

## PRESS RELEASE

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# HM CPS INSPECTORATE OVERALL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF CPS HERTFORDSHIRE

**HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSi) has today published their Overall Performance Assessment (OPA) of CPS Hertfordshire.**

The OPA process provides a benchmark for each CPS Area's performance in thirteen key aspects of work. 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 Hertfordshire was Fair.**

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

| OVERALL ASSESSMENT                                      |  | FAIR             |          |                       |
|---|--|------------------|----------|-----------------------|
| Critical aspects  |  | Assessment level |          |                       |
|   |  | OPA 2005         | OPA 2007 | Direction of travel   |
| Pre-charge decision-making                              |  | Fair             | Poor     | Declined              |
| Ensuring successful outcomes in the magistrates' courts |  | Poor             | Fair     | Improved              |
| Ensuring successful outcomes in the Crown Court         |  | Fair             | Poor     | Declined              |
| The service to victims and witnesses                    |  | Good             | Good     | Stable                |
| Leadership  |  | Good             | Fair     | Declined              |
| Overall critical assessment level                       |  | Poor             |          |                       |
| Progressing cases at court                              |  | Good             | Fair     | Declined              |
| Sensitive cases and hate crime                          |  | Good             | Fair     | Declined              |
| Disclosure  |  | Poor             | Fair     | Improved              |
| Custody time limits                                     |  | Fair             | Fair     | Stable                |
| Delivering change                                       |  | Fair             | Fair     | Improved <sup>1</sup> |
| Managing resources                                      |  | Good             | Good     | Stable                |
| Managing performance to improve                         |  | Fair             | Fair     | Stable                |
| Securing community confidence                           |  | Fair             | Fair     | Stable                |
| OVERALL ASSESSMENT                                      |  | Fair             | FAIR     |                       |

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

The overall assessment for CPS Hertfordshire (Fair) remains unchanged since the last such assessment in 2005. Performance has improved in two aspects (and in one further aspect within the same rating), remained stable in five, but five aspects have declined of which two are categorised as 'critical'.

<sup>1</sup> Although the assessment of this aspect had remained unchanged, there has been a significant improvement within the range of performance covered by the rating

**Main findings include:**

In 2006-07 the Area had a lower proportion of convictions in both the magistrates' courts and Crown Court than nationally, although performance in the magistrates' courts is showing signs of improvement.

Overall, Inspectors found the quality of case preparation and progression was variable although there has been an improvement in successful outcomes in sensitive cases and hate crimes.

The quality of prosecutor's decision making at the pre-charge stage requires improvement and the statutory charging scheme (under which the CPS has assumed responsibility from the police whether to charge in the more serious contested cases) is not delivering the expected benefits in the Area; premature decisions to charge have contributed a high level of unsuccessful outcomes with performance significantly worse in the Crown Court than magistrates' courts.

Since the 2005 OPA the Area has worked hard to improve the way it undertakes its duty of disclosure of unused material to the defence, with positive results.

The proportion of effective trials (contested cases which actually proceed to trial on the day fixed) in both the magistrates' courts and Crown Court is in line with national performance although long standing backlogs of trials due to lack of court capacity have contributed to a higher than national ineffective trial rate.

The Area did not meet the timeliness target of 71 days from arrest to sentence for dealing with persistent young offenders during 2006-07. This has improved but not consistently so.

The Area has proactively taken forward the CPS advocacy strategy and has a dedicated team of full-time Higher Court Advocates who are undertaken and increasing number of high profile and sensitive cases in the Crown Court.

The Area has demonstrated a high level of commitment to improving the service to victims and witnesses. The No Witness No Justice initiative has been successfully embedded and compliance with the Direct Communication with Victims initiative is higher than nationally, although the quality of letters requires some improvement.

There has been mixed success in relation to the implementation and evaluation of the success of joint initiatives with criminal justice partners. Overall, relationships with other agencies need to be strengthened, although there has been more collaborative planning for more recent projects

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector of HMCPSI, said:

*"The Area has declined in a number of aspects. These includes its Crown Court casework. However, the Area has demonstrated that where attention has been focussed on areas of weakness that it has been able to deliver improvements. CPS Hertfordshire has the capacity to deliver the necessary improvements and I hope it will do so."*

The inspectorate has visited all 42 CPS Areas over a six month period in order to provide a benchmark from which future work can be informed. The inspectorate is today also publishing a summative report which sets out on a comparative basis the assessments for all 42 Areas. It uses the outcomes of these assessments to determine where best the CPS should focus its resources in order to promote improvement within itself, 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.

This press release should be read in conjunction with the report itself (which contains an integral summary).

### **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 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 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 2007. Each Area is rated excellent, good, fair or poor.

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 Hertfordshire serves the area covered by the Hertfordshire Police. Its main office is based at St. Albans. In the year ended March 2007 the Area employed 107.7 full time equivalent staff, and handled 17,558 cases before the magistrates' courts and 1,791 in the Crown Court. It also gave advice to the police in 2,980 cases which did not result in proceedings

This news release and the report in relation to CPS Hertfordshire are part of a block of 13 reports published today together with a summative report drawing together the common themes and presenting the assessment for all 42 Areas on a comparative basis.