

***HM CROWN PROSECUTION SERVICE
INSPECTORATE***

PRESS RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01 FRIDAY, 17 NOVEMBER 2000

17 November 2000

62/00

CPS CAMBRIDGESHIRE

The Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its report of its inspection of CPS Cambridgeshire. The inspectors found that the quality of casework decision-making and advice to police was good. Inspectors commended the Area on allocating lawyers to serious cases at an early stage to facilitate the provision of advice to police and consistency through the case, and on the low discontinuance rate achieved whilst maintaining sound conviction rates and low rates of adverse results attributable to failures in the review process.

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

“CPS Cambridgeshire has achieved good casework performance in its first year of operation under the new structure. 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 and to carry forward its action plan on equality and diversity issues. Overall, CPS Cambridgeshire 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 objectives of the CPS to ensure that charges proceeded with are appropriate to the evidence and to the seriousness of offending by consistent and fair review, and to meet the needs of victims and witnesses in the criminal justice system with other agencies.

The time taken to deal with persistent young offenders from arrest to sentence fell to 74 days in the first quarter of 2000, which was significantly better than the national average. Further initiatives are recommended to help achieve the Government's target of 71 days.

Overall the standard of advocacy is satisfactory in both the magistrates' courts and the Crown Court. Inspectors observed some examples of good preparation and accomplished presentation.

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

Inspectors commended these efforts and identified a number of aspects of good practice including the proposed protocol to be agreed with the local authority in relation to sharing information in child protection enquiries, and a protocol agreed with other agencies for the care of victims of rape and serious sexual assaults. Inspectors found other matters which needed attention, and made a number of recommendations and suggestions to help the Area address these issues.

The Area senior managers need to improve certain aspects of CPS operations in the Crown Court. The standard of preparation of instructions to counsel and the drafting of indictments require improvement and some aspects of preparation for trial need attention to overcome problems and delay at court.

There have been weaknesses in the Area's undertaking of its duties of disclosure of unused material and it is an issue which it has proposed to tackle jointly with the police, through joint training. Inspectors have also urged a more rigorous approach to the discharge of duties of disclosure by prosecutors and the recording of their decisions and the reasons for them.

During this transitional and difficult phase it is especially important to maintain open two-way communication between managers and staff. The Area Management Team is already using a variety of methods of communication to ensure information gets to and is taken in by staff.

A compromise solution has been agreed in relation to the new criminal justice units at trials unit: a careful review of their effectiveness will be required.

External relationships were generally good. There is still work to be done with police in driving forward a number of initiatives on a countrywide basis. A renewed impetus in relation to joint performance management is required in order to improve standards of police files.

The Area has a positive attitude to part-time staff. A lower percentage of staff belong to ethnic minorities than the population of the county, but a single member of staff makes a marked difference in percentage terms. The Area needs to carry forward its action plan on equality and diversity issues and to reach out to local community groups to improve relationships and the Area's standing with members of ethnic minorities in the community.

The Area has made considerable efforts to improve the level of service and support to victims and witnesses. External consultees commented upon this and upon the marked improvement in the Crown Court of late. The Area has good communication links with the Witness Service and Victim Support.

Complaints are investigated properly, and generally responded to openly and in a timely fashion.

Responding to the report, the Chief Crown Prosecutor, Richard Crowley, said:

“I welcome the findings of the report which acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the staff of CPS Cambridgeshire.

“CPS Cambridgeshire is presently embarked upon a major reorganisation of its working practices and, although we are in a transitional, phase it is particularly encouraging to note the positive findings of the Inspectorate in relation to our quality of decision-making, advocacy and advice to the police.

“However, there is no room for complacency and the reports findings highlight areas which need to be improved.

“The Area Management Team has accepted all of the recommendations and suggestions made by the Inspectors. We have submitted an action plan to the Director of Public Prosecutions setting out the steps we have taken or will take in respect of the recommendations.”

Notes to the Editors

1. This is the ninth report of the 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.
2. CPS Cambridgeshire has its offices in Huntingdon. On 31 July 2000, the Area employed the equivalent of 54.5 full time staff (the CCP, the Area Business Manager, and the equivalent of 17.9 prosecutors, 28.3 caseworkers and 6.3 administrative staff).
3. In the year ending 30 June 2000, the Area dealt with cases involving 17,490 defendants in the magistrates' courts and 1,411 defendants in the Crown Court. It provided advice to the police before charge in respect of another 522 defendants.
4. Before visiting the Area, the team of inspectors examined a total of 231 cases of various types. The team visited the Area for a total of two weeks during July and August 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 CPS lawyers 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 the Enquiry Point at CPS Inspectorate (tel: 020 7210 1197) or Gillian Bremner at CPS Cambridgeshire (tel: 01480 825204).