

## Press Notice

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Tuesday 23 January 2007

### AREA EFFECTIVENESS REPORT ON CPS CUMBRIA

*The Area has a clear vision for the future, with a clear sense of purpose and greater degree of corporacy.*

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPsi) has today published its report of the inspection of CPS Cumbria (the Area).

The Area has made significant improvements since the HMCPsi Overall Performance Assessment (OPA) in August 2005 when it was assessed as "Poor". Following the appointment of a new Chief Crown Prosecutor (CCP) in November 2005, the Area has strengthened its contribution to the local criminal justice system and plays a major role in driving forward joint initiatives.

The main findings were:

- The standard of casework decision-making and case preparation is good in respect of both magistrates' courts and Crown Court cases. Instructions to counsel in Crown Court cases are comprehensive, although greater attention to detail is required to avoid frequent amendments to indictments.
- There are improved arrangements for case progression. The Simple, Speedy, Summary Justice (CJSSS) pilot in the west of the county has significantly reduced adjournments in magistrates' courts' cases.
- Successful outcomes in the magistrates' courts are generally improving. Crown Court performance is more mixed, although the proportion of cases culminating in judge ordered acquittals and the overall conviction rate are both better than the national averages. The effective trial rates (i.e. cases fixed for a contested hearing which proceed on the day appointed) are improving.
- The Area overcame some earlier concerns about its preparedness for migration to statutory charging (an initiative under which the CPS has assumed responsibility for the initial decision whether to charge – previously a matter for the police - in all except minor cases) in December 2005. The quality of pre-charge decisions is good; prosecutors are pro-active in seeking further evidence where necessary, although there is a need to pay greater attention to ancillary issues, particularly witness needs. Most of the anticipated benefits of statutory charging are being realised and performance is improving.

- Although the Area has reduced its dependence on agents in the magistrates' courts, it needs to take action to improve the standard of agency advocacy. Its own advocates are well regarded.
- Specialist and sensitive cases are handled well, but arrangements within charging centres to handle specialist cases need to be more structured.
- The Area was re-structured following the appointment of the new CCP, but further re-organisation may be required to accommodate wider changes within the CPS. The senior management team has a clearer sense of direction and has developed a greater degree of corporacy. There is greater emphasis on joint planning with criminal justice partners. The Area's engagement with the community is now focussed more on consultation rather than the simple provision of information, although many activities still involve more easily targeted groups.
- A more robust performance management regime has been established since the OPA and a developing culture of performance improvement is apparent, particularly in more important aspects of financial and human resource management.
- Inspectors identified Area strengths in a number of aspects including casework decision-making, dealing with persistent young offenders, case progression in the magistrates' courts and Crown Court and the willingness to seek actively and adopt good practice from other CPS Areas.

The Chief Inspector, Stephen Wooler CB, said

*“It is to the credit of managers and staff alike that CPS Cumbria has made significant improvement in many of the aspects which were a concern to inspectors when the overall performance assessment was carried out. The Area now has a clearer vision and sense of direction. I am sure that all staff will continue to work hard to build upon this progress already made and to ensure that CPS Cumbria continue to contribute strongly to improvement in the criminal justice system.”*

The full text of the report may be obtained from the Corporate Services Group at HMCPSP Inspectorate (telephone 020 7210 1197) and is also available online at [www.hmcpssi.gov.uk](http://www.hmcpssi.gov.uk).

## NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. HMCPSP undertook overall performance assessments (OPAs) of all CPS Areas in 2005 and 14 aspects of CPS work were assessed in each Area. Areas were rated as “Excellent”, “Good”, “Fair” or “Poor” and aspects for improvement were highlighted in each Area. CPS Cumbria was assessed as Poor and 72 aspects for improvement were identified.
2. HMCPSP is now conducting two types of Area inspection. A full one considers each aspect of Area performance within the inspection Framework. A risk-based inspection considers in detail only those aspects assessed as requiring scrutiny. This is based on HMCPSP's OPAs and other key data. HMCPSP's inspection of CPS Cumbria was a full one.

3. CPS Cumbria serves the area covered by the Cumbria Constabulary. It has five offices in Carlisle, Workington, Kendal (two) and Barrow-in-Furness. The Area Headquarters (Secretariat) is based at Carlisle.
4. Area business is divided on functional and geographical lines. Carlisle and Workington deal with the conduct of all cases dealt with in the Carlisle, Workington and Whitehaven Magistrates' Courts, and Carlisle Crown Court. Kendal and Barrow-in-Furness offices currently deal with cases at Kendal, Penrith and Barrow Magistrates' Courts. A separate Trials Unit based in Kendal which dealt with cases committed to Carlisle, Barrow, Preston and Lancaster, was being re-structured at the time of our visit to create combined units at Kendal and Barrow, dealing with both magistrates' courts and Crown Court work.
5. Face-to-face charging advice is provided at four charging centres (Kendal, Carlisle, Barrow and Workington) on a part-time basis. The Area operates an appointments system which allows time for advice in urgent custody cases.
6. Judge ordered acquittals relate to Crown Court cases where the prosecution has decided before the trial commences that the case should not proceed (because of evidential or other consideration) and invites the judge to make an order acquitting the defendant(s).
7. At the time of the inspection in September 2006, the Area employed the equivalent of 70.74 full-time staff.
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.

An Executive Summary of the Report accompanies this Press Notice. For further information, please contact Andreas Harding, on 020 7210 1143 or 07901 856 348.

Embargoed copies of the Summary, this Press Release, and the full Report are available on the website at: [www.hmcp.si.gov.uk/press/press.shtml](http://www.hmcp.si.gov.uk/press/press.shtml). User ID is MEDIA and the Password is pressReports.