

Press Notice

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Area Effectiveness Report on CPS Gloucestershire

Progress made by CPS Gloucestershire, but challenging issues remain

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPsi) has today published its report of the inspection of CPS Gloucestershire (the Area).

The Area has made some important improvements since the HMCPsi overall performance assessment (OPA) in June 2005 when it was assessed as "Fair". Inspectors found that the new management team, formed in early 2006, has worked hard to address positively some key aspects of performance, including successful implementation of statutory charging (a scheme whereby the CPS has responsibility for the initial decision to charge – something that was previously a police responsibility). Significant improvements have also been made in the way the Area manages its finances and secures value for money. However, CPS Gloucestershire has yet to tackle other challenging issues faced, including more effective deployment of lawyers and better case preparation and progression.

The main findings were:

- The quality of casework decision-making in the magistrates' courts is generally high and in the Crown Court reasonable. In the magistrates' courts, the proportion of successful outcomes is rising and in the Crown Court the conviction rate is better than nationally.
- There has been good progress since moving to the statutory charging scheme, with improved guilty plea rates and higher levels of convictions.
- Weaknesses in case preparation and progression emerged as important issues that need to be addressed. The levels of ineffective trials (ie those listed for a contested hearing that do not proceed on the day) in both the magistrates' courts (25% compared with 19% nationally) and Crown Court (18% compared with 13%) are too high.

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- Whilst good joint work with the magistrates' courts has been undertaken to reduce significantly the waiting times for trials, there is still scope for reducing further the average time from setting a trial date to the time a trial is heard.
- The decision-making in sensitive cases was found to be sound, and the performance in securing successful outcomes for 'hate' crime is strong. A specialist domestic violence court set up in 2006 has overcome initial difficulties and is now working well.
- Gloucestershire has just one Witness Care Unit covering the whole county and, whilst this appeared to get off to a good start, the Unit has not fulfilled its early promise and needs urgent attention. Multiple listing of trials has had an adverse impact on the service to witnesses at court and there is also scope for further improvement in relation to the Direct Communication with Victims scheme, whereby the CPS writes to victims explaining why a charge has been changed or dropped.
- Significant improvements have been made in the systems and processes used to account for and manage resources, and action has been taken to secure economies and better value for money. Staff deployment, however, is not yet optimal and progress is needed to manage lawyers' work allocation more effectively.
- Senior managers have a clear sense of purpose, and communication within CPS Gloucestershire is improving, though not yet fully effective. The morale of caseworkers and administrative staff is generally good, but that of lawyers is more mixed and needs to be addressed. The further promulgation of the overall CPS vision, to ensure that all staff understand its implications for the Area, would assist senior managers in addressing some of the challenging issues faced.
- The new leadership is promoting an open and constructive approach to partnership working with other criminal justice agencies and there is some evidence of success in implementing nationally-driven change, such as statutory charging, although some joint change projects - for example the Witness Care Unit - have been less successful.
- There are high levels of offences brought to justice in Gloucestershire, although the proportion of these that are convictions is relatively low.

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The Chief Inspector, Stephen Wooler CB, said

“It is pleasing that CPS Gloucestershire has achieved some important improvements since the last assessment in 2005. I am confident that the Area will build on this report to strengthen its performance further.”

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 overall performance assessments (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. CPS Gloucestershire was assessed as **“Fair”** and 38 aspects for improvement were identified.
2. HMCPsI is now conducting two types of Area inspection. A full one considers each aspect of performance within the Inspection Framework, while a risk-based inspection considers in detail only those aspects assessed as requiring scrutiny. This is based on HMCPsI’s OPA and other key data. In CPS Gloucestershire, inspectors assessed six of the 13 themes within the Framework.
3. CPS Gloucestershire serves the area covered by the Gloucestershire Constabulary. It has one centralised office at Gloucester, where the Area Headquarters (Secretariat) is also based.
4. Area business is divided on functional lines between magistrates’ courts and Crown Court work. A single Criminal Justice Unit (CJU) is responsible for the conduct of all cases dealt with in the magistrates’ courts and a Trials Unit (TU) handles cases dealt with in the Crown Court.
5. The Area provides face-to-face charging advice at three police charging centres. At Gloucester charging advice is provided on a full-time basis and at Cheltenham and Stroud on a part-time basis (three and two days respectively).
6. At the time of the inspection in February 2007, the Area employed the equivalent of 51 full-time staff.

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7. Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate was established by the Crown Prosecution 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 856 348.

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