

Press Release

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Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate

CPS London Borough Performance Assessments

Brent Borough

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSI) has today published their performance assessment of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) London, Brent borough. It should be read in conjunction with London-wide report also published today.

This is one of a planned series of borough performance assessments of the units in CPS London.

The overall performance assessment of CPS London, Brent borough was **POOR**.

The table below provides a breakdown of the assessed level of performance against the ten aspects:

Aspect	Score	Assessment
Pre-charge advice and decisions	0	Poor
Decision-making, preparation and progression in magistrates' court cases	0	Poor
Decision-making, preparation and progression in Crown Court cases	0	Poor
The prosecution of cases at court	2	Fair
Serious violent and sexual offences, and hate crimes	0	Poor
Disclosure	0	Poor
Custody time limits	2	Fair
The service to victims and witnesses	0	Poor
Managing performance to improve	2	Fair
Managing resources	Not scored	
Management and partnership working	2	Fair
Overall assessment	8	Poor

The quality of CPS charging decisions was variable. The conviction rate of 86.6% compared to 86.1% across CPS London and 87.1% nationally is very positive. However, there is a lack of timely case preparation in relation to magistrates' court cases. This is countered by late remedial action and by some robust judicial intervention at court. This means that effective trial rates (i.e. contested cases which proceed on the day fixed for trial) are therefore favourable.

In the Crown Court the lack of proactive case management is reflected in lack of analysis in instructions to the advocate, low quality standards of indictment drafting, and in the end low conviction rates of 66.6% in the 12 months to September 2009 compared to 72.7% across CPS London and 80.7% nationally.

Cases relating to serious violence, sexual offences and other hate crimes are handled by specialist prosecutors, but suffer from the lack of active case management. Compliance with the prosecution's duties of disclosure of unused material to the defence is neither thorough nor timely.

The service to victims and witnesses was assessed as poor.

Prosecutors relate positively to victims and witnesses at court. But compliance with the direct communication with victims scheme is weak so that letters are not always sent to victims when charges are dropped or materially altered. Applications to the court for special measures to assist vulnerable and/or intimidated witnesses are often late.

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

“Nearly all aspects of casework performance are poor and too many cases are not prepared for trial properly. This is particularly noticeable in the Crown Court where conviction rates are low. A concentrated effort is needed to strengthen casework processes if the public is to be properly served and confidence in the criminal justice system maintained.”

This press release should be read in conjunction with the executive summary which is attached.

For further information please contact Anisha Visram, HMCPSI's media contact, on 020 7210 1187/07901 856 348.

Notes to editors

1. HMCPSI was established as an independent statutory body on 1 October 2000 by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.

2. The pilot performance assessment of Croydon borough, published in May 2009, was the first of a planned series of performance assessments of the individual borough units in CPS London.
3. There are 33 geographical units based on London boroughs and the cities of London and Westminster. CPS London also has a dedicated traffic unit and a complex casework centre which handles serious and complex cases and those at the Central Criminal Court (Old Bailey). CPS London provides advice to police and charging decisions through a telephone service, CPS London Direct, or where a face-to-face meeting is needed through the local borough units. The units are gathered into six districts based on Crown Court centres.
4. The borough performance assessment (BPA) process provides a benchmark for the performance of the boroughs in ten key aspects of work, each of which is assessed as being Excellent, Good, Fair or Poor. The unit is then assessed on its overall performance in the light of these markings. The process also evaluates the management of resources at borough level.
5. The scoring mechanism is described in annex C of the report. This provides some limiters that apply in addition to the total of points scored. This is because of the significant impact that some aspects will have on the delivery of the borough's core business, or because of the impact of a number of Poor aspects.
6. The performance assessment included examination of finalised case files; interviews with representatives of partner criminal justice agencies and the judiciary; discussions with borough staff; observations at the office; and observations at the magistrates' court and the Crown Court.
7. The findings from the borough performance assessments undertaken have been drawn together in a pan-CPS London report which addresses the significant issues that have emerged as the assessments have progressed in order to provide an overall picture of the performance of the area. The report has also been published today along with nine other boroughs and the report relating to the traffic unit.