

PRESS RELEASE

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REVIEW OF THE FRAUD PROSECUTION SERVICE

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSi) has today published its review of the Fraud Prosecution Service (FPS).

The FPS was established as part of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) London area by the Director of Public Prosecutions in September 2006, to handle the most serious and complex fraud cases prosecuted by the CPS nationally and be the centre of excellence for the fraud prosecution work within the CPS.

The FPS is currently achieving these aims and the direction of travel is positive in relation to casework. In 2007-08, 85% of defendants prosecuted by the Service were convicted, which compares favourably with conviction rates generally. The work carried out by lawyers and caseworkers is characterised by strong legal decision-making and proactive case preparation and this is accompanied by very good casework supervision by senior managers.

The review also found that:

- there are sound systems in place to provide early investigative advice to police and the quality of that advice is consistently high;
- caseworkers take a firm approach to case progression which ensures that hearings and trials are effective as often as possible; and
- managers are constructive and collaborative in their relationships with partner agencies.

Inspectors also found room for improvement in some aspects of work. Whilst the quality of review decisions is generally good, there is a need for prosecutors to be more consistently proactive in identifying and reacting to foreseeable changes of circumstances. Performance also needs to improve in some aspects of casework through more structured and more consistently applied casework systems. This includes the quality of instructions to counsel, quality of record keeping and use made of the CPS computerised case management system, as well as the handling of asset recovery issues.

The overall compliance with the prosecution's obligations of disclosure is good but there is a need for a more consistent approach to the procedural aspects.

The FPS has already started to deal with some of these issues. Inspectors stressed the importance of pressing forward this work in order that the Service is able to handle a predicted increase in caseload. The report also notes the numerous agencies currently involved in fraud investigation and prosecution and recommends that the National Fraud Strategic Authority, as part of their function of developing and supporting a national fraud strategy, should bring forward proposals for coherent and structured arrangements for the investigation and prosecution of fraud generally. The FPS will also need to play a full role in the future development of the national fraud strategy.

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

"I am very pleased to find that the quality of fraud prosecution work has improved significantly since the Fraud Prosecution Service was established in 2006. The CPS is now in a good position to deal with the predicted increase in serious and complex fraud work. It is also important that the FPS should continue to develop its role within the framework of a national fraud strategy which creates more coherent, structured and co-ordinated arrangements for the work of the numerous organisations (of which FPS is just one) involved in the investigation and prosecution of fraud."

This press release should be read in conjunction with the report itself. This contains an integral summary which is also available separately.

Notes to Editors

- 1 HMCPSP 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 FPS is a unit within CPS London although it has national responsibilities. It was established in the light of criticisms by HMCPSP as to the capacity of the CPS for handling fraud cases, following recommendations contained in the review of the handling of the Jubilee Line case.
- 3 Because the FPS was only established recently, this exercise was not a full inspection in the traditional sense, but a review. Its purpose is to provide a baseline of current performance for future inspection and to highlight any risks in the light of current and expected demands. The review also assesses the capability of the FPS to foresee, analyse and meet any other challenges which may flow from changes in its operating environments including to volume or pattern of casework. 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.
- 4 The FPS provides a national service to police forces, CPS areas and other agencies concerned with the investigation and prosecution of fraud, operating from its main office in London and a subsidiary office in York. In the year ended March 2008 it employed 37 full-time equivalent staff.