

PRESS RELEASE

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CPS DERBYSHIRE

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its report of the inspection of CPS Derbyshire.

Inspectors found that the Area has built on the findings of the previous report (published in September 2000) and was committed to the principle of continuous improvement. Generally, the quality of decision-making was good, with the standard of pre-charge advice to the police particularly good. However, some aspects of casework handling required improvement. Cases were not reviewed effectively at a sufficiently early stage. This has contributed to lateness where discontinuances were necessary; and a significantly higher than usual proportion of adverse outcomes where remedial action by the CPS might have avoided that result.

The Area management team has worked hard to develop its performance management, and inspectors particularly welcomed the establishment of clear standards for a wide range of casework functions. The Area produces and monitors performance quite regularly but needs to develop its effectiveness in analysing and making use of that information on a systematic basis to drive up performance.

The Area has taken positive steps and initiatives to improve public confidence in the CPS, and in its treatment of victims and witnesses. However, more work needs to be undertaken to agree a local protocol in relation to the special measures to assist young or vulnerable

witnesses, and to ensure that the Witness Service is made aware of the needs of all witnesses involved in cases.

The Area is particularly strong in its management of people, and there is a high awareness of equality and diversity issues.

Although the Area had previously attained the Government's 71-day target for dealing with persistent young offenders from arrest to sentence (a target shared with all other criminal justice agencies), there had been regression in Derbyshire with the average time having increased at the time of the inspection to 88 days.

Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of HMCPSI, said:

“The findings by the inspectors reflect well on managers and staff in Derbyshire. There has been sound progress since the last inspection in respect of numerous aspects of performance. Although there are some issues yet to be addressed, the people of Derbyshire can be satisfied that they have an efficient and effective prosecution service.”

Other findings by the Inspectorate include:

- * the quality of decision-making is both sound and objective, with the quality of pre-charge advice to police, in particular, being good. Lack of timely and effective review has, however, led to cases being allowed to drift on inappropriately.
- * Area performance in respect of the disclosure of unused material is weak, with limited evidence of effective steps taken to improve the poor performance identified at the time of the last inspection.
- * Effective steps to tighten up procedures for custody time limits have only recently been introduced.

- * On the other hand, instructions to counsel have improved considerably since the last inspection, and there has been a marked improvement in the timeliness of service of committal papers and of instructions to counsel.
- * Overall, the standard of CPS advocates in the magistrates' courts is satisfactory, but there is concern over the quality of some agents. CPS advocates in the Crown Court are good.
- * The Area provides good quality service to the courts and court users, and has played an effective role in joint initiatives with the courts. However, the standard of service is compromised by a lack of timely review or preparation on the part of some prosecutors.
- * Internal communications are good, and managers show commitment to training and development. Staff have a high awareness of equality and diversity issues, and the Area has entered into a partnership with the Positive Action Training and Recruitment Agency.
- * The Area has moved towards stationing individual lawyers in police stations, which goes some way towards ensuring early initial review of cases, and to providing the police with a contact point for consultation. This is a step towards the CPS and police national policy of co-locating staff working on criminal justice matters but full co-location has not yet been achieved with the police, despite positive negotiations. The Area needs to consider the widest possible range of options and seek a more cost-effective solution.

Responding to the report, Chief Crown Prosecutor, David Adams, said:

“I welcome the Inspectorate’s report with its acknowledgement of the progress we have made and for the help it provides us in focussing on our priorities in the coming year.”

An Executive Summary of the report is attached.

Notes to Editors

1. In November 2002 HMCPSI commenced its second programme of Area inspections of the reorganised CPS. The aim is to visit all 42 CPS Areas in England and Wales twice over a four-year period. During that period each Area will receive at least one full inspection; the second may either be full or intermediate depending on the circumstances.
2. Following a risk assessment, the inspection of CPS Derbyshire was a full inspection.
3. CPS Derbyshire has its office in Derby. The office covers five magistrates' courts and two Crown Court centres.
4. CPS Derbyshire employs the equivalent of 94.4 full time staff.
5. In the year to 30 September 2002 the Area handled 19,995 defendants in the magistrates' courts and 1,807 defendants in the Crown Court. In addition, pre-charge advice was given to the police in 1,026 cases.
6. The team of inspectors examined a total of 188 cases. The team visited the Area for one week in January 2003. The inspectors interviewed staff at all levels. The team also spoke to representatives of other criminal justice agencies. Observations were made of advocates at magistrates' courts and the Crown Court, including CPS lawyers, agents and counsel. The team was assisted during the on-site phase by a lay inspector who looked at the handling of complaints and the treatment of victims and witnesses.
7. Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate was established as a statutory body by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000, which came into effect on 1 October 2000. The Inspectorate had previously been a unit within the CPS headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by and reports to the Attorney General.
8. For further information, please contact either Sonia Sanson at HMCPSI (tel: 020 7210 1180; e-mail: Sonia.sanson@cps.gsi.gov.uk) or Jane Bampton at CPS Derbyshire (tel: 01332 614113).