

HM CROWN PROSECUTION SERVICE INSPECTORATE
THEMATIC REVIEW OF BUSINESS PLANNING (REPORT TR 2/03)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction and background

1. Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPsi) has carried out a review of business planning within the CPS.
2. The effective and efficient operation of the criminal justice system is high on the political agenda, and is likely to remain so for some time to come. All agencies are now required to show, individually and jointly, quantifiable improvements in process, performance, service delivery and outcomes. For 2003–2006, stretching public service agreement (PSA) targets have been set, and criminal justice agencies must now plan and work together to achieve the targets. New systems for joint accountability have been established, with local Criminal Justice Boards reporting performance quarterly to the National Criminal Justice Board.
3. Such requirements mean that agencies must know and understand the capacity of their organisation to deliver what has to be delivered, and react quickly either to changed circumstances or under performance. A comprehensive planning process must be in place, which allows for analysis of the current and changing circumstances, the development of clear objectives and actions needed to achieve them, and an understanding of the possible obstacles to success and how to address them (risk management). Delivery needs to be supported by plans, which make responsibilities and timescales for action clear, are subject to regular monitoring and review, and for which key officers are held accountable.
4. The Inspectorate found during its first cycle of inspections that planning was an aspect of work that needed to be improved, and that those at operational level needed help to plan properly. The CPS itself is anxious to improve management practice, performance management and delivery. These factors, coupled with some imminent reorganisation of functions within the Service's Headquarters, made a thematic review of business planning appropriate at this time.
5. The review has sought to identify gaps in the current process, and recommendations are made in respect of aspects that need further attention. In addition, in order to support the Service, the Inspectorate, as part of this review, produced planning guidance for Areas and Service Centres, which was published in December 2002.

Methodology

6. The review team:
 - * examined and analysed Corporate, Area and Service Centre Business Plans for 2002-2003;
 - * interviewed key staff within CPS Headquarters and CPS Board members;

- * conducted interviews with some Chief Crown Prosecutors (CCPs) and Service Centre Managers; and
- * held a seminar with CPS staff, representatives from other criminal justice agencies, staff from the Criminal Justice Joint Planning Unit, and others with knowledge of the criminal justice system.

Main findings

7. The review assessed arrangements for business planning in the CPS against a framework for planning in the public sector, recently established to improve public sector services and productivity, and good planning practice.
8. The review found that, although there was a commitment to the production of business plans, the purpose of business planning was not clearly understood across the organisation and, as it had traditionally been practised, appeared irrelevant to some managers, particularly when they were charged with developing and implementing initiatives that arose outside the normal planning cycle or timetable. The planning process, and plans themselves, did not focus on priorities and were often drawn too widely, and without measurable objectives, which limited their effectiveness. A greater link to delivery was needed, with increased internal accountability by senior staff for performance against the business plan.
9. Central structures and responsibilities for planning did not support planning across the organisation. The role of the Planning Unit based within Headquarters was to deal only with corporate planning, and not with planning arrangements for any business units – that is, CPS Areas, Service Centres and Headquarters’ Directorates. Area, Service Centre and Headquarters’ Directorate planning was largely disconnected and carried out in separate units independently from each other; the coherence of the organisation’s planning could not be guaranteed under present structures. There was confusion among CPS Areas about the purpose of the submission of their plans to CPS Headquarters.
10. The CPS has a collegiate approach to management arising out of its structure, under which substantial responsibility for how strategy is delivered is devolved to 42 CCPs, who report directly to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and the Chief Executive. Some believed that this structure limited the extent to which Headquarters could properly concern themselves with the substance of Areas’ strategies and plans. We took the view, however, that the management structure did not affect the legitimate activity of the Chief Executive or the role of Headquarters in ensuring the delivery of objectives and manage the risks that come with a decentralised structure.
11. The review found that thought needed to be given to the development of a consistent approach to planning at strategic and business level, and that the timing of key aspects of planning activity should be brought forward in the planning year, and properly synchronised, to allow units to plan more thoroughly.

12. The review also established, however, that the CPS had recognised the need to improve its planning processes, and some improvements were already underway. The Chief Executive had given an unequivocal message to senior staff that clear, detailed plans were needed, in all units and nationally, which formed the basis for action, and priorities for 2003-2004 had been communicated earlier than in previous years. The Service had already begun to change its approach to planning: CPS strategic and business plans for 2003-2004 are to be firmly focused on delivery of the PSA targets, and supported by national delivery plans.
13. The Service had also recognised that issues of accountability needed to be addressed, and at the time of the review, the Chief Executive was consulting senior staff on new arrangements for internal accountability through performance review. New performance management regimes were being developed, which would ultimately better inform future planning, although these had yet to be established properly. Structural and cultural issues remained to be addressed, however.

Recommendations

14. Inspectors have made the following recommendations:

The business planning framework and the purpose of planning

1. That the CPS assess its position against the business planning framework established for public sector services, and the controls that need to be in place to support it, in order to inform its thinking about its planning processes.
2. That a corporate understanding is developed and promulgated about the purposes of planning within the CPS.

Structures for, and ownership of, the planning process

3. That the CPS Board's Terms of Reference set out the roles and responsibilities of the Board for all key areas of governance, including for strategic and business planning, and the monitoring of performance and achievement of objectives.
4. That in developing structures to support the Board in the planning process, Terms of Reference are developed which clearly set out the purpose and responsibilities of any sub-committee or executive group, its relationship with the Board, and with any wider planning forums.
5. That the purpose of the submission of Area and Service Centre plans, their scrutiny and the use made of them centrally, is carefully re-examined in the light of other recommendations in this report.
6. That ownership of, and responsibility for the integrity, coherence and efficacy of planning throughout the CPS is determined and supported by relevant structures.
7. That the role and responsibilities of the Strategic Planning Unit are reviewed, and its relationship with operational units and the Business Development Directorate is determined.

Aspects of the planning process

8. That clear expectations are set for the planning process and in particular that:
 - * the CPS considers, and acts on, the recommendation made by its own Management Audit Service that a comprehensive strategic planning approach is identified and consistently applied; and
 - * the CPS clarifies its view of, and approach to, use of the Excellence Model.

Planning documents

9. That the CPS considers whether the business planning period for Areas should be extended for a period of up to three years, properly supported by shorter term action, delivery or project plans for key objectives, to better assist the delivery of strategic objectives.
10. That the Headquarters Business Plan is no longer produced.
11. That:
 - * clear expectations are set for the quality and use to be made of planning documents across the organisation; and
 - * business plans are used as the basis for discussion at performance reviews between CCPs, the DPP and Chief Executive, and that the performance review scheme is extended to include reviews of directorate performance against planned objectives, targets and actions.

Links between planning and the allocation of resources

12. That the CPS formally considers whether business planning should inform the need for, and allocation of, resources across the organisation.

The planning cycle and timetable

13. That the timetable for planning activity throughout the organisation is reviewed to ensure that business planning activity starts earlier in the year; that priorities, objectives, and annual targets are established earlier than at present; and that the Corporate Business Plan is finalised by the end of December.

The full text of the report may be obtained from the Corporate Services Group at HMCPSI (telephone 020 7210 1197).