

***HM CROWN PROSECUTION SERVICE
INSPECTORATE***

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CPS NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its report of its inspection of CPS Northamptonshire. The inspectors found that the Area had a core of experienced lawyers and caseworkers, who reviewed and prepared cases in a generally sound and timely manner. The handling of the more serious casework, in the Crown Court, is thorough. Sensitive cases such as those involving youth offenders, child or racially aggravated crime were being handled appropriately. CPS advocates were satisfactory. The inspectors also identified several aspects of performance where development is necessary. These included the quality of information about case decisions and handling of files, compliance with the obligations of prosecution disclosure and the quality of instructions to counsel in Crown Court cases.

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

“CPS Northamptonshire has successfully laid the foundations for an effective and efficient prosecution service based on the decentralised model recommended in the Glidewell Report. The quality of its casework decision-making is good. It has achieved much in developing sound working systems. Provided the weaknesses identified by the inspectors are addressed, it will be well placed to offer a consistently high standard of service to the criminal justice system as well as to victims and witnesses.”

The inspection was carried out during a period of extensive change for the CPS both nationally and in Northamptonshire. The Area has successfully piloted a number of initiatives such as Narey courts and the implementation of section 51 Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The Area also undergone major change in its management structure during part of this period to re organise itself on the basis of functional units dealing with magistrates' and Crown Court casework.

The Area has a core of experienced staff at both legal and caseworker levels. They handle much of the casework in a sound and timely manner. Many of the recommendations made to improve casework in the last report, in 1998, have been addressed, although work still remains to be done on a number of issues including the quality of review endorsements; the disclosure of unused material; the quality of instructions to counsel and indictments; and the need to ensure that appropriate lessons are learnt from finalised cases.

CPS advocacy in the magistrates' court is satisfactory, and the introduction of Designated Caseworkers has been a success. The Area has three Higher Courts Advocates (HCAs). Deployment of the HCAs has been limited, but the CCP has plans for them to exercise their rights of audience more fully.

Relationships with the local CJS partners is good, and the Area has piloted a number of important initiatives, such as Narey court hearings, early sending of indictable only cases to the Crown Court and statutory time limits for dealing with youth offenders, prior to national implementation. Work remains in several other areas such as reducing the number of trials which do not proceed on the trial date for a variety of reasons. Further work is also needed to reduce the time taken to deal with persistent young offenders.

The Area has recently achieved IiP status. Progress on equality and diversity issues is satisfactory. The Area management team is currently reviewing the roles of managers within the Area.

The Inspectors made 17 recommendations and 12 suggestions designed to help the Area improve its performance. These included:

- improved monitoring of quality and timeliness of casework and instructions to counsel;
- structured arrangements for learning from experience in casework;
- improved handling of unused material;
- steps to strengthen management roles in Area Strategic Group;
- monitoring of advocacy;
- introduction of systems to record and deal with all complaints; and
- steps to reduce cracked and ineffective trials in the magistrates' and Crown Court.

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

- the sharing of information on racially aggravated offences with the police;
- the use of a summary trial check 7 days before the trial to ensure trial readiness;
- the attendance of the Deputy Clerk to the Justices at CPS/police joint performance Management meetings;
- the presence of a police witness liaison officer in the CPS Crown Court Unit; and
- the setting up of a focus group to look at core competencies in the context of equality and diversity.

Responding to the report, the Chief Crown Prosecutor for Northamptonshire, Colin Chapman, said.

“I welcome the report of the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate. It shows that CPS Northamptonshire has made good progress in the two years since it became a CPS Area in its own right, serving the local criminal justice system and the people of the county of Northamptonshire. We recognise that there is still work to be done in certain key aspects of our work and we have already drawn up an action plan to address these issues.

“Behind the successes identified in the report there has been a team of dedicated and committed staff. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking them for their hard work and efforts so far.”

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 Northamptonshire has one office in Northampton and. On the 1 November 2000 it employed the equivalent of 51.2 full time staff including 14 part time members of staff: the Chief Crown Prosecutor, the Branch Crown Prosecutor, 15.6 lawyers, the Area Business Manager, 8.6 administrative staff, 3.6 designated caseworkers and 20.4 caseworkers.
3. In the year ending September 2000, the Area dealt with 14,429 defendants in the magistrates’ courts and 1,317 defendants in the Crown Court. It provided advice to the police before charge in another 455 cases.
4. The Inspection took place over a period of ten days between 27 November and 15 December 2000. Inspectors examined 216 cases finalised between July and September 2000 covering a range of casework. The Inspectors interviewed staff at all levels and also 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 John Stephenson at CPS Northamptonshire (tel: 01604 823642).