

HM CPSI overall performance assessment of CPS Merseyside

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSI) has today published the overall performance assessment (OPA) of CPS Merseyside (the Area).

The OPA process provides a benchmark for each CPS Area's performance in 13 key aspects of work, each of which 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 Merseyside was Fair.

The table below provides a breakdown of the assessed level of performance against the 13 aspects and provides a comparison with the 2005 exercise:

Critical aspects	Assessment level		
	OPA 2005	OPA 2007	Direction of travel
Pre-charge decision-making	Good	Good	Stable
Ensuring successful outcomes in the magistrates' courts	Fair	Fair	Stable
Ensuring successful outcomes in the Crown Court	Good	Fair	Declined¹
The service to victims and witnesses	Fair	Fair	Improved²
Leadership	Good	Good	Stable
Overall critical assessment level		Fair	
Progressing cases at court	Good	Fair	Declined
Sensitive cases and hate crime	Good	Good	Stable
Disclosure	Good	Good	Stable
Custody time limits	Fair	Poor	Declined
Delivering change	Good	Good	Stable
Managing resources	Fair	Fair	Declined³
Managing performance to improve	Fair	Fair	Stable
Securing community confidence	Fair	Good	Improved
OVERALL ASSESSMENT	Fair	FAIR	

1 Ensuring successful outcomes was a separate aspect in the OPA in 2005, in which CPS Merseyside was rated as Fair. This aspect has been subsumed into the aspects dealing with magistrates' and Crown Court casework, and, as successful outcomes remain fair in the Area, the rating for Crown Court casework appears to have declined.

2 Although remaining within the Fair rating, arrangements for delivering the service to victims and witnesses have improved.

3 Whilst remaining at Fair, the Area's performance has declined within that rating as a result of drops in performance on financial controls, and managing staffing levels and the budget.

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

Conviction rates in magistrates' courts and Crown Court cases are slightly below the national average, but the rate is improving in the magistrates' courts. More attention needs to be paid to case preparation and progression particularly in magistrates' courts cases, and to the Area's quality assurance systems, which are not yet effective.

In the Crown Court the Area is using its own Higher Court Advocates to drive up standards, but needs to maintain its focus on witness care, which impacts on outcomes significantly in Merseyside.

Generally the Area works well with partners. There has been effective work with the police on confiscation of criminal assets and persistent young offenders are dealt with within the national target of 71 days from arrest to sentence. The introduction of new IT systems with the police was managed effectively.

CPS Merseyside has been through a period of considerable organisational change set against a background of falling caseload; the consequent reduction in budget in the current year means that change is continuing. The caseload still contains some very serious crime, but some of the more minor cases are now being dealt with by the police issuing warnings or fixed penalty notices, which has shifted the balance. A period with no permanent business manager and the significant commitment by the Chief Crown Prosecutor to national initiatives have also presented challenges.

The Area is working hard to engage with local communities and sensitive cases, such as the murder of Anthony Walker and the death of a child from injuries inflicted by a dog, are handled well.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector, said:

"CPS Merseyside faced significant challenges in 2006-07 but maintained its position on a number of key aspects of performance. Some decline is evident, but the main weaknesses are being tackled. The change programme which is underway should be used to ensure that casework defects are rectified, and improvements consolidated and maintained."

The Inspectorate is visiting all 42 CPS Areas over a six month period in order to provide a benchmark from which future work can be informed. A summative report will be published in early 2008 which will set out on a comparative basis the assessments for all the Areas. The outcomes of these assessments will be used to determine where best to focus Inspectorate resources in order to promote improvement within the CPS and the criminal justice system as a whole. It is also hoped that the Areas, and CPS Headquarters, 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) and is available on our website at www.hmcpai.gov.uk.

For further information, please contact Andreas Harding, HMCPSI Communications Manager, on 020 7210 1143 or 07901 856 346.

Notes to Editors

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.

The OPA report is based on 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 findings and by measurement 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 six month period, between June-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 ones, 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.

CPS Merseyside serves the area covered by the Merseyside Police. Its main office is based at Liverpool. In the year ended March 2007 it employed 2674 full-time equivalent staff, and handled 26,445 cases before the magistrates' courts and 3,893 in the Crown Court. Advice was given to the police in 8,873 cases which did not result in proceedings.

This Press Release and the Report in relation to CPS Merseyside are part of a block of ten reports published today. HMCPSI will publish two further tranches of reports covering the remaining 20 Areas.