

PRESS RELEASE

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CPS HERTFORDSHIRE

An Area Making Progress

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published its Report of the inspection of CPS Hertfordshire.

The Area has made progress since the last inspection; a number of strengths and significant improvements are apparent, but some matters still require attention.

The Area's casework performance against a range of measures is above average, compared with the Inspectorate's findings across the other CPS areas. Acquittal rates in both magistrates' courts and the Crown Court are better than the national average, and the quality of decision-making about when to proceed with cases is good.

The Inspectorate team found that, with the notable exception of persistent young offender cases, the timeliness of preparation was an issue. HMCPSI felt that a more pro-active approach was required by the CPS in helping the police to compile a case, which would help to overcome issues with the timeliness and quality of files received from them. The Area was bettering its target in bringing persistent young offenders to justice in less than 71 days, by achieving 60 days.

The quality of advocacy in Hertfordshire has remained sound since the last inspection, in May 2002. Even though there has been a significant increase in the number of staff, there has also been a strain on Area operations, as a result of many established prosecutors being deployed to implement national CPS initiatives.

The Area is implementing all three major initiatives to which the CPS is committed nationally (the shadow charging scheme, Effective Trial Management and No Witness No Justice) and has co-located with the police throughout the Area. Hertfordshire is also one of the two national pilots for the enhancement of the role of Higher Court Advocates (CPS lawyers who, after specific training, are authorised to appear in the Crown Court).

Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of HMCPSI said:

“Managers and staff should be pleased with their progress since our last Report in May 2002. They have maintained a level of performance which is generally sound, in some respects improved, and at the same time have coped with extensive change both in the CPS nationally and the criminal justice system as a whole.”

The main findings of the Inspectorate are:

- Casework outcomes are better than the CPS national performance against a range of measures. The criminal justice agencies in Hertfordshire have achieved good results against the Public Service Agreement targets set by the Government for the criminal justice system. Public confidence in the criminal justice system is above the national average and acquittal rates in the magistrates’ courts and the Crown Court are better than the national average.
- The quality of pre-charge advice and decisions at various stages of review were sound but, with the exception of persistent young offender cases, timeliness of preparation is an issue. Discontinuances are timely, but there are occasions when the prosecution are not ready to proceed to trial, and the timeliness of service of prosecution papers and case progression in Crown Court cases could also be improved.

- Delays are also caused by incomplete and late provision of police files. A more pro-active approach by CPS lawyers at review, to assist police in case building, would speed up the collation of evidence and allow cases to proceed on time.
- Partnerships within the local criminal justice system (CJS) are generally strong at the operational level, but the failure to resolve some long-standing issues between agencies hinders improvements across the county. The Area is committed to improving performance, but its perceived inability to assist in the delivery of effective case management in the magistrates' courts undermines its credibility with CJS partners. The Inspectorate recommended that more effective engagement should take place at a strategic level.
- Progress towards co-location and shadow charging has been good at the Criminal Justice Units (CJUs) at Hertford and Watford. Further work is needed at CJU Central and the Crown Court Unit (CCU) to realise the benefits of co-location.
- The Area carried out training on arrangements for the disclosure of unused material, but weaknesses remain in the disclosure process.
- The Area could benefit from more objective, detailed and regular consideration of the reasons for unsuccessful cases, with a view to learning from experience.
- The standard of advocacy is satisfactory. The Area does not have a high agent usage, although it is on the increase, and will need to implement efficient advocacy monitoring.
- Hertfordshire makes full use of procedures to avoid unnecessary witness attendance, and tries to ensure phasing of witnesses at the Crown Court to prevent them waiting a long time to give evidence.

- The Area has implemented the Direct Communication with Victims scheme to explain reasons for dropping or reducing charges. The quality of letters is generally good, but the Inspectorate recommended that work is needed to ensure that timely letters are sent in all cases falling within the scheme.
- The Inspectorate recommended that the Area Management Team should implement a framework to improve communications with staff and performance management. Engagement with the local community can also be strengthened.

An Executive Summary of the Report is also available.

Notes to Editors

1. In November 2002 HMCPSI commenced its second series of Area Inspections of the CPS, visiting all 42 CPS Areas in England and Wales twice within a four-year period. Each Area received at least one full inspection - the second was either full or intermediate depending on the circumstances.
2. This is the report of HMCPSI about CPS Hertfordshire. The CPS is a national service, but operates on a decentralised basis with each of its 42 Areas being led by a Chief Crown Prosecutor (CCP) who enjoys substantial autonomy. The inspection was a full one with all aspects of casework and management considered. The Team visited the Area for one week in September 2004 and the Area was previously reported on in May 2002.
3. CPS Hertfordshire services the area covered by the Hertfordshire Constabulary.
4. Area business is divided on functional lines between magistrates' courts and Crown Court work. Three Criminal Justice Units are responsible for cases dealt with by the magistrates' courts; CJU Central is based at St Albans and cover the magistrates' court there; CJU East is based at Hertford and covers the magistrates' courts at Cheshunt, Hertford and Stevenage; and CJU West is based at Watford and covers Watford and Dacorum Magistrates' Courts. The Crown Court Unit is based at St Albans and reviews and handles cases dealt with in the Crown Court.
5. At the time of inspection, CPS Hertfordshire employed the equivalent of 88.6 full-time staff. The Area Headquarters (Secretariat) is based at St Albans and comprises the CCP, Area Business Manager (ABM) and the full-time equivalent of 9.4 other staff.
6. In the year ending June 2004, the Area dealt with 20,967 cases in the magistrates' courts, 1,551 in the Crown Court, and gave pre-charge advice to the police in a further 4,292 cases.

7. The Joint Operational Practice (JOPI) is an inter-agency agreement providing rules and guidance on the disclosure of unused material to the defence.
8. The shadow charging scheme is the preliminary stage of implementing the presence of CPS lawyers at charging centres (Police Stations) to advise on appropriate charges.
9. The Effective Trial Management Programme is an initiative to improve the case management and timely progression of defendants through the criminal justice system.
10. No Witness No Justice is a project to improve the experiences of witnesses attending court.
11. Co-location of CPS and police staff was recommended in the report on the Review of the CPS by Sir Iain Glidewell.
12. For further information, please contact Heather Minshall (telephone 020 7210 1166; e-mail: Heather.Minshall@cps.gsi.gov.uk) or Michael Fogg (telephone 020 7210 1143; email: Michael.Fogg@cps.gsi.gov.uk) at HMCPSI.