

Press Release

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HM CPSI overall performance assessment of CPS Durham

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSI) has today published the overall performance assessment (OPA) of CPS Durham (the Area).

The OPA process provides a benchmark for each CPS Area's performance in 13 key aspects of work, each of which is assessed as being 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Fair' or 'Poor'. The Area is then assessed on its overall performance in the light of these markings.

The overall performance assessment of CPS Durham was GOOD.

The table below provides a breakdown of the assessed level of performance against the 13 aspects and provides a comparison with the 2005 exercise:

CRITICAL ASPECTS	Assessment Level		
	OPA 2005	OPA 2007	Direction of Travel
Pre-charge decision-making	Good	Fair	Declined
Ensuring successful outcomes in the magistrates' courts	Fair	Good	Stable
Ensuring successful outcomes in the Crown Court	Fair	Good	Improved
The service to victims and witnesses	Good	Fair	Declined
Leadership	Good	Good	Stable
Overall Critical Assessment Level		GOOD	
Progressing cases at court	Good	Good	Stable
Sensitive cases and hate crime	Good	Excellent	Improved
Disclosure	Good	Good	Stable
Custody time limits	Fair	Fair	Stable
Delivering change	Good	Good	Stable
Managing resources	Good	Good	Stable
Managing performance to improve	Fair	Fair	Stable
Securing community confidence	Fair	Good	Improved
OVERALL ASSESSMENT	GOOD	GOOD	

Some aspects have been categorised as critical; this is due to the significant impact that they have on the overall performance of a CPS Area and the service it delivers to the public.

CPS Durham has maintained its overall good level of performance since the last assessment in 2005 and has shown significant improvement in relation to community engagement and the handling of sensitive cases and hate crime. Structures are in place which enable the delivery of new initiatives independently and in partnership with others, and to bring about improvements in relation to existing work. As with most small Areas, resources are often stretched; it ensures that value for money underpins most decisions taken in the Area and those taken jointly with criminal justice partners.

The quality and timeliness of casework is generally good and the conviction rates in the magistrates' courts and the Crown Court are better than the national averages. The well established Sensitive Case Courts, dedicated to dealing with cases of domestic violence and hate crime, have embedded a multi-agency approach and contributed to Durham achieving a better proportion of successful outcomes than the national average for this aspect of casework.

There have, however, been declines in performance in relation to pre-charge decision-making and the service to victims and witnesses. Although most of the expected benefits of the charging scheme¹ have been realised discontinuance levels, particularly in the magistrates' courts, need to be reduced. Similarly, despite strong commitment from senior management to meeting the needs of victims and witnesses, appropriate procedures are not always followed rigorously.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector, said:

"CPS Durham has continued to build on the firm foundation identified in the last overall performance assessment and there have been improvements in some aspects of its work. The credit for this belongs to managers and staff alike."

The Inspectorate is visiting all 42 CPS Areas over a six month period in order to provide a benchmark from which future work can be informed. A summative report will be published in early 2008 which will set out on a comparative basis the assessments for all the Areas. The outcomes of these assessments will be used to determine where best to focus Inspectorate resources in order to promote improvement within the CPS and the criminal justice system as a whole. It is also hoped that the Areas, and CPS Headquarters, will use this information to address issues at local and national level where this is necessary.

This Press Release should be read in conjunction with the Report itself (which contains an integral summary).

For further information, please contact Andreas Harding, HMCPSI Communications Manager, on 020 7210 1143 or 07901 856 346.

¹ A statutory scheme under which the CPS has assumed responsibility for the initial decision whether to charge (previously a police responsibility) in all except minor cases.

Notes to Editors

- 1 HMCPSI was established as an independent statutory body on 1 October 2000 by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.
- 2 The OPA report is based on judgements that have been made by HMCPSI using a combination of absolute and comparative assessments of performance. These came from national data, CPS self-assessment, HMCPSI findings and by measurement under the criteria and indicators of good performance set out in the OPA framework. The exercise will include visits to all 42 CPS Areas over a six month period, between June-December 2007. Each Area is rated 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Fair' or 'Poor'.
- 3 The Inspectorate uses an assessment model which is designed to give pre-eminence to the ratings for 'critical' aspects of work as drivers for the final overall performance level. Assessments for the critical aspects are overlaid by ratings in relation to the other defining ones, in order to arrive at the OPA. This assessment model is included in the framework and is available to all Areas.
- 4 This exercise is not a full inspection and differs from traditional inspection activity. While it is designed to set out comprehensively the positive aspects of performance and those requiring improvement, it intentionally avoids being a detailed analysis of the processes underpinning performance. However, it is designed to provide a benchmark from which future work can be informed.
- 5 CPS Durham serves the area covered by the Durham Constabulary. Its main office is based at Durham. In the year ended March 2007 it employed 68.6 full-time equivalent staff, and handled 10,503 cases before the magistrates' courts and 1,628 in the Crown Court. Advice was also given to the police in 7,597 cases which did not result in proceedings.
- 6 This Press Release and the Report in relation to CPS Durham are part of a block of 12 reports published today. HMCPSI will publish three further tranches of reports covering the remaining 30 Areas.