

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCP*SI*) has today published its performance assessment of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) London, Lewisham borough.

This is one of a planned series of borough performance assessments of the units in CPS London. Reports on nine have been published today and those on a further ten boroughs, the traffic unit and an overarching report on CPS London as a whole will be published in March.

The overall performance assessment of Lewisham was **POOR**.

The table below provides a breakdown of the assessed level of performance against the ten aspects:

Aspect	Score	Assessment
Pre-charge advice and decisions	2	Fair
Decision-making, preparation and progression in magistrates' court cases	0	Poor
Decision-making, preparation and progression in Crown Court cases	0	Poor
The prosecution of cases at court	2	Fair
Serious violent and sexual offences, and hate crimes	0	Poor
Disclosure	0	Poor
Custody time limits	2	Fair
The service to victims and witnesses	0	Poor
Managing performance to improve	0	Poor
Managing resources	Not scored	
Management and partnership working	2	Fair
OVERALL ASSESSMENT	8	POOR

The quality of decision-making was mainly satisfactory, but minimal ongoing or last minute attention and case preparation was resulting in cases not being ready to proceed, poor presentation and unsuccessful case outcomes.

The proportion of magistrates' court cases which resulted in a successful outcome (conviction) in the 12 months to June 2009 (81.8%) was lower than that for CPS London overall (85.9%) and nationally (87.3%). The proportion of successful cases in the Crown Court (67.7%) was below the national figure (80.6%) and London overall (72.7%) and had declined from the 2008-09 position.

Improvements are needed in the quality and timeliness of case review, preparation and progression, most notably in respect of contested cases. Inspectors found that some trial advocacy was affected by poor or late case preparation. Other weaknesses related to the compliance with the prosecution's obligation to disclose unused material to the defence and the service to victims and witnesses.

The associate prosecutors (staff who are not lawyers but have special training to enable them to present certain cases in the magistrates' court) are highly regarded by criminal justice partners.

The borough would undoubtedly benefit from harnessing the positive relationship it has with criminal justice partners to agree and implement focused improvement strategies targeting key aspects of its work.

Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of the CPS, said:

“The overall poor performance is disturbing. It is attributable to some extent to the difficult circumstances in which the borough has worked while having to implement a number of cross-London and national initiatives with increasing resource constraints. It is important to acknowledge that staff have remained supportive of each other during this difficult period of change. But it is now vital for the borough to focus upon its core activities and improve its performance across the different aspects of its casework handling. Urgent action is necessary to address the numerous weaknesses”.

This press release should be read in conjunction with the executive summary which is attached.

The full report is now available from the embargoed section of the inspectorate’s website (www.hmcpsi.gov.uk) using the following details:

- Username: MEDIA99
- Password: LBPAJan10

For further information please contact Anisha Visram, HMCPSI’s media contact, on 020 7210 1187/07901 856 348.

Notes to editors

- 1 HMCPSI was established as an independent statutory body on 1 October 2000 by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.
- 2 The pilot performance assessment of Croydon borough, published in May 2009, was the first of a planned series of performance assessments of the individual borough units in CPS London.
- 3 There are 33 geographical units based on London boroughs and the cities of London and Westminster. CPS London also has a dedicated traffic unit and a complex casework centre which handles serious and complex cases and those at the Central Criminal Court (Old Bailey). CPS London provides advice to police and charging decisions through a telephone service, CPS London Direct, or where a face-to-face meeting is needed through the local borough units. The units are gathered into six districts based on Crown Court centres.
- 4 The assessment process provides a benchmark for the performance of the boroughs in ten key aspects of work, each of which is assessed as being excellent, good, fair or poor. The unit is then assessed on its overall performance in the light of these markings. The process also evaluates the management of resources at borough level.
- 5 The scoring mechanism is described in annex C of the report. This provides some limiters that apply in addition to the total of points scored. This is because of the significant impact that some aspects will have on the delivery of the borough’s core business, or because of the impact of a number of poor aspects.
- 6 The assessment included examination of finalised case files; interviews with representatives of partner criminal justice agencies and the judiciary; discussions with borough staff; observations at the office; and observations at the magistrates’ court and Crown Court.

- 7 The findings from the assessments undertaken will be drawn together in a pan-CPS London report. As well as providing an overall picture of the area, this will address the issues that have emerged as the assessments have progressed. Some of these were of serious concern and need to be tackled urgently at a senior management level.

- 8 HMCPSI's original intention had been to assess all 33 boroughs in order to reflect the variations in performance which were expected across an area as diverse as CPS London, and this approach was endorsed by the area's senior managers. In the event findings from the early assessments showed a relatively narrow range of performance and consistency in the themes emerging and the aspects for improvement. London's senior management team confirmed that the boroughs which had been assessed were fairly representative of the area as a whole and that to undertake further assessments would be unlikely to add significantly to our findings. The inspectorate therefore decided to confine the exercise to 20 boroughs (including the pilot assessment of Croydon), drawn from five of the six districts, together with the traffic unit.