

PRESS RELEASE

(EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01hrs 16th March 2004)

16 March 2004

03/04

CPS MERSEYSIDE

The performance of CPS Merseyside is strong overall, according to a report published today by Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate following a full inspection of the Area. It has achieved that, and responded to a number of national initiatives both within the CPS and the wider criminal justice system, despite having to overcome some staff shortages.

The good performance extended to both quality and quantity. Inspectors found that initial decision making and continuing review of cases were both good. Sensitive cases (such as child abuse, rape, racially aggravated offences, domestic violence and road traffic cases involving fatalities) were mostly dealt with well, although a few were discontinued too readily. The accuracy of indictments and standard of instructions to counsel were consistently good. The CPS had worked with the police and other criminal justice agencies to increase the number of offenders being brought to justice.

Inspectors identified one specific aspect of concern which reflected on both the police and CPS. They found a significant number of cases due for committal to the Crown Court were discharged because prosecution papers were not ready. This was attributable in the main to the fact that those files were received late from the police and piecemeal.

Other significant findings by the Inspectorate include:

- * CPS Merseyside has a particularly high profile in the service provided to witnesses including a strong relationship with the Witness Service. It works well with other criminal justice agencies to improve the services offered to victims and witnesses;
- * senior managers provide a clear vision for the Area with an inclusive approach towards staff participation in the development of policy and processes;
- * performance management is good both within the CPS and in its support to the Merseyside Criminal Justice Board;
- * although CPS Merseyside is involved at all levels in groups within the Criminal Justice System that include minority ethnic community representatives, there should be more direct engagement with individual minority groups;
- * there is effective and regular review of staff deployment to minimise the impact of any shortages and ensure that resources are used to best effect;
- * within the branches, there should be trial checks on cases sufficiently before summary trial date for effective necessary action to be taken;
- * there is a need for action to ensure the timely linking of and response to correspondence and police papers;
- * there is a need for monitoring of the quality of advocates, both internal and external, representing the CPS before the courts; and
- * the Area has good central systems and expertise to monitor and control its budget.

Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of HMCPSI, said:

“The report reflects an impressive performance by CPS Merseyside. Although there are some things which could be improved, the overall picture is one of good quality casework, improving care towards victims and witnesses as well as robust performance management and effective budgetary control. The people of Merseyside can be reassured that they are served by an effective prosecution service which offers good value for money.”

Responding to the report, John Holt, the Chief Crown Prosecutor, said:

“I am delighted to welcome such a positive report which reflects the hard work and public service values of our staff. We acknowledge, of course, that there are some things that we could do better. We have a strong culture of continuous improvement, which is recognised in this report, and we are already working to provide an even better service to the people of Merseyside.”

An Executive Summary of the report is attached.

Notes to Editors:

1. In November 2002 HMCPSI commenced its second programme of Area inspections of the reorganised CPS. The aim is to visit all 42 CPS Areas in England and Wales twice over a four- year period. During that period each Area will receive at least one full inspection; the second may be either full or intermediate depending on circumstances.
2. The inspection of CPS Merseyside was a full one.
3. CPS Merseyside as an Area has three offices, at Liverpool, Crosby and Birkenhead. Area business is divided on functional lines between magistrates’ courts and Crown Court work. The Area also has a unit co-located with the police in Liverpool and a co-located Street Crime Unit (the Robbery Unit) based in Liverpool dealing with all cases of this type.
4. The Area was previously reported on in May 2000.
5. The area covers magistrates’ courts at Birkenhead, Bootle, Huyton, Liverpool, Southport, St Helens and Wallasey, and the Crown Court at Liverpool.
6. CPS Merseyside employs the equivalent of 265.06 full time staff; this figure includes a number of part-time staff.
7. In the year ending June 2003 the area handled approximately 45,414 cases in the magistrates’ courts and 4,117 Crown Court cases were handled during the same period, advice was given to the police before charge in a further 2,227 cases.
8. Before visiting the area the team of inspectors examined a total of 328 cases drawn from all units. The team visited the area for two weeks week during 3-14 November 2003. The inspectors interviewed staff of all levels from each unit. The team also spoke to representatives of other criminal justice agencies, criminal law practitioners and community based groups in the area. Observations were made on advocates at magistrates’ courts, youth courts and in the Crown Court. These included CPS lawyers, designated caseworkers, agents and counsel. The team was also assisted during the on-site phase by a lay inspector who looked at the handling of complaints and the treatment of victims and witnesses.

9. Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate was established by the Crown Prosecution Act 2000, which came into effect on 1 October 2000 as a statutory body. The Inspectorate had previously been a unit within the CPS headquarters. The Chief Inspector is appointed by and reports to the Attorney General.
10. For further information, please contact either Vicky Pert at HMCPSI (Tel: 01904 545 494; e-mail: Vicky.pert@cps.gsi.gov.uk) or Karen O'Brien, Communications Officer at CPS Merseyside (Tel:0151 239 6465; e-mail: Karen.O'Brien@cps.gsi.gov.uk)