

***CROWN PROSECUTION SERVICE
INSPECTORATE***

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CPS DERBYSHIRE

The Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published the report of its inspection of CPS Derbyshire. Inspectors were impressed with the commitment shown by staff and with the sound quality of most aspects of the work carried out by the Area. Nevertheless, they also found that a number of matters required attention. These included the effectiveness of continuing review of cases at committal and summary trial stage, the handling of unused material and the quality of instructions to counsel.

Stephen Wooler, Chief Inspector of the CPS Inspectorate, said:

“CPS Derbyshire has succeeded in laying sound foundations for the delivery of a good quality prosecution service within the new decentralised structure of the Crown Prosecution Service.

The overall quality of its casework is very sound although inspectors identified some aspects requiring improvement.

The Area has a strong management team which is well-placed to drive forward the many local and national issues in the constantly changing criminal justice system. We have identified some important issues which they will need to discuss with their criminal justice partners in developing at local level the kind of integrated service which the Government wishes the public to receive”.

The report confirms that lawyers make the right decisions in the majority of cases and that they are supported by competent, experienced caseworkers and administrative staff.

The inspectors commented that the standard of advocacy by prosecutors in both the magistrates' and Crown Courts is satisfactory. However, a small number of prosecutors would benefit from better planning and preparation of their cases. In light of this the report suggests that the Area establishes an effective and structured system for the monitoring of advocates.

Inspectors were particularly impressed by the performance of the two designated caseworkers in the magistrates' court and the Area's two higher court advocates in the Crown Court.

CPS Derbyshire has good liaison with all the other local criminal justice agencies and its staff are well respected. However, a number of issues were identified where it was felt the Area needs to work closely with other agencies to develop performance. These are the phasing of the attendance of witnesses in the magistrates' court; monitoring with the courts the reasons why cases listed for trial fail to proceed; assessing the effectiveness of listing arrangements for early first and early administrative hearings in the magistrates' court; the paper plea and directions scheme and the level of CPS representation at the Crown Court.

Specific findings by the Inspectorate included:

- * A protocol on the fast tracking of cases involving persistent young offenders had been signed by all agencies in Derbyshire. The county was still outside the Government's target for dealing with such cases within 71 days of arrest but in the first quarter of 2000, the average finalisation time had been reduced to 117 days. (This is not something that it is entirely within the power of the CPS to influence, but it must play its part).

- * The Area employs a number of staff at different grades who come from minority ethnic groups in the community. There are also some who have disabilities. The Area had benefited in its development of equality and diversity planning from the involvement of the Black Police Officers' Association in Derbyshire. However, it was felt that more work is needed to ensure that all staff fully understand the nature of and the reasons for the CPS policy on equality and diversity.

- * Area staff demonstrate good awareness of the needs of victims and witnesses. The local practice in the Derby Magistrates' Court where early discussion of witness requirements by the prosecution and defence takes place to reach agreement on those witnesses whose evidence is accepted and therefore not required to attend court was commended.

- * The development by the Area of a range of measures, including the analysis of trends and the provision of data to monitor and address staff absence through sickness was highlighted as good practice.

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

“ I am pleased that the overall impression of the CPS Inspectorate is that CPS Derbyshire is a sound and well run Area and with the acknowledgement by the Inspectorate of the hard work and commitment of all staff. I am confident that the Area will respond positively to the suggestions and recommendations made by the Inspectorate.”

Notes to Editors

1. This is the sixth report of the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate in the new cycle of inspections based on the 42 Area structure adopted by the CPS on 1 April 1999. The CPS is a national service, but operates on a decentralised basis with each Area led by a Chief Crown Prosecutor who enjoys substantial autonomy.

2. CPS Derbyshire has its headquarters in Derby and shares its boundaries with other criminal justice agencies in the county. On 26 June 2000 it employed the equivalent of 78.5 full time staff; the Chief Crown Prosecutor, Branch Crown Prosecutor, 26.6 other prosecutors and a part time legal trainee; the Area Business Manager; two designated caseworkers; 38.3 caseworkers and administrative staff; and a business support officer and 7.1 administrative staff who work in the Area Secretariat and Central Services.
3. In the year ending March 2000, the Area dealt with 20,007 defendants in the magistrates' courts and 2,404 defendants in the Crown Court. Advice was given to the police before charge in a further 983 cases.
4. The inspection visit took place between 26 and 30 June 2000 and 10 and 14 July 2000. Inspectors examined a range of files before the visit, and during the period observed CPS advocates in the magistrates' courts throughout the Area. CPS advocates, caseworkers, and prosecuting counsel were also observed in the Crown Court. The inspection team also spoke with local practitioners in criminal law and representatives of the criminal justice agencies that directly affect, or are affected by, the performance of the Area.
5. The CPS Inspectorate was set up in 1996. The Inspectorate will shortly become independent from the CPS (The Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000 comes into force on 1 October 2000). The inspection process examines all aspects of Area performance focussing on the casework decision-making and casework handling process along with management and operational issues.
6. For further information please contact either the Enquiry Point at CPS Inspectorate (tel: 020 7210 1197) or Adele Clarke (tel: 01332 614003).