

Follow-up audit of CPS performance in relation to keeping victims informed

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCP*SI*) has today published its report of a follow-up audit of Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) performance relating to Direct Communication with Victims (DCV).

This is a follow-up to an audit report published in September 2007. The CPS addressed issues raised in that report with a number of measures and this one assesses their effectiveness.

The follow-up found that whilst there had been some improvement in the number of letters sent and in some aspects of their quality, timeliness targets were not always met and the targets set by the CPS to measure area performance in sending letters were not realistic.

Main findings

- Compliance has improved with an increase in the number of letters sent in relevant cases to 72.9%, 11% higher than was found in the last audit. However some victims are still not receiving letters and this is sometimes due to a failure to identify relevant cases, through lack of flagging at an early stage or poor file endorsements at court.
- The requirement to send 100% of letters within the time targets has not been reached. Where a letter to the victim was required within five days, 89.7% met the target. Performance was less good in relation to the demanding target of letters to be sent to vulnerable or intimidated victims within one day – met in 77.0% of cases.
- The quality of letters was similar to that found in the previous study but it was evident that more care was being taken to tailor the standard paragraphs to the circumstances of the case.
- The proxy targets set by the CPS to measure area performance in sending letters are not realistic despite some recent changes to the method of calculation. Due to the way the target is calculated it will remain a wholly unsatisfactory measure and will continue to be set substantially under the actual number of victim letters required. The previous audit highlighted this concern.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector of the Crown Prosecution Service, said:

“The improvement is welcome. The CPS still needs to strive so that all victims receive the information to which they are entitled. More realistic targets would help to bring about improvement.”

This press release should be read in conjunction with the report itself and the executive summary which is integral to it and also available separately.

Notes to editors

The DCV scheme has been operational within the CPS since 2001. It recognised the importance to victims of receiving prompt information about decisions relating to cases which affect them, in particular where a charge has been dropped or reduced or increased in gravity. The CPS committed itself to provide an explanation to the victim outlining the reasons for the decision – usually by letter. In certain serious or sensitive cases the victim or their family would be offered an opportunity to discuss the case with the person responsible for making the decision.

The purpose of this follow-up was to look at concerns raised in the original audit and prior to that in HMCPSI overall performance assessments (published in 2007), regarding performance in compliance and timeliness in sending letters to victims of crime to inform them of the reasons for decisions taken to drop or alter charges.

The results are based on the examination of 195 files from ten CPS areas of varying caseload size with a range of perceived performance. Cases with offence categories most likely to involve identifiable victims and requiring a DCV letter were chosen and we selected files finalised in the last quarter of 2008 to provide the most up to date information. Local area written instructions and performance information was also requested and these were examined along with national performance data.

The review took place between February-June 2009 and the team included two HMCPSI auditors.

HMCPSI was established as an independent statutory body on 1 October 2000 by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000, having previously been part of CPS Headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by and reports to the Attorney General.

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