

PRESS RELEASE

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HM CPS INSPECTORATE OVERALL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF LONDON SOUTH SECTOR

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSI) has today published their Overall Performance Assessment (OPA) of CPS London South Sector

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 three geographical sectors and the Serious Casework Sector in CPS London were separately assessed alongside the assessment for CPS London overall.

The overall performance assessment of CPS London South Sector was Fair.

This report and assessment should be considered in conjunction with the overarching report on CPS London and those in relation to its other three sectors. All have been published today.

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	Fair	Stable	
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	Fair	Fair	Stable	
Leadership	Good	Fair	Declined	
Overall critical assessment level		Fair		
Progressing cases at court	Fair	Fair	Stable	
Sensitive cases and hate crime	Fair	Fair	Stable	
Disclosure	Fair	Fair	Stable	
Custody time limits	Poor	Poor	Stable	
Delivering change	Fair	Fair	Improved¹	
Managing resources	Good	Poor	Declined	
Managing performance to improve	Fair	Fair	Stable	
Securing community confidence	Good	Fair	Declined	
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.

¹ Although the assessment of this aspect has remained unchanged, there has been significant improvement within the range of performance covered by the rating.

CPS London South Sector received the same overall rating (Fair) as it did in the 2005 assessments. It has made some progress since the last OPA, but has not been able to sustain performance in all aspects. Its performance improved in relation to ensuring successful outcomes in the magistrates' courts (and also in delivering change, but within the existing rating). Performance was stable in seven aspects, but declined in four. A number of factors contributed to the comparatively slow rate of progress including, significant changes in the management team and organisational structure in the Sector, changes to Crown Court caseload and the need to prepare for initiatives to be rolled out in 2007-08. There were indications of further improvements in 2007-08, although more work is still required, particularly in respect of Crown Court cases.

Other main findings include:

There has been some improvement in the conviction rates in both the magistrates' courts and the Crown Court although both remain significantly below the national average.

The statutory charging scheme (under which the CPS has assumed responsibility from the police for the initial decision whether to charge in more serious and contested cases) has yet to deliver the expected level of benefits. Combined with some significant weaknesses in case progression systems this has led to the comparatively high levels of unsuccessful case outcomes.

In magistrates' courts cases there is a need to focus on the level of cases set for committal to the Crown Court that are discharged because they are not ready to proceed and to work with the police in reducing the level of outstanding warrants for the arrest of defendants who have not attended court.

In the Crown Court a reduction is needed in the number of cases which have to be dropped by the prosecution.

The Sector was involved in a number of pilots in 2006-07 as part of the London Reform Programme and in implementing CPS national initiatives. Some of these have already shown some positive signs which, if maintained, should lead to improved performance.

On the other hand ongoing initiatives, including those involving the service to victims and witnesses, have not all progressed as anticipated.

Financial controls were weak at Sector and Area level in 2006-07. Greater stability in staff and managers, changes to reporting lines, and improved systems are factors that have contributed to better performance in 2007-08.

Significant progress was made in implementing the Sector advocacy strategy which led to increased deployment of CPS resources to court. The greater use of in-house lawyers to cover courts produced some financial benefits, but impacted adversely on case preparation and progression systems; this was balanced to some extent by the improved use of designated caseworkers (non-lawyers with special training who are permitted to present some cases at court) to free up some prosecutor time.

The sector has undertaken a lot of work to try and improve custody time limit processes, and their documented system was adopted on an Area-wide basis. However, despite their endeavours there were still too many occasions where non-compliance with procedures led to failures.

Positive work has been undertaken to strengthen the handling of sensitive cases, although this has not led to substantial improvements in case outcomes in the period covered by this assessment. The appointment of specialist rape advocates was a positive development.

Relationships with partner criminal justice agencies were generally positive and collaborative, which augers well for the future when significant change is planned.

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

"This was a very mixed year for the CPS London South Sector and it is clear that case management needs to improve in order to achieve improved case outcomes. However, activity commenced in late 2006-07 and carried into the current business year gives scope for some optimism. The challenge for the sector remains to translate actions into improved outcomes".

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. This summative report 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 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.

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 begin 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 London South Sector serves the area covered by the Metropolitan Police Service and the City of London police. Its main office is based at the Cooperage, with five others sited throughout the sector. In the year ended March 2007 the Sector employed 435.7 full time equivalent staff, and handled 63,711 cases before the magistrates' courts and 8,626 in the Crown Court. It also gave advice to the police in 12,650 cases which did not result in proceedings

This news release and the report in relation to CPS London South Sector as well as those relating to other London Sectors and CPS London as a whole 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.