

## ***HMCPSI inspection of CPS Gwent***

# **Inspection prompts “back to basics” fresh start**

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI) has today published its report on the inspection of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in Gwent (the area). The overall rating of the area’s performance is now **POOR**.

This was a full inspection of the area. It found that CPS Gwent was in a much weaker position than that reported in the previous inspection and overall performance assessment (2007). Weaknesses permeate decision-making at all stages of cases and the systems for preparing and prosecuting cases through the court process give rise to concern.

Many of the issues highlighted in previous reports had not been addressed and in some cases have been exacerbated by management failings. Relationships with other criminal justice partners had deteriorated, there was evidence of a blame culture, which far too frequently has the ultimate effect of being disadvantageous to the victim. Inspectors found that standards and expectations need to be embedded on fundamental issues and the area needs to regain the confidence of its criminal justice partners.

The inspection team expressed disappointment that the area had been allowed to fail to this extent without some intervention from the centre. Criminal justice partners echoed that sentiment. The events of the last two years have been very demoralising for staff. It is therefore a great testament to their resilience that there were a large number who remained fully committed, were working hard and retained an enthusiasm to do a good job; if the area can harness this they should be able to move forward and improve the situation.

The inspection has stimulated the criminal justice agencies in Gwent more generally to seek greater collaborative working – in particular through a LEAN review (see Notes to editors). This provides greater optimism for the future.

### **Main findings:**

- CPS Gwent has lacked a clear vision and any real leadership since 2004.
- The lack of senior management direction and a reluctance to engage effectively with criminal justice partners has had very serious consequences on working relationships. There was a very obvious blame culture in the area.
- Casework results in the area have failed to keep pace with those seen nationally. They have deteriorated since 2007.
- There were serious deficiencies identified in the standard of decision-making. The Code for Crown Prosecutors was applied incorrectly in over 10% of cases at the charging stage; decision-making was worse in serious cases destined for the Crown Court.

- The absence of clear expectations and standards resulted in very inadequate performance management and was a contributory factor to the poor standards of decision-making and casework outcomes.
- The service offered to victims and witnesses and the quality of justice overall within Gwent has been hampered by the poor casework standards and less than effective partnership relationships. In some instances the impact of the approach between partners has had the effect of penalising victims and witnesses.
- CPS Gwent needs to go back to basics and address the short-comings identified in the report. However, much of what the CPS does is dependent on and influenced by its partners. There is much that partners must do to ensure that the CPS can operate effectively. The inspection report identifies a number of issues that Gwent police and others in the criminal justice system must address if the administration of criminal justice is to be improved.
- The Chief Crown Prosecutor resigned during the inspection for reasons unconnected with the inspection itself. A new Chief Crown Prosecutor has been very much welcomed by criminal justice partners and staff and he has started to implement some urgently needed change, and is working to gain a clearer understanding of the issues that need to be addressed. HMCPSP's report contains a summary of his approach to the problems. It is founded on a return to basics and the development and implementation of clear standards across all aspects of the CPS core activities.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector of the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate, said:

*"It is deeply disappointing to find CPS Gwent in such a weak position. Many of the issues which were identified previously remain, and in some cases have been exacerbated by further management failings. In short, the area must go back to basics. I have discussed with the new Chief Crown Prosecutor the problems faced by the area. Although a new approach is beginning to have a significantly positive impact, the task ahead should not be underestimated. It will take some time for the Service offered in Gwent to begin to meet the required standards."*

This press release should be read in conjunction with the report itself and the executive summary which is integral to it and also available separately.

## **Notes to editors**

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate is an independent statutory body established by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000, which came into force on 1 October 2000. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.

CPS Gwent was the subject of an overall performance assessment in December 2007 which rated performance as fair. This inspection included detailed scrutiny of finalised case files and some current cases were observed at court. Inspectors considered a wide aspect of casework including decision-making and casework handling together with the systems, management and structured monitoring of performance which underpin good casework.

The inspection team comprised legal and business management inspectors working closely together, with a lay inspector who helped examine the way in which the CPS relates to the public with dealing with witnesses and victims, its engagement with the community including minority groups, its handling of complaints and the application of the public interest test contained in the Code for Crown Prosecutors.

CPS Gwent is one of 42 CPS areas, each of which has a chief crown prosecutor, and serves the area covered by the Gwent Police. It deals with criminal cases at Abergavenny, Abertillery, Caerphilly, Cwmbran and Newport Magistrates' Courts, and at the Crown Court sitting at Newport and Cardiff.

LEAN principles are based on techniques mainly used in manufacturing processes. The lean principle is to focus attention on removable waste from the process. In terms of using LEAN in the public sector, the focus remains the same, using process examination to identify waste, usually through duplication of effort and inefficient processes and removing these. The work carried in Gwent had used value stream mapping to examine joint processes and the findings of this exercise are being implemented to remove duplication and produce more efficient processes.