

***HM CROWN PROSECUTION SERVICE  
INSPECTORATE***

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**CPS DURHAM**

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its report of the inspection of CPS Durham. The inspectors found that casework decisions were generally sound as was the conduct of cases – but two problems had contributed to a recent dip in performance. Inspectors commended the Area on its excellent relationships with local representatives of other criminal justice agencies and for its development of a number of good practices, particularly in the field of information technology.

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

“The performance of CPS Durham is fundamentally sound. The Area has many experienced and capable staff committed to providing a high quality service. Substantial progress has been made in implementing recent change through close and successful liaison with other local criminal justice agencies. Adapting to extensive change, at a time of increasing caseloads, has placed additional pressure on staff and brought about a dip in performance. We are pleased to note that work has already begun to analyse office systems and to rectify the difficulties. Once that is achieved, we would expect CPS Durham quickly to regain its normally high standards.”

The inspectors found that the Area's overall performance in respect of casework and decision making is good. CPS Durham has attained Investors in People (IiP) status and progress towards implementing the Glidewell principles, to allow CPS lawyers to concentrate on more serious and difficult cases, is well advanced.

A number of commendable initiatives have been pursued internally and in partnership with other criminal justice agencies. The Area piloted the CPS national initiatives for deploying lawyers in police stations and for the development of information technology. A high priority has been placed on training staff and joint training with the police is extensive.

The CCP is highly regarded and has played a leading role in establishing and maintaining successful inter-agency liaison. Local representatives of other agencies were quick to praise the experience and expertise of the Area's staff and described its most senior lawyers and caseworkers as of the highest calibre.

Whilst inspectors found much to commend, they also found matters which require attention, some urgently.

The principal concern is the case management system adopted that delays action until seven days before the pending appearance. Most of the critical comments in the report flow from its use. Late decision-making and inadequate preparation has created additional work. Inspectors considered the overhaul of this system to be a matter of priority and were pleased to note that a senior lawyer had been assigned to review all office systems so that the necessary improvements can be effected.

Durham is a rural Area and its magistrates' courts are spread throughout the county. A substantial drain is placed on CPS resources in covering them. The time spent by lawyers at police stations and court centres has increased due to recent changes. This has added to the pressure to achieve quality and timeliness. Progress has been made in negotiating listing arrangements that better utilise CPS resources. Inspectors are convinced that more can be achieved in this regard.

Inspectors commended the Area for its contribution to a reduction in the average time taken between arrest and sentence for persistent youth offenders. In 1999, the average period in Durham was 87 days, which was significantly below the national average of 108 days. For the first quarter of 2000, the average was 85 days compared with 96 days nationally.

Inspectors received considerable praise for the performance of Crown Court caseworkers. They are under a lot of pressure but are always very helpful. They are particularly valued by prosecuting counsel for their experience and knowledge of Crown Court matters.

The overall standard of prosecution advocacy in the Area is satisfactory. Inspectors observed several examples of good advocacy but also considered, on some occasions, that the quality of presentation could have been enhanced by more thorough preparation.

The Area has made considerable efforts to improve the level of service and support to victims and witnesses. Representatives of both Victim Support and the Witness Service told inspectors that relationships with the Area are very good and that the approach of the CPS has improved considerably in recent years.

Other issues covered in the report include:

- \* The need for more thorough compliance with the prosecution's duty of disclosure;
- \* Timeliness of pre-charge advice to police;
- \* Promptness of replies to correspondence.

Responding to the report, the Chief Crown Prosecutor, Jeff Corrighan, said:

“I welcome this report which highlights much of the good work that has been carried out in Durham. It is a tribute both to our dedicated staff and to the constructive partnerships that we have with the other local criminal justice agencies. We accept that there are problems within the case management

system however we are aware of the reasons for them and have already taken steps to address them.”

#### **Notes to the editors**

1. This is the tenth report of HM 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 (CCP) who enjoys substantial autonomy.
2. CPS Durham has its offices in Durham. On 1 August 2000, the Area employed the equivalent of 56.5 full time staff (the CCP, the Area Business Manager, 23 prosecutors, the equivalent of 25.5 caseworkers and six administrative staff).
3. In the year ending 30 June 2000, the Area dealt with 16,961 cases in the magistrates' courts and 1,367 cases in the Crown Court. It provided advice to the police before charge in a further 643 cases.
4. Before visiting the Area, the team of inspectors examined a total of 250 cases of various categories. The team visited the Area for a total of two weeks during August 2000. It interviewed staff of all levels, as well as criminal law practitioners and local representatives of other criminal justice agencies in the Area. Inspectors observed advocates, including CPS lawyers, a designated caseworker, agents in the magistrates' courts and counsel prosecuting on behalf of the CPS in the Crown Court.
5. The CPS Inspectorate was set up in 1996. On 1 October 2000 it became independent from the CPS as the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000 came into force. The inspection process examines all aspects of Area performance focusing on the casework decision-making and casework handling processes along with management and operational issues.
6. For further information, please contact either the Enquiry Point at HMCPS Inspectorate (tel: 020 7210 1197) or Brian Feetham at CPS Durham (tel: 0191 3835833).