

Press Notice

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Area Effectiveness Report on CPS Derbyshire

Overall performance is improving, but some underlying aspects require further detailed attention

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

Since the HM CPSI overall performance assessment (OPA) when it was assessed as "Fair" (published in December 2005), CPS Derbyshire has taken positive action to strengthen some aspects of its casework performance and the rate of successful outcomes (convictions) is now improving as a result. However, other matters identified in the OPA as requiring improvement have received less attention. Therefore, whilst there has been some improvement against the OPA benchmark, more needs to be done to assure the quality of legal decision-making, casework systems, and communication between managers.

The main findings were:

- The quality of post-charge legal decision-making is better, but decisions to discontinue magistrates' courts' cases are sometimes questionable.
- The statutory charging scheme (under which the CPS make the initial decision whether to charge - hitherto a matter for the police - in all except minor cases) was fully implemented with some success in June 2006, and the Area performed better than the national average in relation to five out of the six benefits realisation measures in the fourth quarter of 2006-07. However, the proportion of pre-charge advice cases that result in discontinuance in the magistrates' courts has shown only slight improvement since it was highlighted as an aspect for improvement in the OPA. The position in this respect is now broadly comparable with the national picture - sometimes better.

Promoting Improvement in Criminal Justice

HM CPS Inspectorate, 26-28 Old Queen Street, London, SW1H 9HP
DX: 300850 Ludgate EC4 Office@hmcp.si.gov.uk

- The preparation of cases due to be committed to the Crown Court and magistrates' courts' contested cases are a cause for concern. The number of instances where defendants are discharged because the case is not ready is too high; and the rate of ineffective trials in the magistrates' courts is consistently worse than national performance.
- The Area needs to improve the quality of its casework assurance by reviewing files more systematically and by analysing the causes of failed cases more robustly. This will allow lessons to be learnt by managers and disseminated to lawyers and caseworkers.
- An improved performance management regime has led to an increase in the rate of successful outcomes (convictions) in the Crown Court and magistrates' courts which are now above the national average. The rate of convictions secured in hate crime cases has also improved, although it remains behind national performance. Performance against the Government's targets for the timeliness of cases involving persistent young offenders (71 days from arrest to sentence), has also improved from 67 to 58 days.
- Relationships with criminal justice partners and the Local Criminal Justice Board are positive at all levels. Some progress has been made towards a joint prosecution team approach with the police. This has assisted in the implementation of statutory charging and in resolving some of the systemic and quality issues which have subsequently arisen.
- In leadership and management terms the Area is developing a clearer sense of direction and the governance structure is basically sound. Certain management issues, including staff sickness, need greater attention at all levels.

HM Chief Inspector, Stephen Wooler CB, said:

"It is pleasing to find that managers and staff within the Area have worked hard to improve performance, and that the proportion of successful outcomes is increasing as a result. I hope that CPS Derbyshire will build on this report. If managers and staff can sustain the overall progress demonstrated since our 2005 report, the Area will strengthen public confidence and ensure effective partnership with the other criminal justice agencies."

The full text of the report may be obtained from the Corporate Services Group at HMCPS Inspectorate (telephone 020 7210 1197) and is also available online at www.hmcp.si.gov.uk.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

- 1 HMCPSI undertook OPAs of all 42 CPS Areas in 2005 and 14 aspects of work were assessed in each. Areas were rated as “Excellent”, “Good”, “Fair” or “Poor” and aspects for improvement were highlighted. In 2005 CPS Derbyshire was assessed as “Fair” and 25 aspects for improvement were identified.
- 2 From September 2006-April 2007 HMCPSI conducted two types of Area inspection. Full inspections considered each aspect of Area performance within the Inspection Framework, while risk-based ones considered in detail only those aspects assessed as requiring scrutiny. This is based on the OPA and other key data.
- 3 CPS Derbyshire serves the area covered by the Derbyshire Constabulary. It has two offices in Derby and Chesterfield. The Area Headquarters (Secretariat) is based at Derby.
- 4 Business is divided on functional and geographical lines. The Trials Unit covers all Crown Court preparation in the Area and is based in the Derby office along with the South Criminal Justice Unit, which handles cases before the Derby and Ilkeston Magistrates’ Courts. The North Criminal Justice Unit, co-located with the police, is based in Chesterfield and handles the cases at Chesterfield and Buxton Magistrates’ Courts.
- 5 Face-to-face charging advice is given at four charging centres in Derby, Chesterfield, Ripley and Buxton.
- 6 At the time of the inspection in April 2007, the Area employed the equivalent of 109.5 full-time staff.
- 7 HMCPSI was established by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000 and came into effect on 1 October 2000 as a statutory body. The Inspectorate had previously been a unit within 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 856 346.