

***HM CROWN PROSECUTION SERVICE
INSPECTORATE***

PRESS RELEASE

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CPS HEADQUARTERS CASEWORK DIRECTORATE

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its report of the inspection of CPS Casework Directorate. It is the division of CPS Headquarters which deals with the range of casework which, by virtue of its importance, sensitivity, complexity or specialist nature, is inappropriate for handling by CPS Areas. The team of inspectors found that this casework was generally handled very well and the Directorate's expertise in specialist aspects of law has enabled it to achieve and maintain a high standing amongst its partners in the criminal justice system.

The inspectors found that the Directorate's input into its casework often starts well before charge and lawyers frequently advise the police on aspects of law and evidence from the early stages of an investigation. The standard of decision-making and ongoing advice in all aspects of casework is sound and is generally well reflected in lawyers' review notes. Inspectors commended the Directorate on the quality of these review notes.

Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of HMCPSI, said:

“This inspection found that much good work was being done in relation to some of the most difficult and sensitive work of the CPS. The report notes

significant improvements since the 1999 report. This is pleasing from the point of view of managers, staff and inspectors alike”

The Directorate carries out its specialist casework functions particularly well. Extradition cases are dealt with competently and professionally and inspectors commended them on this particular area of expertise. The Directorate’s preparation of unduly lenient sentence cases for submission to the Law Officers is highly valued by them. The quality of work within the Central Confiscation Branch (relating to asset forfeiture) was generally sound although they note that a recent increase in the threshold would in future exclude many cases.

The Directorate has a relatively new management team. It provides strategic direction, sets priorities and monitors progress. Planning processes have improved but remain subject to review; they need to be more robust in some instances. There is a greater emphasis in prioritising key issues for action. Financial resources are generally well managed, although its approach to budgetary planning may be too simple for its individual needs. The diverse and specialist nature of its casework calls for a more sophisticated strategy towards budgetary and staff planning.

Specific findings by the Inspectorate include:

- * The level of co-operation with the police in providing information and care to victims and their relatives in disaster cases, which involve a high incidence of fatalities, was commended.
- * The Directorate should look at ways of devising a strategy for enabling its lawyers to maintain their advocacy skills; there is little advocacy undertaken by Directorate lawyers, apart from extradition proceedings at Bow Street Magistrates’ Court. Very few of the Directorate’s cases are otherwise dealt with in the magistrates’ court so there are few opportunities for lawyers to prosecute cases.

- * There is a need for the Directorate to review the handling of fraud cases. A joint vetting committee oversees arrangements for allocation of fraud cases between the Directorate and Serious Fraud Office. There has, however, been a recent decline in the number of fraud cases referred to the Directorate. Inspectors felt that the volume of fraud work being undertaken within Casework Directorate might not be sufficient to sustain the current level of specialist resources.
- * Current arrangements between the Directorate and CPS Areas aimed at ensuring that appropriate cases are referred promptly to the Directorate need to be strengthened.
- * The monitoring of custody time limits is an issue that needs to be addressed. There are relatively few cases in which defendants are remanded in custody and this has led to a lack of full awareness of the Regulations. Appropriate training and guidance would address this.
- * A specialist team of lawyers and caseworkers handles cases involving allegations of corruption against police officers. Cases are reviewed thoroughly and professionally managed.
- * Liaison arrangements with external partners in the criminal justice system are often informal and relate to contact in respect of individual cases. The Directorate has identified those agencies with which more formal liaison is desirable and has begun to establish appropriate arrangements to put this into practice.
- * Complaints are generally dealt with appropriately and sensitively, although not all have them have been properly recorded and some responses have been less than prompt. There are some differences in Branch systems.

Responding to the report Chris Newell, the Director of Casework, said:

“I am delighted that this report recognises the very high quality of our casework and the real value that all Casework Directorate staff add to the core business of the CPS and to the CJS as a whole. Review notes, witness care

and the handling of extraditions receive particular commendation; but there are references throughout the report to the high quality of all aspects of our casework; to our excellent working relationships with colleagues throughout the CPS and the wider CJS; and to significant improvements in our management framework and planning processes.

“There is, of course, always room for improvement. The report helpfully identifies a number of areas where that improvement can be made. We have drawn up a comprehensive action plan to address all the Inspectorate’s recommendations and we look forward to delivering an even better service in the future.”

Notes to Editors:

1. This is the latest report of Her Majesty’s Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate in the cycle of inspections.
2. Casework Directorate was known prior to 1999 as Central Casework and was inspected early that year. The report (11/99) was published in July 1999.
3. Casework Directorate has been largely unaffected by the restructuring of the CPS into functional rather than geographical units to take forward the recommendations of the Glidewell Review. However, at the time of the inspection, it was preparing for the changes to its work and structure, which will inevitably follow enactment of the Proceeds of Crime legislation.
4. The Directorate has its Headquarters in London. It also has offices in York and, more recently, in Birmingham. The Directorate takes its work from all CPS Areas and police forces in England and Wales.
5. In the year ending 31 March 2002, it handled 2,313 cases, ranging from those in which advice was provided to the police to those, which were the subject of prosecution in the magistrates’ and Crown Courts. The work also includes matters ancillary to the prosecution function, which require special expertise. The caseload ranges from relatively straightforward cases involving minor allegations: many against senior police officers or public officials, to serious and complex cases involving difficult aspects of law and a high volume of evidence and case material.

6. CPS Casework employs the equivalent of 166.4 full time staff; this figure includes a number of part-time staff.
7. The team of inspectors examined a total of 311 cases drawn from all 6 Branches. The team visited the area for a total of 9 weeks from February to April. The inspectors interviewed staff of all levels from each of the 6 Branches. The team also spoke to representatives of other criminal justice agencies in the country.
8. Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate was established by the Crown Prosecution Act 2000, which came into effect on 1 October 2000 as a statutory body. The Inspectorate had, previously, been a unit within the CPS headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by and reports to the Attorney General.
9. For further information, please contact either the Enquiry Point at HMCPSI (tel: 020 7210 1197) or Jane Holman at CPS Press Office (tel:020 7796 8106).