

Press Notice

Embargoed until 00:01 14 March 2006



CPS Essex

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSI) has today published its Overall Performance Assessment (OPA) of CPS Essex.

The OPA process provides a benchmark for each CPS Area's performance in fourteen aspects of work, five of which are categorised as critical. Each of the aspects 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 Essex was **Poor**.

The table below provides a breakdown of the assessed level of performance against the fourteen aspects:

Critical Aspects	Assessment
Pre-charge decision-making	Poor
Ensuring successful outcomes	Fair
Leadership	Fair
The service to victims and witnesses	Good
Managing resources	Poor
Other Defining Aspects	
Managing magistrates' courts cases	Good
Managing Crown Court cases	Fair
Handling sensitive cases and hate crimes	Fair
Custody time limits	Poor
Disclosure	Fair
Presenting and progressing cases at court	Fair
Delivering change	Fair
Managing performance to improve	Fair
Securing community confidence	Poor

The critical aspects are those which have a particularly significant impact on the overall performance of a CPS Area. They are weighted differently from the other aspects in determining the overall performance of an Area.

The performance of CPS Essex in 2004-05 was mixed. In magistrates' courts cases conviction rates were higher than the national average. In the Crown Court, performance was not as good; conviction rates were lower than national levels and improvement is needed. The handling of cases where custody time limits apply also needs remedial action.

Shadow arrangements for pre-charge decision making did not operate as well as expected during the year under review and data to assist managers was unreliable, but improvements have been made since, and pre-charge decisions are now made on a statutory basis. The Area generally offered a good service to victims and witnesses but more work needs to be done to ensure victims are provided with information when charges are dropped or reduced.

The Area was successful, with its criminal justice partners in meeting its target for the number of offences brought to justice, and in ensuring persistent young offenders were dealt with within the Government's 71 day target for the period from arrest to sentence. CPS Essex embarked on a substantial change programme during the course of the year to bring about improvements in a number of aspects. A new organisational structure was established to enable the service to be delivered more effectively and changes have been made to arrangements for the management and governance of the Area, but staff deployment still needs to be examined and improved.

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

“Although the Area was assessed as poor, there was evidence that managers were beginning to address the problems. A number of changes have begun to have a positive impact on the Area’s performance. The Area has begun to build better foundations, and has an opportunity now to translate this into significant improvements.”

The report is now available to journalists on an embargoed basis by visiting the Inspectorate’s website (www.hmcpsi.gov.uk) which contains an embargoed section for the media. It may be accessed by using the following details:

- Username: MEDIA
- Password: OPAS2

For further information, please contact HMCPsi Communications Section, on 020 7210 1143. If the query relates to the CPS, contact Danielle Mann, Area Performance Officer on 01245 455953.

Notes to Editors

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI) was established as an independent statutory body by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000, on 1 October 2000. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.

The Overall Performance Assessment (OPA) report is based on assessments and judgments 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 assessments, and by assessment under the criteria and indicators of good performance set out in the OPA framework. The exercise included visits to all 42 CPS Areas over a seven month period between June and December 2005.

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 aspects, in order to arrive at the OPA. This assessment model is included in the framework and is available to all Areas.

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. The inspectorate will use this information to determine where best to focus its resources in order to promote improvement within the CPS and the criminal justice system as a whole. It is also hoped that the CPS Areas, and CPS HQ, will use this information to address issues at local and national level where this is necessary.

CPS Essex serves the area covered by the Essex Police. Its main office is based at Chelmsford. In the year ended March 2005 the Area employed 144.4 full time equivalent staff, and handled 39,826 cases, which included 1,733 (4.4%) where advice was given to the police before charge.

This press release and the report in relation to CPS Essex should be read in conjunction with HMCPSI's national press release and the summative report which provides an overall performance assessment in relation to all 42 CPS Areas. These are also available on HMCPSI's website in the embargoed sections. Twenty-two of the reports were published in December 2005 to avoid an unacceptably long lapse between assessment and publication. Those relating to the remaining twenty Areas are published today.