

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPsi) has today published its performance assessment of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) London, Bexley borough.

This is one of a planned series of borough performance assessments of the units in CPS London. Reports on nine have been published today and those on a further ten boroughs, the traffic unit and an overarching report on CPS London as a whole will be published in March.

The overall performance assessment of Bexley was **FAIR**.

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

Aspect	Score	Assessment
Pre-charge advice and decisions	2	Fair
Decision-making, preparation and progression in magistrates' court cases	2	Fair
Decision-making, preparation and progression in Crown Court cases	0	Poor
The prosecution of cases at court	0	Poor
Serious violent and sexual offences, and hate crimes	2	Fair
Disclosure	2	Fair
Custody time limits	2	Fair
The service to victims and witnesses	2	Fair
Managing performance to improve	2	Fair
Managing resources	Not scored	
Management and partnership working	2	Fair
OVERALL ASSESSMENT	16	FAIR

The quality of decision-making was fair overall. Some less sound decisions, combined with a lack of positive ongoing attention and case preparation, was impacting adversely on the readiness of cases and their outcomes at the Crown Court. The presentation of cases at court was also unsatisfactory with some advocates not fully prepared for the hearing.

The proportion of magistrates' court cases that resulted in a successful outcome in the 12 months to June 2009 (88.9%) was better than that for CPS London overall (85.9%) and nationally (87.3%). Conversely, the proportion of successful cases in the Crown Court (68.8%) was lower than London overall (72.7%) and nationally (80.6%).

Staff had a good awareness of the systems for ensuring custody time limits were not breached. There were, however, tangible weaknesses in the handling of compliance with the prosecution's obligation to disclose unused material to the defence.

Co-location with the police has led to improved communication with the witness care unit and this should assist improving the borough's performance against the minimum requirements of the No Witness No Justice scheme.

Inspectors were conscious that the implementation of recent national and area initiatives, together with resourcing difficulties in respect of some activities, have impacted upon aspects of performance.

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

“Although we found some aspects of performance in Bexley to be mixed, the overall assessment for the borough was fair. This was achieved at a time when the borough continued its work whilst having to implement a number of national and London-wide initiatives, added to which have been increasing resource constraints. There are now positive signs of improvement in magistrates’ court work. It is important for the borough to replicate this in its more serious casework and to ensure that improvements are sustained.”

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

The full report is now available from the embargoed section of the inspectorate’s website (www.hmcp.si.gov.uk) using the following details:

- Username: MEDIA99
- Password: LBPAJan10

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 assessment 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 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 Crown Court.
- 7 The findings from the assessments undertaken will be drawn together in a pan-CPS London report. As well as providing an overall picture of the area, this will address the issues that have emerged as the assessments have progressed. Some of these were of serious concern and need to be tackled urgently at a senior management level.
- 8 HMCPSI's original intention had been to assess all 33 boroughs in order to reflect the variations in performance which were expected across an area as diverse as CPS London, and this approach was endorsed by the area's senior managers. In the event findings from the early assessments showed a relatively narrow range of performance and consistency in the themes emerging and the aspects for improvement. London's senior management team confirmed that the boroughs which had been assessed were fairly representative of the area as a whole and that to undertake further assessments would be unlikely to add significantly to our findings. The inspectorate therefore decided to confine the exercise to 20 boroughs (including the pilot assessment of Croydon), drawn from five of the six districts, together with the traffic unit.