

Press Release

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HM CPSI overall performance assessment of CPS Cheshire

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSI) has today published the overall performance assessment (OPA) of CPS Cheshire (the Area).

The OPA process provides a benchmark for each CPS Area's performance in 13 key aspects of work, each of which is assessed as being 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Fair' or 'Poor'. The Area is then assessed on its overall performance in the light of these markings.

The overall performance assessment of CPS Cheshire was GOOD.

The table below provides a breakdown of the assessed level of performance against the 13 aspects and provides a comparison with the 2005 exercise:

CRITICAL ASPECTS	Assessment Level		
	OPA 2005	OPA 2007	Direction of Travel
Pre-charge decision-making	Fair	Good	Improved
Ensuring successful outcomes in the magistrates' courts	Good	Good	Stable
Ensuring successful outcomes in the Crown Court	Good	Good	Stable
The service to victims and witnesses	Good	Good	Stable
Leadership	Good	Good	Stable
Overall Critical Assessment Level		GOOD	
Progressing cases at court	Good	Fair	Declined
Sensitive cases and hate crime	Good	Good	Stable
Disclosure	Good	Good	Stable
Custody time limits	Excellent	Good	Declined
Delivering change	Good	Fair	Declined
Managing resources	Good	Good	Stable
Managing performance to improve	Excellent	Fair	Declined
Securing community confidence	Fair	Fair	Stable
OVERALL ASSESSMENT	GOOD	GOOD	

Some aspects have been categorised as critical; this is due to the significant impact that they have on the overall performance of a CPS Area and the service it delivers to the public.

The Area has maintained good overall performance since the last OPA in 2005, largely due to its consistent and reliable casework. It has continued to achieve well in terms of successful outcomes, with conviction rates in both Crown Court and magistrates' courts cases significantly better than national performance. The statutory charging scheme¹ has been implemented effectively and there has been good work in tackling domestic violence, where successful outcomes are increasing. Overall during 2006-07 the time taken to deal with persistent young offenders, from arrest to sentence, was within Government targets.

There remain some concerns over timeliness in case preparation which impacts on the number of magistrates' courts hearings and trials that are not ready to proceed on the day fixed. The Area will need to work effectively with HM Courts Service and the police to ensure that the Government's Criminal Justice: Simple, Speedy, Summary initiative can be implemented as planned.

The needs of victims and witnesses are generally dealt with well, although the Area needs to improve the speed with which it lets victims know when a charge has been dropped or substantially reduced.

Cheshire has the benefit of an accomplished and well organised management team. Resources are managed well, although improvements need to be made to performance management systems, and arrangements for delivering change if the Area is to build on its achievements and improve further.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector, said:

"It is pleasing to note that CPS Cheshire has maintained its good overall level of performance and that the prosecution of hate crime, especially domestic violence, is improving significantly. I am confident that managers will act swiftly to improve case progression systems so that the cases can be dealt with more simply and swiftly."

The Inspectorate is visiting all 42 CPS Areas over a six month period in order to provide a benchmark from which future work can be informed. A summative report will be published in early 2008 which will set out on a comparative basis the assessments for all the Areas. The outcomes of these assessments will be used to determine where best to focus Inspectorate resources in order to promote improvement within the CPS and the criminal justice system as a whole. It is also hoped that the Areas, and CPS Headquarters, will use this information to address issues at local and national level where this is necessary.

This Press Release should be read in conjunction with the Report itself (which contains an integral summary).

For further information, please contact Andreas Harding, HMCPSI Communications Manager, on 020 7210 1143 or 07901 856 346.

¹ A statutory scheme under which the CPS has assumed responsibility for the initial decision whether to charge (previously a police responsibility) in all except minor cases.

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 OPA report is based on judgements that have been made by HMCPSI using a combination of absolute and comparative assessments of performance. These came from national data, CPS self-assessment, HMCPSI findings and by measurement under the criteria and indicators of good performance set out in the OPA framework. The exercise will include visits to all 42 CPS Areas over a six month period, between June-December 2007. Each Area is rated 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Fair' or 'Poor'.
- 3 The Inspectorate uses an assessment model which is designed to give pre-eminence to the ratings for 'critical' aspects of work as drivers for the final overall performance level. Assessments for the critical aspects are overlaid by ratings in relation to the other defining ones, in order to arrive at the OPA. This assessment model is included in the framework and is available to all Areas.
- 4 This exercise is not a full inspection and differs from traditional inspection activity. While it is designed to set out comprehensively the positive aspects of performance and those requiring improvement, it intentionally avoids being a detailed analysis of the processes underpinning performance. However, it is designed to provide a benchmark from which future work can be informed.
- 5 CPS Cheshire serves the area covered by the Cheshire Constabulary. Its main office is based at Chester. In the year ended March 2007 it employed 95 full-time equivalent staff, and handled 17,961 cases before the magistrates' courts and 2,224 in the Crown Court. Advice was also given to the police in 4,128 cases which did not result in proceedings.
- 6 This Press Release and the Report in relation to CPS Cheshire are part of a block of 12 reports published today. HMCPSI will publish three further tranches of reports covering the remaining 30 Areas.