a background of a caseload which has a relatively high proportion of serious cases.

However, Inspectors were concerned with the timeliness of some decision making. Late decision making, a lack of detailed analysis and early consideration of some potential issues, led to some cases being discontinued and others resulting in adverse findings by the courts. The lack of or inadequate recording of decisions and other action taken can also have an adverse impact on the progress of a case. Inspectors also considered that listing practices in the magistrates' did not always assist the Area in the preparation of cases.

The Area has taken positive steps to improve many aspects of its case handling since the last inspection report in 1998 with systems in place for monitoring the quality of indictments and the handling of unused material being good.

The standard of advocacy in the Area was found to be satisfactory. Gwent has two Designated Caseworkers (non-lawyers who, following special training prosecutes certain categories of straightforward cases in the magistrates' courts) who have gained a good reputation with other court users. Five Higher Court Advocates have been introduced into the Crown Court whose work includes the conduct of preliminary hearings which are "sent" to the Crown court under section 51, Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

The programme of change required by the Glidewell report and being undertaken by both the CPS nationally and Gwent is being well managed. Considerable progress has been made by Gwent, as well as developing the individual identity of the Area. There has been full consultation with all Area staff; internal communication is good with key points from meetings being cascaded through regular team meetings.

Relations with representatives of other criminal justice agencies are good. Gwent has developed an external communications strategy, which covers representation on interagency groups, liaison with criminal justice partners, media and local community contacts

The Area has achieved IiP status and, in line with this has introduced a comprehensive training and development strategy. The Area also has an open and constructive attitude towards equality and diversity issues.

The Inspectors made 15 recommendations and 9 suggestions designed to help the Area improve its performance. These included:

- ensuring that review decisions are made at the earliest opportunity in all cases;
- full review endorsements are made in the same place on each file;
- more structured monitoring of prosecution advocates in the magistrates' courts;
- liaison with the Justices' Chief Executive over more effective and efficient Early Administrative Hearing and Pre-Trial Review courts;
- the implementation of some formal liaison with representatives of the Witness Service and Victim support;
- the Area Management Team allocate time for further management development, including team building and the allocation of key roles on strategic issues;
- the setting up of an effective system that will ensure the timely recording of all case receipts, adjournments and finalisations.

The Inspectorate was pleased to be able to commend seven aspects of the Area's work as good practice. These included:

- The appointment of a case progression officer for youth cases;
- The suggestion that the police appoint someone who will be responsible for taking all statements relating to medical evidence;
- the quality of the Area instructions on the handling of unused and sensitive material;

- the delivery of training for counsel who wished to undertake work for the Area
- a in both the magistrates' courts and the Crown Court.

Responding to the report, the Chief Crown Prosecutor for Gwent, Chris Woolley, said.

“I very much welcome the recognition by the Inspectorate that much progress has been made in Gwent over the last two years. This is a tribute to the hard work and professionalism of all the staff in the Area. I also acknowledge the positive assistance which the Inspection has given to us in identifying areas which we need to develop. We can now focus strongly on these to ensure that our performance is still further improved.”

#### **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 1 April 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 Gwent has one office in Newport. On the 29 January 2001 it employed the equivalent of 70.6 full time staff including nine who were part time: the Chief Crown Prosecutor; the Area Business Manager, and seven other administrative staff; 23.3 lawyers; two designated caseworkers and 36.3 caseworkers.
3. In the year ending 31 December 2000, the Area dealt with 19,454 defendants in the magistrates' courts and 1,495 defendants in the Crown Court. It provided advice to the police before charge in another 1,477 cases.
4. The Inspection took place over a period of nine days between 29 January and 15 February 2001. Inspectors examined 256 cases covering a range of casework. The Inspectors interviewed staff at all levels and spoke to representatives of other criminal justice agencies in the Area. Inspectors also observed the performance of advocates in the magistrates' courts and the Crown Court.
5. Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate was established by The Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate 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.

6. For further information please contact either Jo Crossley at HMCPS Inspectorate (tel: 020 7210 1179) or Clive Parish at CPS Gwent (tel: 01633 261137).