

***HM CROWN PROSECUTION SERVICE
INSPECTORATE***

PRESS RELEASE

30 January 2001

01/01

CPS SUFFOLK

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its report of its inspection of CPS Suffolk. The inspectors found that the quality of casework decision-making and advice to police was generally good. Inspectors commended the Area on the significant improvements made since the last inspection, on its positive approach to self-assessment and improvement, and on the low discontinuance rate achieved whilst maintaining low rates of adverse results. But they stressed the need for greater emphasis on Crown Court cases, including raising the standard of instructions to counsel; more active compliance with the prosecution's duties of disclosure; more positive reviews and handling of sensitive cases; and a degree of additional rigour to the continuing review process.

Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of the CPS, said:

"I am pleased to be able to deliver such a positive report. The progress achieved against a background of extensive change, both within the CPS and the criminal justice system, is creditable. It has played a positive and effective part in working with others to improve the criminal justice system locally. There remains a need to address and improve a few aspects of performance primarily in relation to Crown Court cases and to formulate a detailed project plan on the arrangements for Criminal Justice Units co-located with police.

Overall, CPS Suffolk is well placed to continue providing the public with a sound and effective prosecution service”.

The Inspectors found that the quality of decision-making and advice to police was generally good. In particular, staff had played a very positive part in achieving targets which support the national objectives of the CPS.

The time taken to deal with persistent young offenders from arrest to sentence fell to 79 days in the second quarter of 2000, which was significantly better than the national average. Regrettably, the figure for the county figures deteriorated in the third quarter to 101 days, and careful analysis will be necessary in conjunction with other agencies to identify problems and to inform a renewed drive to secure consistent improvement.

Overall the standard of advocacy is competent in both the magistrates’ court and the Crown Court. Inspectors observed examples of good preparation and accomplished presentation.

Inspectors commended a considerable number of aspects of the Area’s performance and achievement and identified one particular issue of good practice. This involved progressing youth cases swiftly from the youth court to the Crown Court by fixing at the youth court the first available date for a plea and directions hearing in the Crown Court.

Inspectors found other matters which needed attention, and made a number of recommendations and suggestions to help the Area address these issues. The report makes 19 recommendations and nine suggestions in relation to aspects of work which need to be developed. A copy of the Executive Summary is annexed.

The Area has played a full and effective role in joint initiatives to improve the criminal justice system in Suffolk and this has been warmly welcomed by other criminal justice agencies.

External relationships were generally very good. There is work to be done with police in relation to joint performance management in order to improve standards of police

files, and with the magistrates' courts in analysing reasons for cracked and ineffective trials and to improve listing, both to reduce delays to meet the needs of witnesses and victims

The Area has a positive attitude to part-time staff, and care needs to be exercised to ensure arrangements meet the operational needs of the Area, particularly in terms of court coverage in the Crown Court, where many cases are heard outside of the county itself. The Area has taken significant steps to reach out to local community groups to improve relationships and the Area's standing with members of ethnic minorities in the community.

Complaints are investigated properly, and generally responded to openly and in a timely fashion. Some further analysis and learning from experience could be attained.

Responding to the report, the Chief Crown Prosecutor, Chris Yule, said:

“This report reflects the dedication and commitment of staff in the Suffolk office. It highlights both a firm foundation, as well as the efforts that have been made to build up confidence in the Criminal Justice System by close working with other agencies to improve service. This independent assessment of our work will inform our planning for the future, especially as we work towards implementing the Glidewell recommendations in Suffolk”

Notes to the Editors

1. This is the latest report of HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate in the current 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 within the terms of a framework document.
2. CPS Suffolk has its offices in Ipswich. On 30 September 2000, the Area employed the equivalent of 53.8 full time staff (the CCP, the Area Business Manager, and the equivalent of 16.6 prosecutors, 31.6 caseworkers and 3.6 administrative staff).

3. In the year ending 30 June 2000, the Area dealt with cases involving 12,510 defendants in the magistrates' courts and 1,355 defendants in the Crown Court. It provided advice to the police before charge in respect of another 998 defendants.
4. Before visiting the Area, the team of inspectors examined a total of 265 cases of various types. The team visited the Area for a total of two weeks during October 2000. It interviewed staff of all levels, as well as criminal law practitioners and local representatives of other criminal justice agencies in the Area. Inspectors observed advocates, including CPS lawyers, designated caseworkers and agents in the magistrates' courts, and counsel prosecuting on behalf of the CPS in the Crown Court.
5. The CPS Inspectorate was set up in 1996. The Inspectorate became independent from the CPS when The Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000 was implemented on 1 October 2000. The inspection process examines all aspects of Area performance focusing on the casework decision-making and casework handling process along with management and operational issues.
6. For further information, please contact either Grace Moronfolu at CPS Inspectorate (tel: 020 7210 1165) or Brian Bartlett at CPS Suffolk (tel: 01473 282154).