

PRESS RELEASE

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HM CPS INSPECTORATE OVERALL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF CPS LONDON WEST SECTOR

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSI) has today published their Overall Performance Assessment (OPA) of CPS LONDON WEST 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 WEST 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	Improved¹	
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	Good	Stable	
Overall critical assessment level		FAIR		
Progressing cases at court	Fair	Fair	Improved¹	
Sensitive cases and hate crime	Fair	Fair	Stable	
Disclosure	Fair	Fair	Stable	
Custody time limits	Fair	Poor	Declined	
Delivering change	Fair	Fair	Stable	
Managing resources	Fair	Poor	Declined	
Managing performance to improve	Fair	Fair	Improved¹	
Securing community confidence	Good	Good	Improved¹	
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 remains unchanged there has been significant improvement within the range of performance covered by the band.

The CPS London West Sector is a large geographical area which stretches from the border of Hertfordshire in the north to Surrey in the south and covers a diverse range of London boroughs.

The Sector has received the same overall rating (Fair) as in the 2005 assessment. Its underlying performance has been mixed. It has improved its rating in one aspect, which is a critical aspect but declined in another critical and two non-critical aspects. In four further aspects, whilst the actual rating has not changed, there has been significant improvement within the band. The strengthened emphasis on performance at borough level should assist the Sector, where necessary, in improving service delivery. Other aspects, however, particularly the operation of the custody time limit system and the management of the Sector's budget in 2006-07, gave rise to significant concerns.

Other main findings include:

There has also been an improvement in the handling of magistrates' courts cases, with an increase in the conviction rate since the time of the last OPA in 2004-05.

In respect of Crown Court cases there had been a much smaller increase in the conviction rate and London overall is one of the worst performing Areas in the CPS in this context. Cases are still not always progressed effectively and the timeliness of compliance with court orders and some actions associated with compliance with the duties of disclosure needed improving.

Managers have worked hard to improve the operation of the pre-charge decision scheme, under which the CPS determine whether to charge in more serious and contested cases rather than police, and this is starting to lead to a reduction in the proportion of cases where no further action is directed.

Inspectors found that too many cases were still discharged at the committal stage because the prosecution were not ready and an adjournment was refused, although performance is improving year on year. There was also a need to improve the timeliness of trial preparation although the proportion of ineffective trials was reducing.

The Sector fell well short of its value target for recovering the proceeds of crime

The Sector in conjunction with its criminal justice partners had driven up performance in respect of persistent young offenders, which contributed to CPS London achieving a rolling average of 71 days for the rolling three months ending April 2007 which met the national target of 71 days from arrest to sentence and this has improved to 66 days in the three months to November 2008.

The Sector also, again in conjunction with its criminal justice partners, met and exceeded its target for bringing offenders to justice.

The Sector's performance in the handling of sensitive cases and hate crimes such as rape and child abuse was improving, and the proportion of successful outcomes was similar to that of CPS London overall. There was a detailed analysis of the outcome in most cases involving allegations of rape and constructive guidance was given by the Sector's case management panel when they reviewed sensitive cases.

The treatment of victims and witnesses was mixed. Compliance at court with the Prosecutor's Pledge was effective, but far too few letters were being sent to victims explaining why the case had been dropped or the charge substantially reduced.

Inspectors found that managers have a high profile, which continues to be developed within the local communities, and a wide range of community engagement activity is undertaken, some of which has a national dimension.

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

“The Sector’s performance has remained overall stable since our last assessment in 2005 with improvements being accompanied by some fall-offs. Good work has been done on improving case outcome in the magistrates’ courts but there is some way to go before this is replicated in the Crown Court. Whilst some aspects of governance and performance management have been strengthened successfully, there was a need for more effective management of the Sector’s budget. However, the Sector continues to develop its engagement within the boroughs it serves, and is playing a leading part in raising public confidence amongst the diverse communities.”

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.

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 will include 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 London West Sector serves an area covered by the Metropolitan Police Service. Its main office is based at Harrow. In the year ended March 2007 the Area employed 365 full time equivalent staff, and handled 33,759 cases before the magistrates' courts and 6,827 in the Crown Court. It also gave advice to the police in 9,635 cases which did not result in proceedings.

This news release and the report in relation to CPS London West Sector as well as those relating to other London sector 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.